

INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT EXPERIENCES OF TRAFFICKED RETURNEES

Post Integration Lives of Sex Trafficked Returnees in Mid-Western Nepal

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ABSTRACT

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This study discusses the empowerment experiences of sex trafficked returnees. By doing so, this research provides an understanding about the post integration life situation of the returnees. 'Participation and Involvement', 'Self-determination, Freedom of Choice and Decision Making' and 'Social Stigma' were taken as main components of empowerment.

Qualitative research methodology was applied to conduct this research. The data was collected using semi-structured method. This interview method was chosen because it allows the researcher to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers. Three sex trafficked returnees and one key informant were interviewed individually.

Thematic content analysis was used for interpreting the data, because it suits questions related to people's experiences and focuses on identifying patterned meaning across the dataset.

The findings of this research indicate that trafficked returnees' current empowerment situation is relatively poor. Apparently, they are seen as accepted and reintegrated in the family and the community but they have encountered several challenges, such as: verbal abuses, inadequate sustainable income, negative stereotype, and disgrace. The study further evidently shows that returnees have not been able to perceive themselves equal as compared to other women in the community; there is envisaged disempowerment and social discrimination in all spheres of their lives including access to resources, education and work.

In conclusion, lack of self-determination, limited freedom of choice and decision making, male domination and enduring stigma among the sex trafficked returnees have not only disempowered them but also narrowed their hope of being empowered.

Key words: Sex-trafficking, returnees, empowerment, and stigma.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Nepal: Country Profile and Anti-trafficking Law	6
1.2 Study Area.....	8
1.3 Motivation of the Study	9
2 SITUATION OF WOMEN IN NEPAL.....	11
2.1 Women’s Status in Nepal.....	12
2.1.1 Educational Status of Women in Nepal	12
2.1.2 Economic Status of Women in Nepal	14
2.2 The Badi Women: Prostitution as Caste Based Professionalism in Mid-Western Nepal	14
2.3 Research Problem.....	16
2.4 Organization in Concern: Maiti Nepal.....	17
3 SEX TRAFFICKING PHENOMENA.....	20
3.1 Sex Trafficking Phenomena: Nepal and India	20
3.2 The General Framework of Prostitution in Nepal: Past and Present	24
4 EMPOWERMENT DISCOURSE	27
4.1 Components of Individual Empowerment	29
4.2 Stigma	31
5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	33
5.1 Research Method.....	33
5.2 Sampling Strategy and Participants’ Selection Process	34
5.3 Data Collection Method	35
5.5 Ethical Consideration	38
5.6 Research Process	40
6 EMPOWERMENT OF TRAFFICKED RETURNEES	41
6.1 Empowerment Discourse and Caste based Professionalism in Badi Women.....	41
6.2 Participation, Involvement and Empowerment.....	42
6.3 Domestic Affairs and Empowerment.....	44
6.4 Self-determination and Empowerment	46
6.5 Patriarchy and Women Empowerment	48

6.6 Stigma and Empowerment	49
7 DISCUSSIONS	52
8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	56
8.1 Learning Experiences	56
8.2 Motivation to Work in Pair and Work Division.....	57
9 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	59
9.1 Research Challenges and Limitations	59
9.2 Working as a Team: Challenges and Limitations	60
10 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	61
10.1 Recommendations	61
10.2 Recommendations to Maiti Nepal, Banke	62
REFERENCES.....	64
APPENDIX 1. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	71

1 INTRODUCTION

Women face different forms of violence, exploitation, discrimination and repression across the world. Domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, son preference, social stigma are usual phenomena we notice against women, which have made them to face various degrees of inferiority and vulnerability. Human trafficking has made women more vulnerable; it has confiscated their basic human 'rights for life, liberty and pursuit of happiness' (Jefferson 2005) and forced them to live as sex slaves. According to IIDS and UNIFEM (2004), approximately two million children are trafficked globally every year; half of this number are under the age of seven and are forced to work in the sex industry. 'Human Trafficking' is defined by the United Nations as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, or fraud, or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (United Nations 2000.)

In Nepal, girls trafficking have become a grave social problem for decades. The government, media, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are examining extensively under this topic, they work individually and in joint force to reduce this problem by rescuing and helping the trafficked victims both inside the country and abroad. Some of the national organizations such as 'Maiti Nepal' and 'Shakti Samuha' have received an international recognition for intercepting and intervening the human trafficking, and rehabilitating and reintegrating the trafficked victims in Nepal.

Women, who are trafficked for sex, undergo torture, sexual violence, physical and verbal abuse at the same time inside the brothel; certain victims who are rescued by different organizations and police cannot go back to their society because they are subjected to social stigma.

Stigma is an identity of shame in the society that hinders the victims to start their normal life again. On the other hand, the victims of sex trafficking are psychologically traumatic and emotionally weak to gather self-esteem for combatting against the existing Nepalese society that associates sex trafficked returnees with negative stereotypes. In search of various alternatives to help the trafficked victims, reintegrating and rehabilitating the victims has emerged as one of the most applauded and almost unanimously celebrated technique for years. Many NGO's and INGO's are using this approach to combat against trafficking and to empower the victims.

1.1 Nepal: Country Profile and Anti-trafficking Law

Nepal is landlocked country with the area of 147,181 square kilometers. It has 125 ethnic groups with their own cultural practices and languages (Nepal, CIA 2011) It has geographical diversities with Mountain, Hill and Terai region. It is multicultural, multi religious and multiparty system based country with mosaic communities with 22 so-called untouchable castes (Dalits), 55 indigenous nationalities, and 102 castes following 11 different religions and having 92 linguistic diversities. According to Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), about 80% of population is engaged in agriculture and farm; most of the national products are agricultural products. (CBS, Nepal 2011.) Nepalese youth labor forces are working across the world: gulf countries, South Korea, Europe and many more countries, by which Nepal is collecting a huge amount of remittance, which is helping national income as well in general.

In Nepal, about 83.3% of people are following Hindu religion; While, 9% of population are Buddhist, 4.4% Islam, 3.1% Kirat and 1.4% Christianity. According to the Population Census 2012, the population of Nepal is 26,494,504, where only 48.6% of populations are literate; this percentage varies in large scale between rural and urban areas. The average life expectancy of men is 67.44 years and 66.94 years of women. (CBS, Nepal 2012. 144-184.) Nepal is listed as low human development areas in United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index list (UNDP 2012).

Nepal endured ten years long civil war from 1996 to 2006, killing ten thousand people, the impetus behind the war was fundamentally to alter the 'Historical relations of oppression' in Nepal, which remained deeply contentious issue in worldwide. The then revolutionary Communist party (Maoist) of Nepal controlled over 90% of the rural areas. In the early stages of their movement as 'an insurgency' condemned them as a 'terrorists', and reacted with brutal force to suppress the movement, but as the country has embarked on the process of redefining itself, Maoist party has gained an unprecedented political recognition, which paved the way for them to elect as a new big party in constituent assembly 2008 and draft a new constitution.

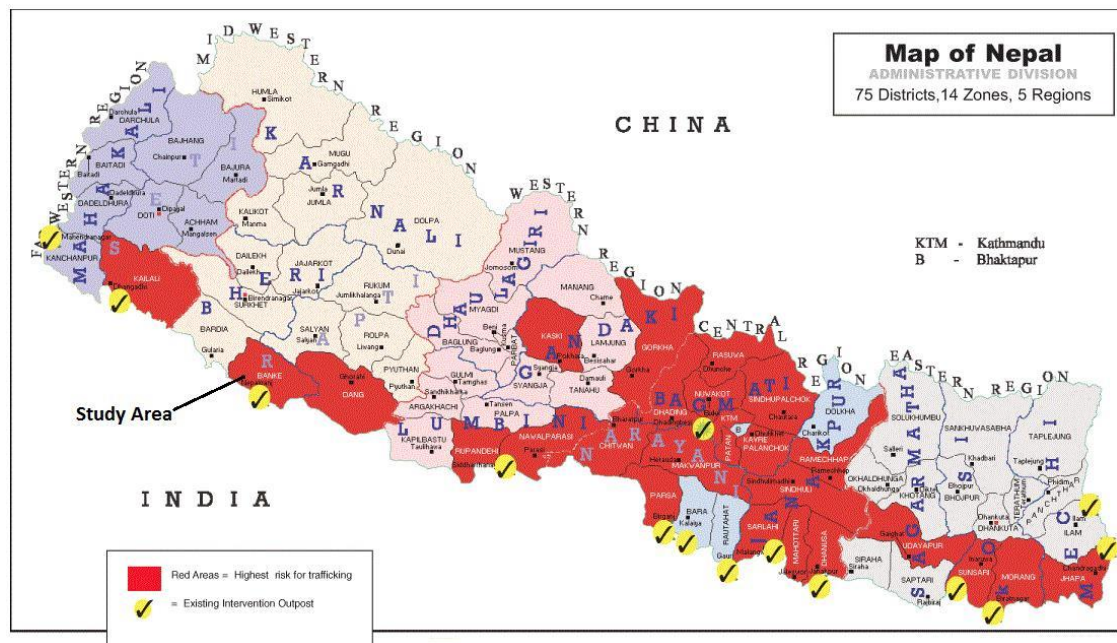
The country has been through significant political change; it has become a federal democratic country from monarchy. The new constitution has been drafted but the issues of women trafficking have not been addressed properly. Asian Foundation and Horizon Program remark that there has been seemingly lack of understanding in term of trafficking in Nepal. To clarify it more, the anti-trafficking law of 1986 is more focused on interception against selling and buying of humans for any purpose excluding other forms of deception such as enforced labor. (Asian Foundation & Horizon program 2001.) However, some of the organizations in Nepal like, Ministry of Women and Children Social welfare (MOWCSW) are close with the definition of United Nations; that entails bounded labor and enslavement. By acknowledging these facts, this research paper defines both prostitution and forced labor for foreign employment as girl trafficking.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 elaborates the trafficking law as: no one shall commit or cause to commit human traffic and transportation; the person is punishable if he or she commits this act. To sell or purchase a person for any purpose, and use them into prostitution without or with any benefit are considered to be Human Trafficking and Transportation. (Human Trafficking and Transportation Act 2007, 1.)

1.2 Study Area

This study was carried out in Banke district, located in Bheri Zone in the Mid-Western region of Nepal. According to 2011 census, the population of this district is 491,313. The average literacy rate is 57.8 percent, where the male literacy rate is 66.06 percent and female literacy rate is 49.20 (CBS). The headquarter ‘Nepalgunj’ of Banke district is connected with the boarder of Uttar Pradesh state in India. The given picture in ‘FIGURE 1’ demonstrates our study area and other locations, which are at risk of sex trafficking in Nepal.

