

# JOURNAL OF POLITICAL STABILITY ARCHIVE



Online ISSN: 3006-5879 Print ISSN: 3006-5860

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63468/jpsa.4.2.51>

Vol. 4 No. 2 (2026)

<https://journalpsa.com.pk/index.php/JPSA/about>



Recognized by: Higher Education Commission (HEC), Government of Pakistan

---

## The broader social, economic, and political consequences of human trafficking, considering the impact on individuals and societal systems

**Dr. Muhammad Altaf Tahir \***

Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (Military), Adjunct professor In Department of Criminology  
University of Karachi  
[draltaftahir@gmail.com](mailto:draltaftahir@gmail.com)

\* Corresponding Author

---

### ABSTRACT

Trafficking in persons (TIP) is considered one of the most serious forms of transnational organized crime, and a serious violation of human rights that affects millions of persons worldwide. It's defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people by force, coercion, deception or abuse of vulnerability for exploitation. The study examines the social, economic and political aspects of human trafficking, particularly the impact of trafficking on the individual and on society as a whole. The study uses secondary qualitative research methods (literature review, analysis of international organisations' reports, government documents and existing human rights documents on trafficking as a criminal enterprise and a structural social issue).

The findings reveal the detrimental effects on the social life of trafficking in persons including physical abuse, psychological trauma, social marginalisation, family separation and re-trafficking. Trafficking has a negative economic effect on the labor markets, thus creating an environment for exploitation, enlargement of informal sectors and increasing poverty and inequality. From the political perspective, it will be detrimental to the state authority, rule of law, legitimacy of institutions and anti-corruption.

One of the main conclusions of the study are the close connections between trafficking and migration pressures, gender inequalities, globalization and government failures. The study finds that human trafficking is not just a problem of law enforcement but also a multidimensional problem that involves human security, sustainable development and social justice. More effective responses will be needed if victim protection is strengthened, governance is improved, there is greater

---

---

international cooperation and long-term structural changes to tackle poverty, inequality and exploitation.

**Keywords:** Human trafficking; forced labor; sexual exploitation; social consequences; economic consequences; political consequences; organized crime; migration; human rights; governance; structural inequality; victimization; labor exploitation; transnational crime; human security

---

## INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is now one of the most pressing issues of international crime and human rights. It is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons using force, fraud, coercion, abuse of power or deception for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). The forms of exploitation include forced labor, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced marriage, organ trafficking, and child labor. Human trafficking is different from smuggling of migrants, which can sometimes be stopped once the migrant has been transported. This is important as trafficking is a crime that is also a human rights violation and not a one-off event. Human trafficking is a worldwide issue affecting millions of people and with staggering profits for traffickers. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), in 2021, nearly 27.6 million individuals were forced into labor (including forced marriage) – primarily women and children (ILO, Walk Free, & International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2022). Trafficking in persons is one of the most profitable forms of organized crime in the world, generating billions of dollars for the private economy annually, and is one of the most profitable organized crimes in the world, with drug and arms trading coming in second (ILO, Walk Free, and IOM, 2022).

These figures show that human trafficking is not a niche problem, but a systemic global challenge that is inextricably linked to inequality, migration, labor exploitation and poor governance. It may be possible that those who have been victims can face discrimination and stigma during reintegration into the community, particularly regarding sexual exploitation. Human trafficking also affects communities and families, as it can negatively affect trust within the community, family dynamics, and vulnerable groups are more vulnerable (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017).

Trafficking is ingrained in many societies and is not treated, so it becomes a generational issue. Human trafficking also results in economic harm by disrupting the legitimate economy and fostering informality and illegal economies, and also by contributing to the exploitation of the legal economy. Forced labor distorts competition in that traffickers and exploitative employers are able to benefit from free (or underpaid) labour. Another loss of revenue to the governments is through tax evasion and informal economy caused by trafficking. Trafficking in the developing world perpetuates poverty by keeping vulnerable persons in a cycle of poverty and exploitation (Shelley 2010).

