

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

## **Internal Child Trafficking: Experiences and Reunification with Family**

***Missaye Mulatie Mengstie*<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Human trafficking involves nearly every part of the world. It affects all regions and most countries of the world. Though the Government of Ethiopia is attempting to eliminate trafficking, it does not sufficiently address internal trafficking, including child sex trafficking. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and unification of internally trafficked children in Metema Woreda. To achieve this, a case study design was employed by taking five internally trafficked and reunified children and one key informant from a non-governmental organization working on trafficking. Qualitative data were collected through interview and narrative analysis was made accordingly. The results indicated that internally trafficked children were physically and emotionally abused. They received advice and some medical treatment in a temporary rehabilitation center before unifying them with their families. However, the support was not adequate enough to enable victims of internal trafficking to recover from their traumatic experiences. Therefore, child welfare and law enforcing institutions should give due emphasis to internal child trafficking and offer psychosocial support before unifying them with their families.*

**Keywords:** child, internal trafficking, reunification

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

There is no one universally agreed definition of human trafficking. In the broader sense, it involves all nonconsensual exploitation (Koettl, 2009). It generally refers to the process through which individuals are placed or maintained in an exploitative situation for economic gains. According to UN (2014), trafficking can occur within a country or may involve movement across borders. Women, men and children are trafficked for a range of purposes, including forced and exploitative labor in factories, farms and private households, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage.

Though human trafficking is reported to involve nearly every part of the world, it is hard to find reliable data on trafficking. Due to its illegal and often invisible nature, the range and severity of trafficking activities and the variations in which trafficking is defined is a bit cumbersome (Oram et al., 2011).

In Africa, men, women and children are being trafficked both within and outside the continent and forced into situations of labor and sexual exploitation. Being the poorest region in the world, sub-Saharan Africa is the most vulnerable region from which substantial number of victims has been recruited for both continental and intercontinental transaction (Adepoju, 2005; ILO, 2010). In Ethiopia, trafficking has occurred internally and externally in the form of adult and child labor and sex trafficking due to pull factors (e.g., demand for cheap labor) and push factors such as poverty, political instability, economic problems, and gender discrimination (Beck et al., 2017).

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Gondar. Email: mulate2002@yahoo.com

Internal trafficking of children from rural areas to urban centers is wide spreading. Trafficking children from rural to urban areas is a prevalent and steadily increasing practice in the country. Victims of internal trafficking both women and children were preferred for labor exploitation, physical and emotional, as well as sexual abuse. Trafficking victims working as housemaids are recurrently overworked, subjected to corporal punishment, and sexually abused by employers and their families. Children suffer from different types of abuses and exploitations as a result of trafficking within Ethiopia. However, reliable and comprehensive data on trafficking children are not available as victims of trafficking remain inaccessible and invisible in their communities (Endeshaw et al., 2008).

According to human trafficking report (2017), Ethiopia is a source and, to a lesser extent, destination and transit country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Though the government of Ethiopia is making significant efforts to eliminate trafficking, it does not fully meet the minimum standards. For instance, it did not sufficiently address internal trafficking, including child sex trafficking. On top of this, there was no standard procedures for frontline responders to proactively identify trafficking victims among vulnerable intending migrants (USDS, 2017).

Children are trafficked into many forms of labor that made them vulnerable to a range of occupational health risks varying by sectors. At each stage, they encounter psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse; forced or coerced use of drugs or alcohol; social restrictions and emotional manipulation and economic exploitation (Zimmerman and Hossain, 2007). Risks often persist even after a person is released from the trafficking situation and only a small proportion of people reach post-trafficking services or receive any financial or other compensation (GAATW, 2007).