FIGURE 1: Risk Areas for Sex Trafficking in Nepal and our Study Area



(Source: Friends of Maiti Nepal 2010)

Girls and young women living in the areas shown in red are at the highest risk for sex trafficking in Nepal (See Figure 1).

1.3 Motivation of the Study

As international students at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) for social services, we had a plan to bring out new issues for our thesis from our own country and contribute new findings in research field of Diak.

Similarly, the mosaic communities of Nepal consists various social problems. It needs several researches to explore the causes behind it and bring change in it by implementing new policies and practices. Analogously, we experienced the lack of sex-trafficking studies in Diak curriculum. Thus, we chose our research topic about empowerment of sex trafficked returnees from Nepal with a plan to contribute a new chapter in the field of social work practices in Diak and to familiarize with the issue of sex trafficking. Concerning the choice of our thesis topic on ‘Empowerment of Sexual Trafficked Returnees’, we attempted to study the life situation of trafficked victims after their rehabilitation and reintegration programme.

Several researchers have made their research under these rubrics but there are not enough research being done regarding the post-integration lives of sexually trafficked victims; mainly: Their empowerment status and daily life situation. Moreover, the majority of the studies regarding human trafficking are focusing on the causes of ‘girl trafficking’ and policy implementation. These prior study and observations initiated us to do the research about the post reintegration lives of trafficked returnees.

The study of International Labor Organization (ILO) shows that there have been few research regarding the current situation of rehabilitated girls but there has not been any research conducted under the topic of “Reintegrated victims’ life situation and experiences” (ILO 2001, 49). This study therefore adds knowledge on this topic with the findings of post rehabilitation and reintegration programmes of our research participants by showing the empowerment experiences of trafficked returnees, which creates a better understanding about the new life experiences about them.

We believe that, this research can provide additional knowledge and literature for the students of Diak about Nepalese sex trafficked returnees and contribute to the academicians, students, scholars, and researchers by providing information on empowerment of the trafficked returnees in their individual level. Moreover, it also describes the research experiences of male researchers, investigating into the sensitive issues of sex trafficked women.

2 SITUATION OF WOMEN IN NEPAL

It is significant to discuss about the national and cultural background of research topic, which makes it easier for our readers to conceptualize and form an overview of our study. Nepal shares open boarder with both China in north and India in the south that has enabled most of the Nepalese people to enter India as a free movers and work there. The economy of this country is primarily based on agriculture employing more than half of the population. Nepalese youths who are working across the world send a huge amount of remittance, which generate large amount for national economy. The natural beauty, cultural and historical heritage of Nepal has attracted tourists from all around the world, and tourism has become the major industry for international exchange. Skilled manpower from Nepal is shifting across the world in search of better opportunities that has resulted the situation of brain drain in the country. Recent years, migration has increasingly predominant, with over 300,000 Nepalese migrating to India alone (O'Dea 1993).

Nepal is hitherto practicing Hindu religious norms and values notwithstanding Nepal have become Federal Democratic Republic in 2008. The socio-cultural norms in Nepal have created a (false) dominant position for males and have paved the way for creating male-dominated/patriarchal society (Zhou, Wu, Zhu and Yuni 2013). Patriarchy creates discourses of male oriented society, patriarchal discourse are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations, which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them; that governs a hierarchal relations between man and woman in a society. It generally keeps the ideology of a man as a provider and protector of the family and has more values and responsibilities than a woman. Male dominated society has created a gender stereotype for women as meek, docile, emotional, and weak, which stays inside the boundary four walls (home). These stereotypes have created norms of do's and don'ts for women in the society and it has put them in disadvantaged and marginalized position in comparison to men. Moreover, this socio-cultural environment has given preference for 'son' during the childbirth. Hence, a daughter is not given as same rights as a son since childhood (Limbu 2012).

2.1 Women's Status in Nepal

It has been mentioned earlier about the women in Nepal that shows relatively low status in comparison to men. Our research focuses the setting of those Nepalese women who reside in the in rural or rural-urban areas of Nepal, because majority of Nepalese population live in rural area.

The villages of Mid-Western Nepal are mostly underdeveloped which is primarily due to the geographical barriers in Nepal. The geographical difficulties of Nepal account inadequate transportation that has led to many consequences as unavailability of various facilities such as health and education. However, the richness of the land provides food to some extent. These evidences show that most of the people in rural areas are dependent on agriculture and farming. CBS (2011) shows that Nepal has 86.2% of the population live in rural areas, where men are 50.3% and women are 49.6% (CBS 2011).

The women, who live in rural areas, are living in shortage modern facilities and information from various sources, their number of educational attainment is small. Our observations show that majority of women spend their days doing household works and working in fields. They are naive and gullible, who easily become prey to sex traffickers.

2.1.1 Educational Status of Women in Nepal

Most of the sex trafficked victims are taken from the rural areas of Nepal, where academic, economic and social status of women are reasonably low. It was the reason why we thought it was important to give the image of these women from rural areas in our research background.

Researchers Zhou Yi, Wu Chen, Zhu Jing and Yuni Wen (2011), in their research 'Nepalese Women' write:

One tangible measure of women's status was their educational attainment. Although the constitution offers women equal educational opportunities, many social, economic and cultural factors contributed to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates for girls. Illiteracy imposed the greatest hindrance to enhancing equal opportunity and status for women. (Yi et al. 2011.)

Women in Nepal are caught in difficult circumstances imposed by patriarchal society. Their poor social status obstructs their educational attainment and many more opportunities, which make them more dependent on men (Patriarchy). Although female literacy rate has improved noticeably over the years, it is still less in comparison to male. Gender disparity is phenomenal in Nepal; even educated women do not hold a higher status than her uneducated counterpart. In many societies of Nepal, education is heavily class-biased; education disparity has made women vulnerable for trafficking. (Shrestha 2004.)

CBS (2011) Nepal shows that only 30% of women in villages are educated, while 60% can read and write, and 10% cannot read and write at all (CBS 2011). However, in this globalization era, there is improvement of alertness concerning the significance of the role of education. Traditionally, in male-dominated society, it was believed that it was a wasted investment to educate girls, since the role of women was expected to be housewives and limited in fieldwork. Until now, they are excluded from decision-making, participating in social activities and gaining fair political rights. Hence, women have low educational attainment and low social status than men in Nepal.

Although women play essential roles in the family, their contributions have always been overlooked; it is men who take advantage of women vulnerability and make them dependent, leading to treat the women according to their will. Low literacy rate is also a key factor for human trafficking in Nepal. Girls trafficked from Nepal to India are typically illiterate, unmarried and under age, where majority of them are between the age of 13 to 18 (Stallard 2013).

2.1.2 Economic Status of Women in Nepal

Yi et al. say, for Nepalese women, economy has been always an unknown issue because they are deprived from the opportunity to perform their skills. Women have to depend on their male counterpart or to their parents for everything that can be related to economy. A girl is dependent on her father before her marriage; she remains again dependent on her husband after her marriage and probably on her son during the later years of her life.

Women contribution to household work and fieldwork has been significant to run the family, yet they have to rely on men to take authoritative decisions regarding the economy. Their involvement is under-valued by the male dominated society. (Yi et al. 2013, 9-13.)

Financially, the status of women is moderately poor in comparison to men, it is not women, who are incapable for working but it is the socio cultural environment that reinforces women to remain inside the four walls and take care of the family members. A girl who grows up in such environment can easily become a victim of sex traffickers.

2.2 The Badi Women: Prostitution as Caste Based Professionalism in Mid-Western Nepal

Nepalese people have adopted caste-based profession since the beginning of 18th century. The impact is still noticeable in current Nepalese society. In 18th century, jobs were divided according to the castes: the government jobs were for high caste Brahmins; 'Chhettris' were warriors to protect the land and territories. 'Sudras' were called untouchables or low caste people, also known as Dalit. (Sharma & Basnet 2006.)

National Dalit Commission: working actively for securing the rights and liberation of Dalit, defines 'Dalit Community' as:

'Dalit Community' refers to the caste community, who has been kept far behind in social, economic, educational, political and religious spheres, and deprived of human dignity and social justice due to caste based discrimination and untouchability. (National Dalit Commission 2005)

Damai, a Dalit Caste, had profession of tailoring. 'Bishowkarma' had to work with metals and Irons. Similarly, 'Badi' women were entertainers. Badi caste belongs to an untouchable Hindu caste, with approximately 7,000 populations, who inhabit scattered settlements in Mid-Western Nepal (Cox 2000, 22-25). Badi men do fishing and make drums and pipes, while Badi women engage in prostitution from their early age and continue it until they become too old to attract any more costumers.

Badi are the lowest caste in Hindu caste system of Nepal. They are the untouchables and have low status because of their profession as prostitution. According to the orthodox Hinduism, the highest castes; Brahmins, Chhettris and Thakuris do not allow the Badi people to enter into their houses and accept meals or a glass of water from them too. Marriage with Badi is also strictly forbidden. For instance: if a man or woman from higher caste marries Badi woman or man, the person is disgraced by the family and society, and ostracized by other members of their caste. (Cox 2000, 23.) It is said that Badi people came to Mid-Western Nepal from India during 14th century. From the time of their settlement, they established themselves as entertainers; travelling in groups, singing songs, staging dances and telling stories from great Hindu epics. During the decade of 1950's the rulers and high-class landlords provided Badi people with basic needs: housing, land, clothing and food. In return these women provided them with entertainment and sex. However, Badi women limited their prostitution to patrons and some of their male relatives.

Cox (2000) explains the situation of Badi women as:

... having no other source of income, Badi women continued prostitution as their basic income. Similarly, during the decade of 1960's and 1970's, the market of prostitutes was expanding; demand for singing and dancing was shrinking as a result of radios, movies and tape players, which became increasingly available during these decades. It has made Badi even more dependent on prostitution as a source of income. (Cox 2000, 24.)

Shrestha (2004) describes in his book "Badi ra Sudur Paschim", as Badi girls grow up, they start to learn from their mothers, sexually mature sisters and other Badi women about sex and learn how to dress and act in such a way to attract men. She further elaborates, within a few months after reaching the age of thirteen, these girls start to engage in prostitution themselves, and some girls start on their own, but are prompted to begin by their parents. (Shrestha 2004.)

The Nepalese government, by considering Badi underprivileged, planned to bring an end to their caste based profession (prostitution) and involved them into several other development activities. To do this, the government has given several agricultural lands to the Badi families and established school for children in Mid-Western Nepal. However, most of the girls who attend school from this community, they eventually drop out and continue prostitution. Badi girls are also given encouragement to enter into different other professions and also to pursue their education. Even though, Badi girls who complete their private schools and pursue their higher education in public schools are often severely harassed and bullied. There are some of the instances where, the higher caste Principal refused to admit Badi children. (Shrestha 2004.)