Trafficking is a drag on economic development and contributes to inequality.

Human trafficking is politically corrosive to the state, to the rule of law, and reveals governance issues. Trafficking networks can be transnational and supported by corruption, poor border control and poor law enforcement. In some cases, there is complicity on the part of government officials, false paperwork, or neglect. This leads to the loss of public confidence and state and international commitment to respect and protect human rights. Furthermore, trafficking has become a major issue in international relations, migration control and security, especially in conflict and displaced and impoverished regions (UNODC 2022).

While there has been increased international recognition of the problem through instruments like the Palermo Protocol (2000), human trafficking is still difficult to address due to its invisibility and links to structural inequalities. A wide range of policies focus on law enforcement and prosecution and neglect prevention, protection and socio-economic drivers of trafficking offences. This results in "reactive" and not "proactive" solutions. This research explores the social, economic and political impacts of human trafficking, particularly in relation to the effects of trafficking on individuals and societies. It calls for the abolition of trafficking as a crime but as also a security and human development and institutional legitimacy issue. The study is meant to help enhance the understanding of trafficking, as a symptom and driver of structural inequality in contemporary societies, with a critical analysis of these intertwined effects.

### **Background and Context**

Trafficking has become a multi-faceted global problem in the 21st century which is linked to migration, poverty, crime, gender disparity and governance. While there have been forms of trafficking throughout the ages, the rise of globalization, technology, armed conflict and economic inequality have led to growth and complication of trafficking. Trafficking today is a transnational crime activity that affects the developing and developed world, and is not a social problem of the local community (UNODC, 2022).

The contemporary definition of human trafficking is largely drawn from the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), which was adopted by the United Nations in 2000.

Trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through coercion, deception, abuse of vulnerability or force for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations, 2000). This definition included trafficking as both a crime and a human rights violation, with a focus on victim protection, prosecution and prevention. The Protocol has resulted in numerous countries having anti-trafficking legislation but with inconsistent implementation. Sexual exploitation and forced labour are both types of human trafficking. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) millions of people worldwide are enslaved, primarily in domestic work, agriculture, construction, manufacturing and the sex industry (ILO et al., 2022). Sexual exploitation and forced marriage have a disproportionate effect on women and girls, forced work is an area where men and boys are vulnerable to trafficking. Because of poverty, displacement, family disruption

and lack of education, children are at high risk. This is a reminder that trafficking does not target any particular group of people based on their gender or age, but rather, affects different groups differently. Migration plays a key role in human trafficking.

Those affected are primarily migrants who want to take advantage of the opportunities for better opportunities or to flee war, political turmoil and environmental disasters. Unregistered migration routes add risk because migrants might depend on recruiters or labor agents and smugglers. Victims can be deprived of their mobility, passports, and income when they are compelled to work in an exploitative manner. Trafficking risks are higher in places of war and displacement, such as in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, with weaker institutions and legal frameworks (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017).

With poverty and gender discrimination, child labour and porous boundaries, human trafficking remains a significant challenge in South Asia. Trafficking for domestic service, forced marriage, bonded labour, and sexual exploitation is a problem in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

In Pakistan, trafficking is linked to forced labor in brick kilns, the agricultural sector, domestic work and illegal migration. Women, children, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and irregular migrants are frequently being targeted due to a lack of economic opportunities and effective legal protection (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Political issues are also among the causes of trafficking. Trafficking is undermined by the corruption of law enforcement officials and the absence of a judicial system and victim protection measures. Traffickers, in some cases, work with the cooperation (or lack of) of local authorities, making it hard to prosecute.

Trafficking is now becoming an issue of migration and border and national security in an international context. However, at times it can be a cause which outweighs the humanitarian and socio-economic dimensions of trafficking. There are international instruments and national action plans, but trafficking is not eradicated because of the lack of addressing its root causes (poverty, inequality, unemployment, conflict and discrimination).

