

# Markers of Trafficking of Adolescents in India

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a process through which persons are placed and maintained in exploitative situations for economic gain. It is often referred to as modern-day slavery and has prompted responses across the world in the form of international protocols and national laws to prevent and punish the crime of trafficking. Perpetrators use methods such as coercion, deception, force, fraud, and abuse of power to exploit the vulnerabilities of the victims and/or their families.

Globally, human trafficking has been increasing over the last two decades and is the third largest source of profit for organized crime following arms and drug trafficking. **According to the Global Report<sup>1</sup> of 2018 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, there was a 40 percent increase in detection of victims of trafficking between 2011 and 2016.** Women and

children, being the most vulnerable sections of society, are the most common targets of traffickers. The main forms of exploitation seen around the world are sexual exploitation and forced labours. **Over the years, India has emerged as a source, destination, and transit country for trafficking<sup>2</sup>.** According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, more than **20,000 victims of trafficking were rescued in 2016.** The main drivers of trafficking are poverty, lack of education, and the low status of women in society. The longitudinal UDAYA survey conducted during 2015-16 and 2018-19 sought to assess adolescent's awareness and familiarity with markers of trafficking.

The focus of the study was on marriage-related markers of trafficking of adolescent girls. Respondents were asked if their family had been approached with marital enquiries about young girls in the household for grooms in other states. Girls were also asked if they had been lured away elsewhere under a false promise of marriage. **The female cohort was more familiar with these markers compared with their male counterparts—amongst the older cohort, girls were twice as likely as boys to be familiar with these markers.** Awareness of these markers increased with age; during the second wave of the study, 18 percent of the older girls reported having some awareness or experience of some of these markers—a 10 percent increase from the first wave. A state-wise comparison shows that respondents in Bihar were more familiar with these markers than those in Uttar Pradesh.

Recognizing the scourge of trafficking in the country, the government has introduced many multi-pronged initiatives to curb trafficking. However, because of the clandestine nature of the crime, there are many challenges. One of the primary risk factors is the social and economic constraints that lead to the vulnerability of the victims at the outset. Hence, the focus needs to be towards prevention of trafficking by creating a protective environment for those most vulnerable. **Communities need to be sensitized and made aware of the dangers of trafficking and youth need to be empowered through education and skills training so that they have opportunities to make a sustained living.** Also, emphasis needs to be laid for networking of all the stakeholders involved to ensure cohesive action against human trafficking.



<sup>1</sup>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2018, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018, New York: United Nations.

<sup>2</sup>Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2008, To Prevent and Combat Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Of Children And Women. New Delhi: MoWCD, Government of India, November, 2008.