2.3 Research Problem

We were interested in knowing about the life situation of trafficked returnees (their feeling about their own empowerment) after their rehabilitation, reintegration or repatriation programmes. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the post-trafficked life experiences of trafficked returnees after their rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

The objective was to find out if they are empowered or not. The main research question of the study is:

1. How empowered do sex trafficked returnees feel after their rehabilitation and reintegration in Nepalese society?

We anticipated unearthing the empowerment situation of trafficked returnees in Mid-Western Nepal by the aforementioned research question. To make the research precise and we further categorized our above-mentioned research question thematically for forming the interview questions in precise manner.

- How do trafficked returnees perceive themselves into the society in regard to participation and involvement?
- How self-determined trafficked returnees are and how they perceive their future in regards to capacity building, creating determination, gaining education and skills they need to live independently?
- How patriarchal discourse has created difficulties for returnees' empowerment?
- How do returnees perceive and cope with the stigma?

2.4 Organization in Concern: Maiti Nepal

Maiti Nepal is a non-profit organization established in 1993 to fight against all the social evils inflicted upon women of Nepal: to protect Nepali girls and women from crimes like domestic violence, trafficking for 'flesh trade', child prostitution, child labor and various forms of exploitation and torture. The focus of this organization has always been on preventing trafficking for forced sexual slavery, rescuing flesh trade victims and rehabilitating them. This social organization also actively works to find justice for the victims of sex trafficking by engaging in criminal investigation and waging legal battles against the criminals.

Maiti Nepal has been highlighting the trafficking issue with its strong advocacy from the local to national and international levels. The chairperson of Maiti Nepal, Anuradha Koirala was announced as Cable News Network CNN Hero of 2010 award 'Protecting the powerless category' for combating against the human trafficking in Nepal. Till then Maiti Nepal rescued 12000 children and girls from sexual exploitation, which was a crucial statistics. (Maiti Nepal 2014.)

The organization claims itself, as girls' real family, where she was born. Married Nepali women have no rights towards her parent's property; she becomes an outsider, and solely belongs to her husband and her husband's family. Maiti Nepal provides shelter to all women and girls, whether married or not, who are exploited or their rights are neglected or violated by any means of the society. The key objective of this organization is to prevent girl trafficking; rescuing them from enforced prostitution and helping to find economic alternatives. It provides counseling, non-formal education on health and basic human rights along with income generating skills for enabling the trafficked returnees to stand on their feet. The clients of this organization are sexually abused girls, abandoned children; potential victims of trafficking, destitute women, prisoners' children, returnees from brothels located in different parts of India, girls and children infected with HIV and Hepatitis B and intercepted girls from different boarder areas of Nepal. (Maiti Nepal 2014.)

The organization describes that an educational status woman of Nepal is relatively low; women have lack of awareness, naïve, gullible and aloof from the modus operandi that traffickers can easily trap the victims. To discourage the traffickers, Maiti Nepal remains vigilant against them by launching awareness programs in rural and remote areas, where women are deprived of access to communication and transportation facilities. The rescue operation of trafficking girls and women is difficult and challenging, thus the organization is coordinating with organizations with India and Indian police at large where most of the Nepalese women and girls are exported for enforced prostitution.

Maiti Nepal has several prevention homes established at the places where women are at high risk of trafficking and has been providing residential trainings to the girls who are at high risks of being trafficked. They provide training for income generating activities, capacity building and leadership enhancement. After the completion of the training, these girls work as social activists against human trafficking in their locality. Similarly, it operates transit homes at the Indo-Nepal border towns for patrolling and keeping vigilance, thereby intercepts girls and women who are at the verge of being trafficked. (Maiti Nepal 2014.)

Maiti Nepal has received international recognition from Prince Charles and Oprah Winfrey and is featured in a documentary film, 'The Day My God Died', produced in cooperation with International Justice Mission. The documentary has advocated for women and children, who are trafficked or exploited. The organization has prevented the trafficking of 6,000 girls and women by intercepting trafficking attempts at the Nepal boarder and providing support in the transit homes for those rescued (Crawford & Kaufman 2008).

Maiti Transit and shelter home was established in the year of 2000, in Banke, Nepalgunj: an open border which is a notorious trafficking outlet to India. The clients of this office are the area of our study. The border of this district is an exit point from Nepal to India therefore the office exerts strict vigilance upon the vehicles coming in and going out from Nepal. Besides, it is also helping for the rehabilitation and reintegration of sex trafficked returnees in Mid-Western region of Nepal. (Maiti Nepal 2014.)

3 SEX TRAFFICKING PHENOMENA

3.1 Sex Trafficking Phenomena: Nepal and India

In our study, the general query may arise: Why sex trafficking happens in Nepal? Crawford & Kaufman (2008) explain, it is because of endemic poverty, the low status of women, and migration in an attempt to escape insurgent violence. Datta (2005) states, women and girls are sold by their own families because of poverty. The sex trafficked victims are taken from the remote village areas of Nepal and sold them into the red-light districts of major cities mainly in India, where they endure enforced prostitution (Crawford & Kaufman 2008). According to Hutchison (2002), the estimated population of Nepalese girls and women are trafficked each year to the urban areas of India, and more than 200,000 Nepali girls are currently working in Indian brothels (Kaufman & Crawford 2011).

According to Sacks (1996), if we see the global scale of sex trafficking, women are trafficked into Israel, the United States and Canada to be employed as dancers in strip clubs; children are sold into sexual slavery in Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Philippines (Kaufman & Crawford 2011). United Nations (2000) estimates two million women are trafficked across boarder worldwide to work in the sex industry every year. Gunnell (2004) says human trafficking is the third biggest illegal industry in the world producing up to USD 9.5 billion in profits annually. According to Bennett (1999), Huda (2006) and Human Rights Watch (2005), Asia is the most susceptible area for sex trafficking because of its large population, increasing urbanization, renewed poverty in the wake of currency devaluations and recession and the occurrence of political insurgencies, such as Nepal, Pakistan and Myanmar (Crawford & Kaufman 2008).

Although human sex trafficking has been a widely discussed topic in global and national context with numerous studies, the post-integration lives of sexual trafficked victims are narrowly researched in the context of Nepal.

Many international conventions have prioritized on the sex trade, for instances, UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and Convention (CEDAW) for suppression of the traffic in Persons and the UN Protocol 2000 for preventing, suppressing and punishing trafficking in persons. In United States, we can find the United States Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000; similarly, in India there is Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956. Most of the national and international conventions advocate for supporting and protecting the victims in destination and source (Jayasree 2004).

There are studies conducted about human sex trafficking in Nepal but most of them are made about how the victims are traded, where they were sold and how the victims coped the situations etc. What we felt missing in research area of sex trafficking is: the post-integration lives of trafficked returnees. Hennik and Simkhada (2004) writes:

Trafficking of young women and girls has been recognized as a particular problem in Nepal, which is viewed as one of the 'sending' countries in the Asian network of trafficking, and India and Pakistan are typical 'transit' or 'destination' countries for all types of trafficking, particularly sex trafficking (Hennik & Simkhada 2004).

Moreover, they report that only since 1990's trafficking has been identified as a priority issue in Nepal although the problem was there before the decades. There has been only limited scientific, empirical research has been published using reliable data from sex trafficked women themselves that truly can investigate the nature and process of sex trafficking in Nepal: the spatial context of sex trafficking; and the complex issues surroundings community reintegration upon return to Nepal (Hennik and Simkhada 2004). Therefore, it is important to make more researches in the field of sex trafficking in context Nepal.

Generally, women and children become prey of sex traffickers or agents and are taken into the different destinations where they are sold and compel for forced prostitution. But Leah Wickham (2009) has different opinion about it, she says that large number of women and children often voluntarily migrate to obtain sex-related work or to follow false promises for employment in order to escape abusive relationships at home, either from their families, husbands or boyfriends.

Hennik and Simkhada (2004) identified the different routes of trafficking: victims may fall in the hands of brokers, independent migration to urban areas from rural, deception by false marriage and by enforced abduction. These truths show another fact that trafficking is commonly conducted by not a stranger but by the closed ones, for instance, closed relatives. Furthermore, trafficking is not a rural phenomenon but the migration to urban areas also enables at some point. (Hennik & Simkhada 2004.)

IIDS and UNIFEM (2004) categorized the causes of trafficking into two groups: root causes and immediate causes. The immediate causes are gender discrimination, unemployment, impact of globalization, discriminatory cultural values, religious beliefs and practices and poverty. On the other hand, the root causes are illiteracy, dysfunctional family and all forms of discrimination including violence, forced marriage and divorce. Similarly the increasing globalization is seen as a pull factor for trafficking that includes international migration policies, demand for cheap labor market and domestic workers and the booming sex industry. (IIDS & UNIFEM 2004.)

Most of the Nepalese trafficked victims who are rescued in Police raid in collaboration with NGOs and INGOs in different parts of the world are kept into rehabilitation center in Nepal unless they deny. Rehabilitation centers are generally run by NGO's; they provide health and social assistance to sex trafficked women and girls who returned to Nepal as sex trafficked victims. They offer literacy and skill building trainings to empower them and assist to integrate back into their communities. The majority of the victims spend less than one year in rehabilitation center, the half of the victims spend less than six months and a small number of victims stay in rehabilitation homes indefinitely after family rejection or difficulties in returning to the community. (Sharma and Basnet 2006.) Leah Wickham (2009) writes:

Rehabilitation and reintegration process depend on a variety of services, developing increased self-esteem and a sense of self-empowerment among recovering women is perceived as the most important element for recovery from violence and exploitation, especially sexual abuse.... Empowerment programs enable women and children to recognize sources or their self-esteem and to construct a more positive identity... the affected individuals involved in the sex trade develop a distorted perception of themselves as sex objects with their only skill to please them.

Robinson and Paramo (2007) refer the above-mentioned idea as cognitive restructuring “which enables the identification and alteration of abuse-distorted thoughts, beliefs and assumption; by gently challenging abuse-distorted views of oneself and of others, as well as of the one’s future and the world” (Cited in Wickham 2009).

Shovita Adhikari (2011) carried out a similar research under the rubric “Reintegration of Nepalese Girls, Trafficking Returnees into the society,” for university of Nordland, Norway. She attempted to find out the process of reintegration of Nepalese trafficked returnees into their society, her research elaborates the process of reintegration of the returnees and what kind of identity and problem they face during the reintegration. She also examines on what types of identity the victims construct when she is in the reintegration and rehabilitation process. In comparison, our research goes beyond Adhikari’s findings, because it tries to investigate the post integration experiences of trafficked returnees, by which we can understand their empowerment situation.