Therefore, reintegration is critical for victims of trafficking. Those who acquire reintegration assistance are much less likely to be re-trafficked. They may also, depending on the nature and quality of support provided, be less vulnerable to intimidation, retaliation, social isolation and stigmatization. Successful reintegration requires cooperation between repatriating and receiving countries. The importance of such cooperation is recognized in regional treaties as well as in key international and regional policy documents (UN, 2014). Rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficking victims have become serious concern for the organizations working to combat trafficking. In order to tackle problems of children and to reunify them with their parents/guardians, it is important to provide all rounded support on their returns (Temesgen, 2014). Though reintegrating a trafficked child is a long-term and complex process, physical problems and stigma can be addressed through social support.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to WHO (2012), human trafficking has received increasing global attention over the past decade. Initially, trafficking of women and girls for forced sex work and, to a lesser extent, domestic servitude, were the sole focus of advocacy and assistance. Quite recently, there is recognition that women, children and men are trafficked into many different forms of labour, and sexual exploitation. Labor-related trafficking occurs in a wide range of sectors, such as agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, mining, forestry, construction, domestic servitude, cleaning and hospitality services (Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., Lavia, J. (2006).

International trafficking of Ethiopian women and children to foreign countries (the Middle East especially to the Gulf States, South Africa and Europe) is well documented. It has

drawn the attention of researchers and one can find plenty of information on the processes, experiences, stories, tragedy and challenges of trafficked girls and women from exit to destination. Studies by Atnafu and Adamek (2016), Minaye (2012), Regt and Tafesse (2016), and Zack and Estifanos (2016) explored the experiences of internationally trafficked Ethiopians.

Nevertheless, internal trafficking in Ethiopia has been given little or no attention. Concerned scholars, the government, non-governmental organizations and policy makers do not pay due attention to internal child trafficking within Ethiopia. Hence, internal human trafficking should have been given equal attention as the international human trafficking. When the trafficking targets children, it should have stipulated more attention because children are the most vulnerable group to human right violation, abuse and maltreatment. Children are more vulnerable to be misguided and misinformed by traffickers about the promises and opportunities at destinations. Considering the urgency of the subject and dearth of research and information, this study aims to explore internal child trafficking in Metema Wereda, Ethiopia.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Area**

This study was conducted in Metema woreda which is located in the north western Ethiopia bordering in the Sudan. This place has been identified as a major human trafficking hotspot through which traffickers illegally transit people to foreign countries via Sudan. The town is a route and destination for those children on the move as the town is found on border as a place for huge commercial farms. The focus of this study is not on international human trafficking which could have attracted the attention of many institutions but rather internal child trafficking which is not given emphasis. It seems that most people in Ethiopia tend to consider human trafficking as a crime when people are forced to move to foreign country.

### **Study Design**

Research design is a sort of research strategy that provides a logic and procedure of collecting information to answer research questions. In this study, the researcher chose inductive approach that commenced with collecting data and then passed to deriving generalization (Blaikie, 1993a). More importantly, this study employs a qualitative research approach with case study design (Flick, 2006). The researcher went to a field with inquiring mind and willingness to ask extensive questions in an ethically fashioned ways as case study is suitable to gather in-depth information by exploring lived experiences of informants (Berg, 2007). Not only that but the researcher also aimed to uncover the manifest interactions of significant factors (Champion, 2006) characterizing trafficked children - capturing various nuances and patterns affecting these children. This study in particular involves explanatory and descriptive case studies (Yin, 2003). Also, the researcher gathered extremely rich, detailed and in-depth information about the internally trafficked children (Hagan, 2006). These case studies help theory building than testing and thus creative insights arose from juxtaposition of contradictory or paradoxical evidences (Eisenhardt, 1989). Such resultant theories have shown to be empirically valid (Berg, 2007). The researcher kept his mind open -being flexible - understanding the vulnerability of internally trafficked children and honestly interpreted the data without biases (Mirriam, 2001). Hence, this case study used both semi-structured and key informant interviews to gather pertinent data from the internally trafficked children.

### **Data collection techniques and instruments**

Data for this study were gathered using both semi-structured interview and key informant interview (Flick, 2006). The researcher selected semi-structured in-depth interviews as his major data collection method because they can answer many research questions that are related to children's perspectives and daily experiences at Metema. Algozzine and Hancock (2006) argued that semi structured interviews encourage interviewees to confidently express their ideas and to describe the world from their own view than the perspective of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). At present, the growing tendency to see children as 'experts' in their own lives made the use of qualitative individual interviews with children paramount (Irwin and Johnson, 2005). The qualitative interviews are particularly suitable to gather information about children's perceptions and subjective experiences of child trafficking (Punch, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews particularly allow children to tell their stories in their own words on issues that are of interest to the researcher. Appropriate interview guides were prepared for face-to-face interview and key informant interview process in the field (Blaikie, 2000). A face -to- face interview was conducted with five internally trafficked and reunified children whose age ranged from 13 -16 years and who are able to understand interview questions.