The question is raised here that trafficking should not be treated as an act of an individual, but also as a symptom of the problems in society and the state. This is crucial for assessing the long-term impacts and formulating policy solutions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A wealth of criminology, sociology, international relations, human rights and development studies literature has developed on human trafficking. Trafficking is often presented as a criminal justice issue, though in recent years there has been a growing focus on the social, economic and political aspects of trafficking. Research in literature reveals that trafficking is a symptom of inequality, and poor governance and exclusion. This review aims to critically summarize theoretical knowledge, world-wide empirical evidence, socio-economic impacts, political dynamics and regional factors of human trafficking, and summarize the major debates and gaps in knowledge relevant to this study.

## **Theoretical Insights into Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is not a one-dimensional phenomenon, and thus needs several theoretical approaches to understand it. The most relevant of these is the concept of structural violence from Johan Galtung (1969) that states that social structures and institutions can be harmful when they prevent people from fulfilling their basic needs. People are vulnerable to traffickers due to a variety of structural factors, including poverty, gender inequality, lack of education and discrimination. In this regard, trafficking is not just an individual wrongdoing but a symptom of structural injustice. The second important concept is that of strain theory (Robert K. Merton, 1938).

Merton theorized that people could commit a crime when the legitimate means to pursue economic and social success are thwarted. Trafficking victims may choose to leave home or take dangerous jobs due to lack of opportunities. Similarly, traffickers can find their way into regions where the illegal economy is tolerated when there is no formal one. Furthermore, feminist theory also plays a significant role in trafficking studies, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and gender-based violence. According to feminist researchers, trafficking is not possible without patriarchy and commodification of women's body and the gender inequality (True, 2012).

Social norms put women and girls in economically and socially weaker positions, which makes forced marriage and domestic servitude more prevalent with them than men and boys for sexual exploitation. Similarly, the theories of globalization can be used to understand the transnational aspect of trafficking. Exploitability in supply chains and migration networks has been created by increased labour mobility, global economic inequality, and global criminal networks (Shelley, 2010). Trafficking speaks to the need for cheap labor and commercial sex globally, and weak labor protections hide trafficking. These framings reveal trafficking as a criminal justice problem, as well as a deeply rooted phenomenon of labor exploitation and institutional complicity throughout the world.

## **Global Scope and Empirical Evidence**

Trafficking is an international problem with almost all countries being a country of origin, transit or destination. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022), trafficking trends vary by region, with the most common being forced labor and sexual exploitation, worldwide. The extent of forced labour (FL) was highlighted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in conjunction with Walk Free and International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2021, which estimated 27.6 million people to be in forced labour and forced marriage (ILO et al., 2022).

Gender disparities are evident in trafficking, with women and girls making up a significant percentage of victims, particularly in sexual exploitation. But men and boys are becoming increasingly recognised as victims of forced labor in the construction, agriculture, fishing and manufacturing industries. Children are also being trafficked, especially in impoverished areas where they are used for labour,

begging, domestic servitude, and war. Historical and empirical research reveals trafficking occurs in regions where governments are weak and people vulnerable. Conflict and refugee source areas are highly vulnerable, as family networks, education, and social protections are often disrupted (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017). For instance, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya and sub-Saharan Africa have all experienced conflicts that have exacerbated trafficking risks by displacing people into irregular migration streams.

Research also shows that trafficking is highly profitable. The ILO (2014) estimated that \$150 billion is generated in illicit profits from forced labour each year. This makes trafficking a lucrative business for organised crime, particularly when the number of trafficking cases investigated and prosecuted is low. This is the profit-loss ratio that sustains trafficking operation worldwide.

### **Social Consequences of Human Trafficking**

There is a strong emphasis in the literature on the social consequences of trafficking for the individuals, families and communities. Physical consequences include being exposed to physical abuse, sexual assault, malnutrition, unsafe work conditions, and lack of freedom. Trafficking also has long-term psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidality (Zimmerman et al., 2008).