Sexually trafficked victims have fear of being stigmatized once they return to their communities; they may confront various stereotypes, emotional reactions from relatives and close ones, such as pity, anger, disgust and discrimination affecting the multiple domains of people’s lives. Link and Phelan (2001) narrate that linking the labels of undesirable attributes to the victims lead to a perception that the negatively labeled persons are different from those who do not share the same label. The labeled victims have the possibility of being treated in horrifying manner. They further claim, stigma and rejection devalue the self-esteem of the victims, which is feeling of self-worth, self-regard, and self-respect and lead to loss of identity.

These victims have less confidence in comparison to others in the society. Payne (2005) emphasizes the concept of empowerment in close connection to self-identity, by enabling people to overcome barriers, to achieve life objectives and to gain access to services. These victims are in need of constructing identity: that can keep them away from stereotypes.

3.2 The General Framework of Prostitution in Nepal: Past and Present

Trafficking of young women and girls in Nepal has become problematic phenomenon recently. The sex trafficking history of Nepal goes back to Rana regime: the feudal family regime. The rulers used to select young girls from different parts of Nepal to serve them as maids and exploit them sexually. Similarly, as we have mentioned earlier, the prevailing Badi community in Mid-Western and Western Nepal is another main factor to prostitution of young girls since 18th century. In western Nepal, Deuki system, where girls are offered to the local Hindu God and are not supposed to get married. It has remained since centuries; poor families offer their children to the temples. These girls remain in the temple and eventually become prostitutes. (Ghimire 1994.)

The international network of sex trafficking in Nepal started in 1951 when the country went for democratic change and gained freedom from the Feudal Rana regime. After gaining the freedom, the country no longer remained in isolation as before and it started to build a network with the outside world. Ghimire (1994) argues, this freedom and openness has provided an opportunity for the traffickers to transport Nepalese women and girls into the red light areas of large Indian cities and sell them for prostitution. During the decade of 1960's, the Indian brothels were full of Nepali women and girls. It is during the decade of 1980's; developing countries including Nepal started to have a wider attention for both national and international level about the problem of sex trafficking. (Ghimire 1994.)

According to The Asia Foundation and Population Council (2001), for the first time in Nepal, the government passed the bill of 'Traffic in Humans (Control)' in 1986, which focused against the human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution. However, it remained inefficient because of the lack of political and judicial will to enforce the Act at one hand and it was long and complex prosecution on the other hand. This act was later considered as a most poorly enforced act in Nepal. This research also blamed the act for aiming to criminalizing prostitution rather than curbing trafficking activities.

Recognizing trafficking problem as priority issue since 1990's, many Governmental Organizations (GOs), NGOs and governmental ministries have collaborated and managed to develop cultural, economic and social programs to address the problems of trafficking. Lately, it is seen that international donor communities are increasing their funding for related social issues, welfare issues, empowering children and women and for the protection of human rights.

Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MOWCSW) established in 1998, worked in collaboration with ILO on the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) to develop a comprehensive thirteen-points strategies for the prevention of trafficking. At the national level, these strategies include: developing a National co-ordination Committee for prevention of trafficking women and girls; launching awareness campaigns on trafficking; introducing educational and employment oriented programs for women and girls. It brought HIV/AIDS awareness programs; working to increase political commitment, and encouraging integrated programs between Government and NGOs working towards prevention of trafficking. In local level, the strategies include: developing local coordinating committees and information centers on trafficking and boosting local employment generation for poverty alleviation. (Hennink and Simkhada 2004.) In 1999, the Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) Trafficking Program identified Nepal as one of the key countries in urgent need of intervention (Asian Foundation Population Council 2001, 2).

The underlying factors of trafficking in Nepal are mainly economic status and gender inequality (IIDS & UNIFEM 2004). Gender discrimination has paved the way for not providing opportunities to have an economic independence among women, because they are bounded inside the 'four walls'.

Similarly, gender inequality is predominant in educational, academic, cultural and social activities. Hennink and Simkhada (2004) explained about the lack of female empowerment and acute absence of overall awareness as the root causes for girl trafficking in Nepal, which also occurs through false employment and marriage by the

traffickers, and also selling the children for financial support of the families (IIDS & UNIFEM 2004).

It is impossible to estimate the exact number of the girls trafficked for sexual exploitation every year, but based on the basis of Nepalese and Indian sources, ILO estimates the figure ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 to 20,000 Nepalese children being trafficked every year and estimates 60,000 to 375,480 Nepalese women working in Indian brothels, with a record estimate of 417,200 Nepalese women engaged in prostitution in India. (ILO 2001, 6.)

4 EMPOWERMENT DISCOURSE

According to Lincoln, Travers, Ackers, and Wilkinson (2002), empowerment is a recent phenomenon; the term ‘empowerment’ itself is hard to define, because it has relative meanings: it differs according to cultural, regional, social and political contexts (Hur 2006, 523-524). It has become a widely used word in the field of social sciences in the last decade across a broad variety of disciplines, such as: social work, women studies, education and sociology. The term ‘Individual Empowerment’ in our research refers to an individual empowerment of sex trafficked returnees in the location of Banke district, Nepal.

This research carries significant importance for drawing empowerment theories to understand more about the concept itself in relation with the trafficked returnees (victims) in the context of Nepal. According to Moscovitch and Drover (1981), empowerment comes with the difference of powerful and powerless (Lord & Hutchison 1993). Sexually trafficked returnees are powerless in the society; they are in fear of stigma and have fear of being ostracized from their community. They are in trauma of their bitter past; they live with uncertainty. They are in need of empowerment, which “conveys both psychological sense of personal control or influence of and concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights” (Rappaport 1987, 121). Keiffer (1984) explains about the concept of personal level of empowerment where empowerment occurs as the experience of gaining increasing control and influence in daily life and community participation (Lord & Hutchison 1993). This study focuses on the personal experience of the trafficked returnees, their increasing control on themselves and influence in their daily lives and their participations into the community: ceremonies, groups, peer meetings and co-ordination.

To elaborate more about the empowerment theory, Whitmore and Kerans (1988) define empowerment as an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions, which affect their lives and the communities in which they live (Conoley & Goldstein 2004).

Empowerment enables trafficked returnees to overcome their barriers, construct their self-identity that has been questioned by the culture and society, helps to achieve objectives and gain different services that various sources have provided them. Tesoriero (2010) explains that empowerment can be achieved by ensuring people with resources, opportunities, vocabulary, knowledge and skills needed to increase their capacity.

Fetterman, Kaftarian and Wandersman (1996), in their book 'Empowerment Evaluation' explain:

The purpose of empowerment on the individual level of analysis is individual self-Improvement through methods that compare person with herself in attempts to improve person's capacity to fulfill her mission in life in ways that are consistent with her needs interests and abilities.

These writers have discussed individual empowerment under the rubric of 'Equal Theory Opportunity,' where they have located the two measurement targets: individual capacity and social opportunity. This theory claims the discrepancy between the right and the experience of self-determination is due to the lack of capacity and lack of opportunity among individuals whose personal, social and economic circumstances are beyond their control. (Ferrerman, Kaftarian & Wandersman 1996.)

This study mainly focuses on the personal empowerment of trafficked returnees. Empowerment can be understood as the process of an individual positive change, identify their will power and work for the change as it has been mentioned earlier about Keiffer (1984) on personal empowerment. To support this idea, Rappaport (1987, 119) points out "by empowerment I mean our aim should be to enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives."

By all these above mentioned empowerment concepts, it can be said that empowerment is a strategy where individuals go for achieving an increasing control of various aspects of their lives and participate in the community with dignity (Lord & Hutchison 1993).

4.1 Components of Individual Empowerment

Several researchers have used various components to measure individual empowerment (See TABLE 1 below). We have chosen ‘self-determination, freedom of choice and decision-making’, ‘participation and involvement’, and ‘social stigma’ as main components of our research for an empowerment of trafficked returnees in Mid-Western Nepal. From the following, we selected the suitable components of empowerment in our study. The components are later used as a theme for our thematic content analysis.

TABLE 1: Literature Based on Components of Empowerment

Authors	Components
Larson, Walker & Pearce (2005)	Self-Confidence
Boehm & Staples (2004)	Mastery and Self-determination
Becker, Kovach & Gronseth (2004); Kovach, Becker & Worley (2004)	Self-determination, self-sufficiency and decision making ability
Fetterman (1996); Sprague & Hayes (2000)	Self-determination
Speer (2000)	Personal sense of control and efficacy
Lee (1994)	Self-efficacy and critical consciousness
Thomas & Velthouse (1990); Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason (1997)	Meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact
Gkind & Foster Fishman (2002)	Participation, integration and involvement.

(Source: Hur, Journal of Community of Psychology, 2006)

Empowerment is operative at various levels: personal or individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and collective. In this research, we focused on individual or personal empowerment. Several researchers have conducted their studies by viewing a single component of individual empowerment, such as: self-determination, self-confidence as given in the TABLE 1, while, other researchers have studied individual empowerment by using multiple components such as: Bohem and Staples (2004) have used mastery and self-determination, and Becker et.al (2004) have used self-determination, self-sufficiency and decision making for doing their researches. Bohem and Staples (1990) relate individual empowerment with the way people think about themselves, as well as the knowledge, capacities, skills and mastery, they actually possess. On the other hand, Boehm and Staples (2004) and Fetterson (2002) refer the collective empowerment as the process by which individuals join together to break their solitude and silence, help one another, learn from one another, and develop skills for collective action (Hur 2006). He further explains that individuals become more empowered personally by the process of individual development; they cannot always become effective in helping to build their groups' collective empowerment.

According to Becker, Kovach and Gronseth (2004), individual empowerment develops when people try to improve the capabilities to succeed their psychological and intellectual difficulties and achieve self-determination, self-sufficiency, and decision-making skills (Hur 2006, 531).

Hayes (2000) considers self-determination as a single and critical component of empowerment. To add more, Bohem and Staples relate self-determination to the aspects, which enable individuals to meet the challenges of different situations. It refers to the characteristics that can maintain a firm stand and give expression to one's inner voice to achieve personal rights. To support this idea, Desi and Ryan (1985) along with Wagner (1995) describe self-determination as the belief one has autonomy or control over, how one does his or her own work. Similarly education is also taken as an essential component of empowerment; education for women enables them to find better jobs that will in turn grant them greater financial power, which makes them less vulnerable of being trafficked (Hur 2006, 531-532).