Additionally, key informant interview was conducted with one officer working on human trafficking. This key informant is a well-connected and informed community experts (Berg, 2007). This helped the researcher to discuss sensitive topics by getting the respondents' candid sentiment on the subject and collect in-depth information needed (Blaikie, 2000). The informant not only understood the issue, but also thought about solving/preventing the problem of trafficking children. He earnestly expressed his thoughts, feelings, opinions, and perspective on the child trafficking in the interview sessions that took 1 and a half hour.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Consent was obtained from parents of trafficked children and oral assent was obtained from children. Besides, ethical approval was obtained from Ethical Committee of Department of Psychology at University of Gondar to assure absence of possible physical and psychological harm on the participants.

### **Data analysis**

The qualitative analysis combined an interpretation of the various analytical categories identified while reviewing the literature and describing the culture of internal trafficking experiences. The qualitative transcripts and the written notes were analyzed through narrative analysis (Creswell, 2009). In doing the analysis, the tape-recorded interview data were listened to repeatedly. From each transcript, significant phrases or sentences that pertain directly to the lived experience of the trafficked children were coded and categorized. The formulated meanings were clustered into themes allowing the emergence of themes common to all of transcripts from the participants.

The results were integrated into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon

under investigation. As the descriptions and themes have been obtained, the researcher in the final step approached some children for a second time to validate the findings. However, no new and relevant data emerged and thus data from the field were compared with studies by other authors, in order to ameliorate the analysis. Hence, methodological rigor was attained through the application of verification and validation (Meadows & Morse, 2001). Finally, all the data from semi-structured interview, key informant interview and documents have been merged, analyzed and synthesized as shown below.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Internal child trafficking in Metema**

As mentioned earlier, Metema town is a path way through which traffickers' transit people to Sudan. One key informant (a project officer in Mahiber- Hiwot for Social Development stated that both internal and international trafficking occur through Metema town for various supplies of child trafficking. According to the project officer, trafficked children and women come from different parts of Ethiopia especially from Amhara Region (e.g. Metema rural areas, Debark, Dabat, Amba-Giorgis, Gayinit, Debre-Tabor, East Gojjam and West Gojjam). The illegal local brokers misled and deceived them about the presence of promising job opportunities in the destination countries. Besides, bar and restaurant owners, long-range vehicle drivers and illegal employment agents play role in trafficking children.

Trafficked persons seem to have plan "A" and plan "B". In plan "A", they try to go abroad by any means, often with the help of brokers. If plan "A" fails and are not able to pass the border, they start working in Metema town (in bus station, domestic work, daily laborer) and in large farming places nearby to Metema: plan "B" which makes them under internal trafficking. This research focuses on internal trafficking process of children (Plan "B").

### **Experiences of Internally Trafficked Children Before Reunification**

The duration of being trafficked varies from child to child. Three out of five participants stayed from two to six months under trafficking. The remaining two participants were trafficked for less than two months. Whether the duration is an hour, a day, a week or a month, it would hamper the development of the trafficked child. Developmental Psychologists underline the importance of family for physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of a child. According to Ecological Systems Theory of Development, the family is the immediate environment with whom the child closely interacts and such interaction with the family members influences child's growth (Berk, 2000). Therefore, it is imperative to note that separation from the immediate family environment ubiquitously hinders the development of the trafficked children.

During their separation from families, internally trafficked children experience of various forms of exploitation and abuse. Among others, sexual abuse, kicking, excessive and age inappropriate labor work, insufficient food and clothing, terrorizing, blaming, restricting form social interaction. One interviewee expressed her experience as follows.