4.2 Stigma

The literal meaning of stigma indicates a set of negative and often-unfair beliefs that a society or groups of people have about something. It is a mark of shame or discredit that an individual perceives from the society. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as possession of bodily attributes as cut or burnt marks designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier, the signifier is regarded as a blemished person ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places. Goffman (1963) further clarifies stigma as disgrace to the self into the society. It is society that establishes the categories of persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for the people in the society. Consequently, stigma leads to social exclusion and discrimination, where victims are not treated as normal human and tagged them with low 'social status'. The stigma devalues the social identities relating to the personality and behavior of the individuals, it grows up with in the psychology of the individual affecting the other members of the family as well. (Goffman 1963, 12-15.)

The stigma is seen to the large extent in trafficked women/girls returnees during and after the reintegration process in Nepal. Stigmatized women are given undesirable attributes, which pave the way for differentiating them with the people who do not have same labels. The labeled persons' distinct identity gives rise to forming a stereotype that leads them for social exclusion and identity crisis. Stigma and social exclusion undervalues the returnees' self-esteem: the feeling of self-respect, self-worth and self-regard, which leads to the loss of identity.

4.3 Patriarchy

The existing patriarchal discourse in Nepal plays a vital role for constructing women's identity. Every woman's identity is formed by patriarchy; patriarchy equals to power. Connell (2009) explains, power is an important dimension of gender and is related to the concept of patriarchy. It is important to see the nexus between the empowerment of trafficked returnees and patriarchy, because the women/girls (trafficked returnees) have to live with the existing patriarchal discourse in their society.

Patriarchal discourse is a created body of theory and practice by males in a society that has power to shape structure of gender role difference. It is a social system in which male gender role acts as the primary authority, central to social organization and where fathers hold authority over women, children and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. Many patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Patriarchy can also be understood as male's formal control over women and family, exercised by fathers, husbands and brothers, where male remains in the advantaged position in every respect, and female remains in marginalized position, there occurs female subjugation. Patriarchal discourse has remained as a powerful discourse in Nepal that controls the hierarchal relationship between men and women in society and regulates 'do and don'ts' with stereotypes. (Limbu 2012, 19.)

Patriarchy depicts boys as tough, rough and mentally skilled people, whilst girls are as soft, gentle and love carrying household duties, fulfilling male's desire and respect them as god. They think that women cannot corporate with the real world because they lack rational qualities. In those society men serve as authoritative figure and shapes the family whatsoever he desires to. Hence, the patriarchal nature of society shapes and perpetuates gender inequality to the extent of allowing male domination and female subordination (Limbu 2012). Sex traffickers in Nepalese society where patriarchy exists can easily take advantage over women and pursue them for sex trafficking.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology illustrates the choices undertaken in the process of carrying out an inquiry. Silverman further defines methodology as:

“choices we make about the case to study, methods of data gathering and other forms of data analysis in planning and executing a research study” (Silverman 2011, 53).

5.1 Research Method

The choice of researchers for carrying out different research methods depends on what they are trying to find out. Our study focuses on exploring the trafficked returnees' post integration lives histories and their in-depth understanding of human behaviors to find out their empowerment situation. To conduct this type of research, qualitative method is favorable, because this method has an ability to investigate not just the questions of what, where and when but also why and how, which are fundamental to understand the phenomena being investigated in social research. (Silverman 2011, 4-7, 17, 53.)

According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research method involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, which studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them. This method involves the collection of a variety of empirical materials: case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts and so on. (Cited in Creswell 1998, 2.)

Creswell conveys similar concept about qualitative research:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in natural setting. (Creswell 1998, 15.)

In addition, qualitative research method allows researchers to plunge in-depth into the experiences of the informants (Strauss & Corbin 2008). By the use of this method, we attempted to find out post integration life situation experiences of trafficked returnees and acquainted with their empowerment.

5.2 Sampling Strategy and Participants' Selection Process

Sampling refers to the process of deciding who will participate in the research project. The selection of our research participants/sample was based entirely upon the idea of the most appropriate respondents, who held specific knowledge or experience about the issues to be studied in our research (David & Sutton 2011, 2032-237).

For our research, we used purposive sampling because it is suitable method in qualitative studies where the researcher is interested in informants who have the best knowledge, concerning the research topic (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen & Kyngäs 2014, 4). The informants who took part in the study were purposively selected because either they were directly involved in the fight against human trafficking or they were trafficked victims.

According to our research supervisor, the recommended numbers of participants were 6 to 7 because the research was to be conducted in a pair. To find correct numbers of participants, the concerned organization Maiti Nepal provided us the name list of trafficked returnees registered in the year of 2013 along with their current addresses. The list included the victims of all forms of violence: domestic, gender and trafficked. In accordance with the project coordinator of Maiti Nepal, Banke, the researcher identified the sex trafficked returnees. Out of 70 sex-trafficked returnees, only seven were located in our research area (Banke district). The researcher visited the location of the possible participants to find out their whereabouts and residences of the possible participants, and started to approach them.

It was impossible to include all identified sex trafficked returnees in our study, because of various reasons. Some people may simply not want to be associated with research

project, which is looking at sex trafficked returnees as they may feel that it labels or stigmatizes them and, they may be concerned that friends and relatives may find out (Oliver 2010, 13). One of the interviewee declined due to the fear of her identity being exposed. We failed to include three other participants from our research area, because their family members informed us that they did not live there anymore and had left for India with their husbands after getting married. Therefore, we were only able to include the remaining three participants in our study.

Elo et al., (2014) explain, selection of most appropriate size is important to ensure the creditability of any study, however there is no commonly accepted sample size for qualitative study as the ideal sample depends upon the purpose of the study, research question and richness of the data (Elo et al. 2014, 4). Although, only three respondents were interviewed, the data had explained enough to the phenomenon of our research interest, and it was realized that there was no more information needed to be collected. Hence, the saturation point was achieved.

Beside the three interviewees, one key informant representing Maiti Nepal, Banke district was also interviewed. The interview with the key informant was primarily focused on getting general information about women trafficking, organizational structure and their approach and techniques to intercept the sex trafficking. Furthermore, questions about the services they provide for the trafficked returnees were also included.

5.3 Data Collection Method

Interviews can reach the parts, which other methods cannot reach. Interviews allow a researcher to investigate and prompt things that we cannot observe. Additionally, Willington describes interview as a conversation with a purpose, which researcher intends to gain his or her research information. (Willington 2007, 81.)

There are three different kinds of interview methods: structured, unstructured and semi-structured (Willington 2007, 81-83). In structured interview, no deviation is made from

either the wording or the order of a set list of questions and this method is of more value when the more number of participants are available; which may provide quantitative as well as qualitative data. On the other hand, an unstructured interview can vary from one interview and one interviewer to the next. There is not set list of questions or rigid orders in this method. Semi-structured interview compromises the problems inherent in unstructured interview method and avoids the inflexibility of the structured one. Furthermore, semi-structured interview involves interview guidelines or checklist of questions that helps to get the information about the researcher covering issues.

Semi-structured interview method was chosen to collect the data because semi structured interview allowed the flexibility in comparison to structured and unstructured interview method. Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to “seek both clarification and elaboration on the answers given”, which “enables the interviewer to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers” (May 1993, 93). This less structured format provides subjects the opportunity to respond “on their own terms” (May 1993, 93).

Since the interviews were semi- structured, the use of standard set of questions to guide the interview was important, but it was also necessary to supplement the questions with follow ups and probes based on participant responses. All the interviews were conducted in Nepali local vernacular language.

Tape recordings and note taking were used during the interviews, because they improve accuracy and quality of data. Tape recordings allow interviewers to concentrate, maintain eye contact and study the body language of the interviewees (Wellington 2007, 86). Note taking during the interview helps to jot down the non-verbal communications, expressions, impressions and verbatim of the interviewees and to remember the existing scenario. Apart from interviews, we used booklets: brochure, prospectus and websites in our study because it allows a researcher to see the way an organization portrays itself in print (Wellington 2007, 86).

5.4 Data Analysis Method

We used thematic content analysis for interpreting our data because it pays particular attention to the issue of the reliability of its measures ensuring that different researchers use them in the same way and to the validity of its findings through precise counts of word use (Silverman 2011). To do this analysis, the researcher classifies the research data into certain categories. These qualitative data are treated similarly to numerical data and can be statistically manipulated to provide scientific information, where researcher derives conclusion from the information in the text. Researchers have several approaches doing qualitative content analysis including by identifying themes, topics or issues. We designed our interview questions about the empowerment of sex trafficked returnees by constructing different thematic questions. The themes we chose were the components of empowerment: participation and involvement, self-determination (freedom of choice and decision-making) and stigma.

The data was collected from field notes and tape recordings; the raw data collected were first transcribed into Nepali language. Then, we translated the transcribed data into English, where we tried our best to give vernacular touch. The translated document was the size of 17 pages (A4 size) excluding field notes that were 7 pages. To manage the quantity of data and to reduce the bogus information, we started to code the translated text afterwards. While coding our data, we always kept in our minds about the research question: “How empowered do sex trafficked returnees feel after their rehabilitation and reintegration in Nepalese society?” Because it helped us to focus on research track and protected us from misinterpreting the research data.

We thematized our data by highlighting the transcribed interview documents that matched with the themes of our research questions. For instance, we chose three colors highlighter pens for representing three different themes; we used yellow color for participation and acceptance, red for stigma and psychological empowerment and green for independence and subjective well-being. We jot down the common nominators under the relevant themes and put them into the cluster of categories by which we constructed our findings.

5.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethics are moral codes that are meant to be followed while doing a research. They are binding, hence need to be adhered to irrespective of the circumstances surrounding the research; they remind us of our responsibilities to the people being researched (May 2011, 61-62).

For the purpose of this research, two NGOs dealing with the issues of trafficking were contacted for the permissions. In both the cases, permissions were verbal. Informants were asked of their free will to take part in the research without forcing or coercing them after informing them of the purpose of the inquiry. The option to withdraw from the research was also explained to the informants. (Silverman 2011, 96-97.)

It is important for researchers to keep the confidential information they receive confidential, especially for issues that are sensitive. To ensure it, the raw data collected will be destroyed after the publication of the final report in order to protect the privacy of the participants. Additionally, to assure the confidentiality of our participants, the raw data and transcription were kept into a single folder of a computer to erase them easily and lessen the possibility of reaching the private information of our participants at others' hands. Equally, to hide their real identity, pseudonyms were used because anonymity is important as it is a sensitive topic and for some it may be embarrassing and cause a lot of discomfort to talk about them in public. May (2011) emphasizes that

“guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to the research participants must be honored unless there are clear overriding reasons to do otherwise” (May 2011, 63)

One other ethical issue that was considered was, ‘do no harm principle’. It is important that the researcher should avoid inflicting harm to their informants (May, 2011). Similarly, a researcher needs to promote the value of human life, show human dignity while doing research. He or she should maintain certain standards: ensure freedom and self-determination, safeguard against harm and unreasonable suffering and protect privacy and close relationships. (Forskningetikse 2006.)

Moreover, Oliver (2010) also agrees that research participants should be treated with respect, should not be harmed in any way and should be fully informed about what is being done with them (Oliver 2010, 22). This should be based on the degree of risk as well as the weight of the consequences that may flow from the research (Piccolo & Huw 2009, 12). We as researchers acted in the best interest of our informants. This principle was observed by trying to formulate questions to participants that would not cause stress, anxiety or bring suffering to our participants.

Dealing with sensitive topic was not easy; there might come a situation where respondents had to recall their painful past, which might led our research participants to depression and even more worse to commit suicide. Hence, to avoid such situations, the research participants were informed in advance about the types of question they would be asked and reminded that they have the option not to answer certain questions or end the interview whenever they wish (Silverman 2011, 109).

Since all interviewed were illiterate; the purpose, risk and benefits and rights of the study participants was orally presented individually and verbal consent was obtained. Interviewees were informed about their right to withdraw from our research at any time and also they could or ask to turn off the tape recorder at any time without offering any reason (Silverman 2011, 98).

The concerned organization together with the informants was informed that the report will be published online and will be accessible to the general public. As well, the role of other research partner in the whole research process was clearly articulated and a consensus to read, use and analyze the information was obtained.

5.6 Research Process

The participants who are selected in this study are sex trafficked returnees who are reintegrated by Maiti Nepal in Banke District. To find these target participants, we chose Saathi Sanstha Nepal: A Nepali NGO working to eliminate the injustice and violence against women and children along with sexually trafficked victims. Both of us had volunteering experiences of working with this organization; therefore it was easy for us to pick up this organization for reaching our aimed participants.

According to our research plan, one of the researchers travelled to Nepal and made a contact with concerned organization via our friend: a former Saathi Sanstha Nepal's project co-coordinator. They provided us 5 names of the trafficked returnees along with their home address and contact numbers. The researcher tried to reach them, but the family members informed us that they got married and had migrated to India. Since the researcher failed to receive any research participants, we discussed the situation and agreed to change the organization, as there was another available organization "Maiti Nepal" in the same location and working with the same issue.

When we ran out of participants for our research from concerned organization (Saathi Sanstha Nepal), we did not have any contingent plan. All that is left for us, as a last resort was to contact Maiti Nepal: a NGO, working in the same location, dedicated in helping victims of sex trafficking. The researcher approached this organization along with our research plan and finally received consent to continue our research with them.

6 EMPOWERMENT OF TRAFFICKED RETURNEES

In this chapter, we analyzed the interviews using thematic content analysis method to understand the empowerment experiences of trafficked returnees. We chose different empowerment related themes: participation and acceptance, self-determination, independency and stigma for our interviews. We posed questions relevant to these themes to our respondents. We had three interview participants: Returnee 1, Returnee 2 and Returnee 3. We coded them as R1, R2 and R3 respectively in our analysis. In addition, we used our observation and field notes and key informants' interviews to do the analysis.

6.1 Empowerment Discourse and Caste Based Professionalism in Badi Women

In our study, 'caste based professionalism' was a major unanticipated finding we discovered. Two of our participants were from Badi community, the community that takes prostitution as a source of income especially among women. According to our participants, their relatives used to have sound income to support their families, who were working in brothels of India. Those relatives took them for the same business in their early age. They said that their relatives prompted them for earning good money and enjoy pleasant life. They were raided by joint force of Indian police and Maiti Nepal in brothel of India and returned back to Nepal. Respondent 1 explains how she was trafficked:

My aunt used to work in India and she used to visit us with a lot of money... She was always well dressed in comparison to my other relatives in Nepal. I used to be jealous to her and dreamed to be like her often. When I was 13, she offered me to travel India along with her and she also promised me to find a good job.... This is how I got involved in prostitution in brothels of India. (R1)

A senior citizen from the Badi community as our key informant told us that within a few months after reaching the age of thirteen, Badi girls start to engage in prostitution themselves. Certain girls start on their own, while others are encouraged to begin by their parents as well.

These girls from their early childhood generally know how to accept the life of prostitution; it is the older generation that teaches prostitution to the new ones, and narrates it as a work of women in their culture and practice or in their caste. It aspires to any other profession, would be unrealistic. A young Badi girl sees her mother, sisters and surroundings engaging in prostitution on a daily basis, which insinuates the young psychology of Badi girl into early age prostitution. They do not usually go to school and have minimum contact with outsiders unlike other caste. The most important lesson they learn in their puberty is: prostitution is the only means of sustenance available to most of the Badi families. As women are the main source of income, this caste prefers to have daughters in comparison to sons unlike general patriarchal Nepalese society. Some of the key informants during our observation also told us that they cried with disappointment after giving birth to the son.

Badi culture is totally different and opposite in comparison with Hindu higher caste families in Nepal. Hindu's prefer son against daughters because a son values more than daughters into their society, because of the religious belief, a son is needed to perform the last death rituals of the parents and if not, the dead body's soul would not go to the Heaven.

6.2 Participation, Involvement and Empowerment

To empower women, participation and involvement are indispensable. In addition, a sense of autonomy and self-value is important for someone to preserve her bodily integrity, participation and acceptance, and take full advantages of public services. Empowerment is about changing society, in which women find their own places, where they feel respected and recognized on the terms, which they want to live but not on terms dictated by others. (Pettit 2012, 6.)

A question regarding the participants' involvement in the community was asked to get the answer concerning their participation and involvement into their community, which determines their self-value and recognition as a part of the community or feeling of an outsider for being sex trafficked returnees.

Only one out of three respondents had her involvement with few numbers of local social organizations or support groups: Women's Group, Women's saving and Credit Group and Aama Samuha (Mothers' Group). We found out that two participants had limited information about the local social groups and were unaware about their ongoing local social activities too. Moreover, they seemed unnoticed about the advantages and benefits they could gain by their participation and involvement with such groups and their activities at one hand. On the other hand, the participant who had involvement in such groups did not find any benefit and support at all; the service user neither holds any kind of membership of any local social groups.

I stayed in India for six years, when I returned back here, my parents fixed my marriage and I moved to my husband's home immediately.... This place and people were new to me then, I was always busy with my household work, I did not want to involve in any social activities, because I had fear of my identity being exposed. Similarly, my family was not in favor of me to get involved in any type of support groups, they think that it is embarrassing. (R3, The respondent from upper Hindu caste)

Respondent three was from upper Hindu caste family of Nepal. Her main reason for not participating in any social activities was her fear among the society people, who might know about her past. Her family members were also in doubt that her identity would be revealed through such involvements and would be ridiculed by the society. Respondent two correspondingly had similar experiences concerning participation and involvement but with different reason. She did not have involvement with any groups into her community because she lacked proper information.

No, I do not participate... I do not have any idea about it. You know that being a woman, daughter or sister in our culture, it is not good to involve outside the household activities. (R2)

It is found that the Badi community participants were in double exclusion from general Nepalese society. Badi caste is considered as untouchable caste, they are not allowed to participate, involve and have free access to enter inside the homes of upper castes in Nepal.

Although, it is prohibited to discriminate any citizen by their castes and gender under the Constitution of Nepal 2007 (Constitution of Nepal, 2007), people are still treated according to inherent religious cultural norms and values.

People see Badi caste and prostitution as synonymous; they have different attitude on us. Our community is already marginalized because of our caste, and when they also know that I am a trafficked returnee, they exclude me more because they think that I am a potential HIV victim. (R1)

Furthermore, in the interview, respondent two expressed similar reason for not participating and involving in local social groups. She explained:

.... Because I am a Badi and a trafficked returnee, the villagers from upper caste do not want to touch me; they think that I have HIV. I sometime want to involve with them but I never felt the favorable environment for it. (R2)

Generally, it is seen that Badi community is marginalized from mainstream societies of Nepal. The stereotype of being potential HIV victim has made them double marginalized. They are also at the risk of social exclusion, which lives with the mark of shame and stigma. These circumstances have made Badi trafficked returnees to be ostracized from the main stream Nepalese society. Despite some of the respondent's will for participation and involvement, the cultural attitude has hindered them to get into different women's groups and get empowered.

6.3 Domestic Affairs and Empowerment

To measure empowerment in sex trafficked returnees, we asked questions related with their participation and involvement in domestic affairs to find their situation inside the household life. Majority of the respondents replied that they had limited rights in domestic affairs compared to their male counterparts, yet they are happy.

Respondent 2 stated:

I do almost all household works by myself: buying groceries, cooking and decorating house. I have my rights on what I want to do inside the house. But, when it comes about the external affairs, it is always my husband who takes care of it. He is superior to me and I think he knows better than me. Moreover, I am happy that he takes care of matters outside the house.

This returnee enjoys her limited freedom inside the household activities. She regards her husband as more superior than herself and more intelligent as well. It seems she has internalized the patriarchal norms and values; that has provided privileged position to male members into the society, where women remain in subordinate position. This trafficked returnee is living the life of general Nepalese married women. The statement of Respondent 3 performs as an example:

My husband allows me to receive the rent from our tenants and use them for domestic expenditure such as: buying foods, clothes, make-ups and paying my phone bills. Although the rent money I receive is not much, but I am happy with what financial independence he has given to me. He is saving his salary in bank, in a hope that we could start a small business in future. (R3)

It was astonishing to discover that returnees enjoy their lives inside the territory of patriarchy. The patriarchal cultural upbringing and economic dependency on male members are the reasons they remain inside the four walls and eventually they start to enjoy what they are given by the patriarchy.

By the above-mentioned findings, the participation and involvement of the returnees in domestic affairs are quite high; they are satisfied in these situations as well. But if we see their participation and involvement outside their domestic lives, most of the respondents lack participation and involvement into the society that shows returnees' self-ostracization from the social surroundings. It indicates, they are not yet empowered.

6.4 Self-determination and Empowerment

One of the objectives of the study was to identify the structure of power and control; this objective was formed primarily on the perceived notion of individual empowerment that develops when people attempt to improve the capabilities to overcome their psychological and intellectual obstacles and attain self-determination and decision making abilities. In our study we have taken self-determination as more than social skills, more than self-advocacy of sex trafficked returnees, which is a power to make choices and preferences to determine their future careers.