*The women [the owner] kicked me. She did not give me food. She gave me food after all members of the family finish eating and the remaining food was given to me. She terrorizes me if I do something wrong. She is cruel. I cannot forget her.*

Similarly, another interviewee said:

*First, they [the owners] were good and promised me many things. Later, they start kicking me. Especially the husband kicked me many times. He did not allow me to play with other children. I worked starting from the morning to tonight. Sometimes I was crying.*

The project officer added that:

*Internally trafficked children, like internationally trafficked ones, lost basic services such as food, education and healthcare services. To the worst, they were vulnerable encountering physical, emotional and sexual abuses.*

Hence, the experiences of internally trafficked children unveil the presence of physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. It is important to note that abuse and neglect of internally trafficked children would have negative result in long term (later during adolescence and adult stages) and/or short-term effects on their physical, cognitive and psychosocial development. Hildyard and Wolfe (2002) studied the impacts of child abuse and neglect on child development. Their study clearly showed harmful and serious effects of child abuse and neglect on children's social interaction, physical and cognitive development dimensions.

### **Returning home: Processes and Rehabilitation Services**

Identifying victims of trafficking is a complex task. Police officers inspect internally trafficked children by collecting information from many individuals as people with information on trafficked persons report their suspicions to police. Then, police conduct interview with suspected victim of trafficking to verify the cases. After identified, victims of trafficking stay in a temporary rehabilitation center in order to receive medical support and counseling services. One of the victims, 14 years old, described the service as follows:

*We receive advice and medical treatment. It was good. It helped me to know about human trafficking and the consequences of trafficking. I will advice my friends when I return back to home. Had I been informed before [trafficking], I would have not been deceived.*

The above account indicates the efforts made to rehabilitate trafficked children while residing in a temporary center. However, IOM (2010) suggests a compressive psychosocial support for victims of trafficking because they suffer from traumatic experiences. For IOM psychosocial supportive is providing safe accommodation, healthcare, legal assistance, vocational training and education. The provisions rendered to internally trafficked children at Metema rehabilitation center seems limited in type and breadths of the services.

### **After Reunification with parents: the reality on the ground**

During the interview, the children were asked about their experience after unification with families. All of them indicated that they again faced problems with their family in their localities. One of the interviews (16 years old) compared and contrasted the scenario before and after unification as follows:

*I stayed for four months as domestic worker in Metema. It was horrible. I didn't get enough food. The duty is too much and I was getting very thin. In the rehabilitation center, I received advice and they [rehabilitation officers] told me to return back home and live with my parents. I was convinced to be with family. But, nothing has*

*changed in the living condition of my family.*

As indicated in the above story, the reunification of internally trafficked children took place with inadequate pre-unification support. This implies that rigorous assessment and evaluation on the needs and problems of internally trafficked children was not carried out. It seems that the victims were offered piece of advice and certain medical treatment ahead of unification with their families no other necessary life sustaining supports.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Trafficked children move to Metema from different parts of Ethiopia through illegal local brokers who misled and deceived them about the presence of promising job opportunities. Trafficking had two plans: plan “A” and plan “B”. In plan “A”, they tried to go abroad by any means, often with the help of brokers. If plan A fails, they planned to work in Metema (plan B). Internally trafficked children in Metema suffered from physical and emotional abuses. The duration of trafficking was longer for girls than boys. Besides, the social isolation problem was higher in girls as compared to boys. The duration of being trafficked varies from child to child. Internally trafficked children experience of various forms of exploitation and abuse such as kicking, excessive and age inappropriate labor work, insufficient food and clothing, terrorizing, blaming, restricting form social interaction. Identifying victims of trafficking is a complex task for Police officers. After identifying victims, they integrate and reunite internally trafficked children. However, the reunification practice is yet at its infancy. Victims of trafficking stayed in a temporary rehabilitation center and were offered piece of advice and certain medical treatment ahead of reunification with their family. Hence, internally trafficked children were encouraged to return back home and integrate without adequate assessment of needs and problems. The reunification of internally trafficked children took place without adequate planning, preparation and pre-unification support.

Therefore, there should be a procedure to convict traffickers, including for trafficking within Ethiopia. Besides, adequate assessment of needs and problems of internally trafficked children before returning back home. Finally, internally trafficked victims should offer adequate medical treatment, and psychosocial support before and after unification with their families.