Field & Hoffman (1994) claimed self-determination as the ability to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself. In order to find out self-determination, questions regarding the returnees' power of decision-making and freedom of choices were asked. The respondents' answers about their experiences show how they lack the power of decision-making and freedom of choices because patriarchy has limited them inside the four walls. Deepa Narayan (2005) states empowerment has an intrinsic value. It is an end in itself. Feeling self-confident walking with dignity, feeling respected, living without fear, is of value in itself.

To understand more elaborated empowerment experiences of sex trafficked returnees in our study; we posed more simplified questions about their freedom of choices and decision-making. The participants' experiences reflect that they did not hold any power to make any important decisions except the option to decide what to cook and what not. They have freedom of choice and right to decision only inside the household activities. They are still dominated by the patriarchal norms and values, which came from a deeply rooted anti-women tradition and belief system in Nepal.

It is seen that returnees lack freedom of choice in their post integration lives, which indicates their low empowerment situation. When respondent one mentioned about starting a small business (Grocery store), we asked her roles in decision-making, to know how self-determined she was for deciding her own future or did she have any rights for her to make choices and decision.

She responded:

No, It was not my decision to start the business (Grocery store), I would have wished my husband to do a job and would preferred myself to start a parlor but I had no option beside respecting my husband's decision, because he is the breadwinner and also being a wife it is my duty to respect him. He always decides for what we shall be doing in near future (R 1).

Although it seems, this respondent provided consent to her husband for starting a business; yet it represents marginalized trafficked returnees who have surrendered to patriarchy due to their absolute lack of viable alternatives that has paved the for limiting their freedom of choices and decisions making. This case represents the lack of women empowerment among trafficked returnees.

Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2010) relate empowerment as group's or individual's capacities to make effective choices. Similarly, Deepa Narayan in her book "Measuring Empowerment: Cross Disciplinary" clarifies empowerment, which broadly refers to the expansion of freedom of choice action to shape one's life. It implies control over resources and decisions. (Narayan 2005, 4.) But, our respondents neither had capacities to make effective choices nor had control over resources and making their own decisions. When questioned were asked about their choices and decision-makings.

Respondent 3 replied:

Although my husband suggested me for joining skill oriented trainings by which I could socialize by meeting people and do some activities at home and could engage myself and forget my past. (Pause) But I fear meeting with people, because they might discover my past that could bring shame and hate in my husband's family. Therefore, I chose to stay home and let my husband to make all the decisions.

From the aforementioned responses of returnees, it distinctly indicates the hegemonic control of patriarchy (men) over the rights of women, where male dominated structures and social arrangements reject returnees' (women) freedom.

Along with the male dominated norms and values, 'lack of economic independence' in the case of R1 and 'fear of stigma' in the case of R2 were found as the main causes for not having an access for decision-making in trafficked returnees which has hindered their empowerment process.

6.5 Patriarchy and Women Empowerment

In patriarchal discourse, power is seen as an important dimension of gender related with the concept of patriarchy (Limbu 2012). It indicates men who hold power over women; men remain in advantaged position whereas women remain as subordinate. Trafficked returnees encounter double challenges into the society, they face discrimination due to their vulnerability at one hand and become victims of patriarchy on the other hand. It is because of patriarchy, returnees have less access for economic opportunities and independence, which leads them to remain in a miserable financial situation than in the brothels.

This vulnerability, financial shortage and social stigma often prompt returnees to end up once again into commercial sexual activities. Respondent 2 says:

Though I was in enforced prostitution, I had an economic independence. I could earn and spend it the way I chose. But now, I have no means of any income; I am totally dependent to my husband. This feeling of dependency sometimes makes me think to return back into same business again. At least I would have the money of my own. (R2)

Based on the aforesaid statement of this informant, she unearthed the general feelings of returnees about their hopelessness and helplessness, which reflects their vulnerability and disempowerment.

6.6 Stigma and Empowerment

Ghimire (2001) says, women returning home from brothels may face myriad of difficulties. Returnees are likely to be traumatized by their experiences; they are subject of stigmatization and rejection in their communities. She further elucidates, empowerment of trafficked returnees is a difficult task because of extreme stigma attached to them and suspect of having disease. It is challenging for them to regain acceptance into their communities as well for being stigmatized and having negative stereotype on them. They are often ostracized from the community by calling them as potential traffickers. When interviewees were questioned about stigma to know if they are free from it or how their situation is, respondent 1 answered:

... People think that I am still working as a prostitute and such perception will never change because I belong to a Badi community... We will always remain as a potential sex worker however we no longer involve in such activities. At times, they also blamed us as sex trafficker. (R1)

However, returnees are no longer involved in prostitution, there is still a risk that community people and relatives may stigmatize them by labeling them as prostitutes or attack, even murder them for the 'dishonor', they are seen to have brought upon their families and society (Willemsen 2006). It was also observed that majority of returnees are living in difficulties because of perceived beliefs and attitudes towards them into the community.

In Badi community, prostitution is practiced as a family business or as a caste-based professionalism. As a result, they are socially stigmatized. Additionally, if a woman is a trafficked returnee, she is doubt as a potential HIV carrier and she is likely to face more negative stereotypes in the community, which leads her towards double stigmatization.

Respondent 1 further said:

It is common thing for us to involve in prostitution, I really do not care if they just see me as a prostitute, because it is a common practice in our community but is already stigmatized by so called upper castes. When it comes about the issue if HIV, they doubt me as a HIV infected although I am not, it is just because I am a trafficked returnee... the pain of being labeled as HIV infected hurts a lot and makes me feel more humiliated and stigmatized than anything else. Moreover, people closely watched us and scrutinized our activities. (R1)

Nepal has strong caste based stratified society; this social structure has made the upper caste trafficked returnee more difficult to get accepted not only into the society but even within their own family as well. In our study, it is found out that the upper caste trafficked returnee face more stigma and discrimination with multiple domains. They perceive negative stereotypical attitudes from the community, which makes them vulnerable and socially excluded. These stereotypes create tension, sufferings and pain in them. They cannot remain stigma free in their post reintegration lives, which can be regard as a barrier for their empowerment. Respondent 3 from upper caste says:

... When I returned back here, my parents fixed my marriage and I moved to my husband's home immediately. I wanted to stay at home with my parents for some months because I was far away from them for five years, but they had a fear of being dishonored into the society in my return. I felt like they were silently blaming for bringing the shame in the family. They were so worried about my identity might be disclosed which might ruin their social status that is why they arranged marriage for me as soon as possible... I agreed to get married because I felt that I had been a burden to my family. (R3)

The majority of respondents' answers reflect how they have been stigmatized as HIV AIDS infected victims, as potential traffickers at times, sex workers, bad omen and frequently treated as an untouchable since stigma was attached with them.

The community members view the returnees as a threat thereby excluding them from the society. They are often subject of talked rubric and gossip. It is evident in our study that returnees who are coping discrimination and perceiving negative stereotype have made them vulnerable to violence by creating anger, tension, pain, feeling of loss and suffering. Although, victims struggled to construct their own respectable identity in their society but their characteristics were always under erasure. These findings illustrates the post integration trafficked returnees life have not been empowered yet, because returnees are not stigma free. They failed to live with confidence and dignity too.

7 DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study show that returnees' present empowerment situation is relatively poor. Ostensibly, they are seen as accepted and reintegrated in the family and community. For example, by putting efforts to do something of their own, some returnee tried to start small entrepreneur, some got married amidst social challenges; that indicates their acceptance at some level. But at the same time, they have encountered several challenges: verbal abuses, inadequate sustainable income, fear of shame and stigma, negative stereotype, humiliation and disgrace and so on. Despite these challenges, returnees are hitherto existing in a hope that there will be changes in their lives and are fighting to cope all the burden and trauma in their daily lives.

None of the returnees in our research were found to be self-determined, nor having any safe future plans. Living life with intense fear of stigma, low self-esteem and negative stereotypes have reinforced them to stay at home by avoiding public participations that has obstructed their access for outside world. Their wish to keep their identities hidden has closed various doors and opportunities for them in the society. Similarly, their fear would never allow them to live and struggle freely into the society and being empowered.

It is seen from our study that caste plays a significant role for the empowerment of sex trafficked returnees. We had participants from two different caste groups of Nepal: Higher Hindu caste and Lower Badi caste. We did not have any plan for seeing empowerment of returnees from different caste perspectives but were surprised with the new discovery. If we look at the empowerment components in different castes, we find the differences. Although the environment varies for the empowerment of trafficked returnees from different caste backgrounds, but none of them were found to be self-empowered.

If we see the 'acceptance' as a component of empowerment, the research shows that returnees have encountered several troubles for being accepted by the family and the community. High caste returnees are facing difficulties in both family and community

level but low caste (Badi) returnees have an easy acceptance in the family; conversely, not into the society level yet. 'Caste based professionalism' has enabled Badi returnees to integrate easily in their community; nevertheless, once they step outside the circle of their locality, they are subject of being stereotyped, neglected, abused and ostracized.

According to Keshab Koirala (personal communication 18.2.2014), the project coordinator of Maiti Transit Home, Nepalgunj, high caste returnees are not easily accepted because their families have existing fear of losing their social prestige and being ridiculed by the community. To be precise, the family members are scared of the adverse effects in their social status. The cases of low caste returnees are different, they have easy acceptance because they take sex as caste based professionalism, which Goffman (1963) describes as 'Tribal Stigma'. He mentions, Badi returnees face the so-called tribal stigma attached with their caste and religion that is transmitted equally to all members of the family. (Goffman 1963.)

This research evidently clarifies that no matter what castes returnees belong to, they still have limited freedom of choices and power of decision-making. But, the restriction in freedom of choices in both castes has different reasons. For instances, poor economic condition and low literacy rate has hindered the freedom of choice in Badi returnees. On the other hand, in high caste returnees, fear of identity being exposed, stigma, and communal rejection have limited their freedom of choices.

Patriarchy was exposed as common evidence for the returnees' limitation for their freedom of choices and decision-making. Returnees included in our study, lacked self-independency and they were relying on male counterparts. Men were taken as breadwinners and holding the power of decision-making. Thus, economic dependency has created low self-esteem and lack of decision-making power in returnees. Moreover, it is also the existing culture of male dominated society has given men a privileged position, which limits the rights and freedom of women.

It is evident that social stigma has been a major challenge returnees faced in their families and communities, which has hindered their empowerment. The returnees felt disempowered by the social stereotype and stigma: potential HIV and AIDS carriers and

sex workers. The feeling of shame and low self-esteem resulted from stigma has limited their access to the resources of opportunity and skills in comparison to other women into their community. They have fear of negative stereotype, they face, i.e. if they are exposed into the society; which creates tension, suffering and anxiety on them. As a result, their post-integration lives have not remained stigma free.