### **References**

- Adepoju, A. (2005). Review of research and data on human trafficking in sub-Saharan Africa. *International Migration*, 43(1-2), 75-98
- Algozzine, B., & Hancock, D. R. 2006. Doing case study research. *New York, NY*
- Atnafu, A., & Adamek, M. E. (2016). The return migration experiences of Ethiopian women trafficked to Bahrain: ‘... for richer or poorer, let me be on the hands of my people...’. *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 9(2), 243-256.
- Berg, B. (2007). *Qualitative Research for the Social Sciences*. New York, USA: Pearson.
- Belser P. (2005). Forced labor and human trafficking: estimating the profits. Geneva, International Labor Organization.
- Beck, D. C., Choi, K. R., Munro-Kramer, M. L., & Lori, J. R. (2017). Human trafficking in Ethiopia: a scoping review to identify gaps in service delivery, research, and policy. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 18(5), 532-543.
- Berk, L.E. (2000). *Child Development* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Blaike, N. (2000). *Designing social research*. Cambridge: Polity press.

- ..... (1993a). Approaches to social inquiry, Cambridge: Polity press.
- Champion D. J, (2006). Research method for criminal justice and criminology. Englewood: Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. (2009). Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA Sage Publications.
- Endeshaw, Y., Gebeyehu, M. and Reta, B. (2008). Assessment of Trafficking in Women and Children in and from Ethiopia. International Organization for Migration.
- Eisnhaerd, K. (1989). Building theory from case study research. *Academy of Management review* (14 (4)). 532-550.
- Flick, U (2006). An introduction to qualitative research, London: Sage.
- WOMEN, G. A. A. T. I. (2007). GATTW. Collateral Damage. The Impact of Anti-Trafficking Measures on Human Rights Around the World.
- Hagan, F. (2006). Research method in criminal justice and criminology. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hildyard, K. L., & Wolfe, D. A. (2002). Child neglect: developmental issues and outcomes. *Child abuse & neglect*, 26(6-7), 679-695.
- ILO (2010). Facts on Child Labor 2010." Informational Pamphlet, the International Labor Organization. Geneva, Switzerland.
- International Organization for Migration (2010). IOM Training Manual on Psychosocial Assistance for Trafficked Persons: International Organization for Migration, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Irwin, L. G., and Johnson, J. (2005). Interviewing young children: Explicating our practice and dilemmas, *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(6), 821-831.
- Koettl, J. (2009). *Human trafficking, modern day slavery, and economic exploitation* (p. 7). Social Protection & Labor, the World Bank.
- Minaye, A. (2012). Trafficked to the Gulf States: The experiences of Ethiopian returnee women. *Journal of Community Practice*, 20(1-2), 112-133.
- Mirrian, S. B. (2001). Qualitative research and case study application in education. San Francisco: Jossey: Bass
- Punch, S. (2002) Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, 9(3), 321-341.
- Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., Lavia, J. (2006). Postcolonialism and education: Negotiating a contested terrain. *Pedagogy, culture and society*. 14 (3): 249-262.
- USDS. (2017). Trafficking in Persons Report 2017. US Department of State (USDS), DC. <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2017/index.htm>
- De Regt, M., & Tafesse, M. (2016). Deported before experiencing the good sides of migration: Ethiopians returning from Saudi Arabia. *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 9(2), 228-242.
- UN (2001). United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, U.N. General Assembly, 55th Session, U.N. Document A/RES/55/25. UN General Assembly, NY.
- UN (2014). Human Rights and Human Trafficking Fact Sheet No. 36, New York and Geneva. [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS36\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS36_en.pdf)
- Zack, T., & Estifanos, Y. S. (2016). Somewhere else: social connection and dislocation of Ethiopian migrants in Johannesburg. *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 9(2), 149-165.
- WHO. (2012). Understanding and addressing violence against women. [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77394/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.42\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77394/WHO_RHR_12.42_eng.pdf)
- Yin, R. K. (2003). Case Study Research. Design and method (3rd ed). California: Sage.
- Zimmerman, C., Hossain, M., & Watts, C. (2011). Human trafficking and health: A conceptual model to inform policy, intervention and research. *Social science & medicine*, 73(2), 327-335.