The trafficked returnees have not been able to perceive themselves equal as compared to other women in the community; there is envisaged disempowerment, social discrimination in all spheres of their lives including access to resources, education and work compared to other women.

When trafficked women return to their home countries or communities, they confront additional socio-economic and psychological problems. They are often returned to the limited economic opportunities and financial constraints that contributed to their initial departure. The poor economic conditions, which contributed to their vulnerability, also thwarted the potentiality for effective reintegration and empowerment. Derks (1998) mentions that poor economic situation of sex trafficked returnees makes the process of empowerment and reintegration more difficult. When economic risk factors are still in existence, the traditional support mechanisms focusing on skill trainings and credits arranged by different I/NGOs do not necessarily uplift the economic situation of the returnee and her family, because the traditional skills provided by organizations are not saleable in modern markets.

The meager income generating skills gained by the returnees do not support for their economic empowerment. On the other hand, economic sustainability is also dependent on non-economic factors (Derks 1998). Such as absence of opportunities that existed prior to their departure, placing them at heightened risk for repeated abuse and exploitation including trafficking. Returnees also anticipate that stigmatization; as a result of being trafficked into prostitution will make their lives too difficult upon their return to their communities of origin. (The Asia Foundation 2005 & Derks 1998.).

Empowerment, to a great extent is dependent on family relations and relations in the larger social environment (Derks 1998). The cases of our respondents show that the families and society are on the other side of the same coin.

Had there been any programme that includes society and family of the returnees for the reintegration and empowerment by putting them in the same row, it certainly would have helped the returnees to cope with the social environment and stigma. This has obstructed the empowerment of our research respondents.

8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Learning Experiences

This research has enabled us to pursue our interests to learn new educational experiences, hone our problem solving skills and to challenge ourselves in new ways. The taught and learned theoretical knowledge in the field of social services in Diak, were practically utilized in our study with research-oriented approach, which has supported and advanced our professional growths in research fields. Since, research is an academic learning process; we learned to use research methods, strategies and analysis through the practice.

We acquired practical and theoretical knowledge for working in a team from university's courses and modules that inspired us to work in a group through different activities: group mini research, group exam, group presentation etc. For our research, working as a team was not a new and challenging issue for us, because we were already accustomed to the teamwork via different activities in different units of our Diak curriculum. The skills we learned had motivated us to conduct this research in a team. Similarly, this research has helped us to apply reflective and innovative approaches to conduct research and implement research-based theoretical ideas vis-à-vis produce new information. Furthermore, we also realized that studying theoretical knowledge in university and working in a practical field are different and more challenging.

By working in pair, we understood the significance of building trust between the team members before starting the work. We realized the possibility of trust could be broken by the negligence of one team member and affects the entire research. Therefore, follow-ups, regular communication and respect for each other's hard work were needed to maintain the trust. Although trust was there; occasionally, it was likely to have problems to synchronize the diverse point of views between the research partners. To overcome it, a common understanding point between such varied ideas was necessary to build, which had made easier for us to represent them in our writing.

During the research, different skills as: respecting ideas and opinions of research partner, making critical decisions (when partner is in dilemma), time management, communication skills and division of work were developed. The team management organization, follow up skills, help in need, criticism were well practiced, adopted and skillfully overcame. Despite our spatiotemporal differences, our firm commitment towards the work had played the role of catalyst to continue our research synchronically and systematically without any interruption in any stage.

We acknowledged the in-depth understanding of trafficking issues and the empowerment of trafficked returnees in the context of Nepal and Asia at large. By the findings our research, we came to know about empowering experiences in post integration lives of returnees. However, they are living the life with intense fear and stigma; they hold the dream of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. As research is always about exploration and findings, we had unexpected findings about Badi community (see Chapter 6.1), which taught us not to anticipate the conclusion before doing any research.

Most importantly, this research has enhanced our confidence and competence to confront the future professional challenges, where we could apply our in-depth knowledge in practical working environment. To sum up, this research has not only helped us to develop our professional abilities, but it also helped to increase our academic and theoretical competences by studying more research related literature.

8.2 Motivation to Work in Pair and Work Division

The volunteering experiences of both research partners in the field of human and sex trafficking in Nepal and the common interests to obtain expertise knowledge in the field of trafficking and empowerment of returnees had set us into the same goal of doing this research in pair.

We had a well-planned work division for doing this research from the beginning; however we left some flexibility to improve ourselves during the process. We worked together with the proposal and both became available for all meetings, seminars and presentations.

For our research, the data collection had to be carried out in a remote part of Nepal hence it was not financially possible for both researches to travel to the target area for conducting the interviews, because the cost was beyond our financial capacities. We did not have any funding for this research; neither, any partner organizations. Therefore, we agreed to conduct the interviews by one researcher travelling abroad (Nepal), while the next researcher could stay in Finland and could carry the task of library research, collecting more literature and writing chapter one and two. Once the data was obtained, in order attain similar grammatical structure between the researchers, it was decided to write all the remaining chapters together.

9 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are limitations and challenges in research design and in particular circumstances of any study. Exploring the empowerment experiences of sex trafficked women returnees itself was challenging topic for us. To make it precise, we categorized our challenges and limitations into two sub topics, which are briefly discussed below.

9.1 Research Challenges and Limitations

For our study, it was difficult to find the desired number of participants. The gender position of researchers on sensitive research topic might have influenced for obtaining less than the proposed number of participants, but the case would be different otherwise.

Due to the financial constraint, it was impossible to manage the required money for the travelling of two researchers; henceforth only one of the researchers was sent to collect the data. Had both of the researchers could afford to travel, the time for locating the participants would have been saved and lessen the load that one researcher had undertaken during the data collection period. But on the other hand, it has benefited for thesis development as well: while one researcher was on the field, the second researcher had enough time to collect the required literature from library and jot down the important information.

Most of our respondents were married women and living in patriarchal society, they had to respect the decisions of their male counterparts. It is seen that marriage has limited the decision making power of trafficked returnees. The findings would differ in the case of unmarried trafficked returnees. The inclusion of unmarried respondents in the study could bring an interesting result in other studies.

For these kinds of studies, which deals with the sensitivity and delicacy of the participants, researchers need more time to build rapport with the participants, by which both parties could create more comfort zone for each other's to make more inquires for researchers and expose further to the participants.

9.2 Working as a Team: Challenges and Limitations

The researchers' spatial difference under travel cost had been challenging for regular meetings thus we opted to meet twice in a week. Additionally, the arrangement of thesis work, working life and personal life together was challenging.

For two researchers, it took us large amount of time to meet a similar understanding point under the same rubric, because the discussions were long. Yet, it was fruitful. We appreciated each discussion where we went through different sides at the beginning but found out the same concluding point at the end.

Although we had work division for writing separate chapters in the beginning of our research, we noticed the difference in structural and style of writing between us. Hence, in order to maintain the similarities, we agreed to write all the chapters together.

10 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was set out to explore the empowerment experiences of sex trafficked returnees in Mid-Western Nepal, it sought to answer this research question:

1. How empowered do sex trafficked returnees feel after their rehabilitation and reintegration in Nepalese society?

The findings of the study have demonstrated the empowerment of sex trafficked returnees was hindered by various socio-economic elements. They lack individual empowerment experiences; because, they do not feel inclusive themselves into the society. Although they carry hope for future but they are not stigma free. Their autonomy is disoriented inside the male dominated society; they lack proper education and skills. In conclusion, the returnees do not feel self-empowered after the rehabilitation and reintegration.

10.1 Recommendations

Once the research was conducted, it unfolded further possibilities of doing more study in the same field. Our finding shows that caste plays a significant role for reintegration and empowerment of trafficked returnees, in country such as Nepal. Caste based professionalism in certain group of Nepalese community has made difficult for empowering the trafficked returnees. The alternative way of developing this research would be to do further study on: How does the caste play role for the empowerment of trafficked returnees from different caste backgrounds in Nepal.

We chose a sensitive and challenging study topic for our research in a remote location of Nepal, where gender and caste plays major role for the construction of the society. Even though, both researchers were male, we left no stone unturned to find out the in-depth knowledge and information about the study. But, the subjective gender position of researchers may vary with the findings of the same research topic in the same field and with the same interviewees.

The analysis of our data shows that patriarchy is one of the main reasons for disempowering returnees. In this case, if the returnees are provided credit services to uplift their financial status in the family, they can have equal power to financial management as males and have decision-making power of their own lives at large.

10.2 Recommendations to Maiti Nepal, Banke

Maiti Nepal, Banke, established itself as a leading NGO in Mid-Western Nepal by combating against the human sex trafficking through several activities including awareness campaign regarding sex trafficking, rescue operations for the trafficked women and girls, apprehending traffickers, providing legal support to the needy and through women empowerment programmes.

Since its establishment, the cases of human trafficking rate is decreasing and number of interception against trafficking is increasing, however it is evident in our study that Maiti Nepal needs to strengthen its strategies to facilitate for individual empowerment and independent living of the trafficked victims. It needs to improve its follow-up activities for the returnees. Regular follow up activities will help Maiti Nepal to ensure the safe and successful resettlement of trafficking returnees to empower them.

Though, Maiti Nepal is cherishing its success at both national and international level about the interception of human sex trafficking, but complete rehabilitation and reintegration programs for victims are centralized only in Kathmandu. Returnees, who would like to resettle in their hometown i.e. away from Kathmandu, do not have similar access for the same empowerment programs that the remaining returnees receive in Central office, Kathmandu. Hence, to ensure the equal accessibility for all the returnees, the organization needs to decentralize its programs at local units, by which the victims would receive holistic programs and get empowered.

The information reflects that all of our respondents were living without any income generating activities and their growing frustration demands Maiti Nepal's immediate inclusion and forceful implementation of income generating programs. Therefore, it is important for Maiti Nepal to include income-generating activities in its strategies for economic empowerment of the returnees and facilitate their independent living.

It is also important to strengthen Maiti Nepal's strategies to educate the family members to increase their participation in the process of reintegration. Because, it is not only the trafficked victim who faces the social stigmatization but their family members bear it as well. Hence, the strategies that empower trafficked victim along with family members are essential.

We learnt that Maiti Nepal Banke has only one professional worker, who is looking after all the empowering programs for returnees: counseling, legal aid and trainings. Apart from this, this person is responsible to meet and coordinate with the local, national and international bodies. To implement all the programs properly, more professionals, who are experts in each field, are necessary to function more effectively.

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APPENDIX 1. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CeLRRd	Center for Legal Research and Resource Development
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
HIV & AIDS	Human Immune-deficiency Virus & Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IIDS	Institute of Integrated Development Studies
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
I/NGOs	International/Non-Government Organizations
MOWCSW	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women