Along with that, there is a great deal of social stigma attached to it, particularly victims of sexual exploitation. The victimisation of the victim and the impediments to reintegration are common in many cultures. The families occasionally reject survivors due to shame and the community ostracizes the survivors as immoral.

This results in heightened vulnerability and risk of re-trafficking. Families are also a victim of trafficking. Children victim to trafficking for work and/or sex are removed from school, leading to long-term consequences on the children's potential and perpetuating generational poverty. Trafficked children cause emotional and financial anguish to parents. If it is forced migration, communities are vulnerable to traffickers who can destabilize the community.

Additionally, trafficking undermines trust in the institutions. The lack of police to secure justice for the victim, or the appearance of complicity hacks trust in the police. If there are no police to ensure justice for the victim, or if the police are perceived as complicit, then there is a loss of trust in police.

This undermines social cohesion and decreases reporting. As a result, trafficking is not just an individual crime, but also a social travesty that undermines social security and human dignity (Shelley, 2010).

### **Economic Consequences of Human Trafficking**

The impact on the economy is terrible, both individual and societal. Individual victims are unable to work, own property and manage their money. Exploitative employment is a force that forces victim to remain in the system of exploitation, preventing them from being able to save and empower themselves.

A common method of trafficking is debt bondage, which keeps people dependent and controlled. Trafficking on the national level is a perversion of the

nation's labor market/economy. The exploitation of labour, with a negative impact on competition and formal labour markets, is gained by unscrupulous employers. This contributes to informal economies and to the state budget (ILO, 2014).

Trafficking must be seen as an economic system founded on inequality, Shelley (2010) states. Exploitation is profitable and acceptable due to lack of good governance, high levels of unemployment and lack of social and labour regulation. Trafficking in developing countries is not a means of alleviating poverty, but is a way of perpetuating it by trapping vulnerable people, who are exploited in low-skilled jobs. There is also an impact on public expenditure as a consequence of human trafficking. The costs of policing, victim services, health and social services and assistance must be financed. But trafficking is a hidden phenomenon and prevention of trafficking is under-funded compared to trafficking response. This leads to a "reactive" state where more is spent on reacting to issues than on preventing them. The worldwide value chain exacerbates the issue.

Farming, textiles, fisheries and mining are all known to contain slavery. Trafficking can also serve consumers/corporations in importing countries, via exploitative labour practices, questioning roles of globalisation.

### **Political Consequences and Governance Failures**

The trafficking also has political significance as it is a violation of the sovereignty of the State, the law and the legitimacy of the State. Trafficking frequently involves transnational transport, which relies on low security at the border, corruption and lack of cooperation between countries. These challenges involve challenging sovereignty and making law enforcement more difficult. Corruption is a strong enabler. Authorities such as police, border authorities, and local authorities may also accept bribes, forge documents and turn a blind eye to facilitate trafficking (UNODC, 2022).

The rule of law and trust in institutions are all challenged by these. Victims will be less likely to report abuse or seek help if they think that the authorities are involved in the abuse. Migration politics is also a concern of trafficking. Trafficking is often associated with border security and illegal migration. Security measures must be put in place, but over-securitisation can lead to policies focusing on the criminalisation of migrants instead of protection of victims. This is particularly the case if the victims are wrongly regarded as illegal migrants. Trafficking affects foreign relations and assistance at the international level.

If a country's efforts to prevent trafficking are judged to be inadequate, it may be subject to criticism, sanctions or even withholding of assistance. For example, the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report is a measure of government action on trafficking that impacts reputation and foreign policy (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Therefore, trafficking is not just a domestic criminal justice problem, but also presents a governance, legitimacy and international relations challenge.

## **Human Trafficking in South Asia**

High poverty rate, gender inequality, labor exploitation, and porous borders are all contributing to trafficking issues in South Asia. The country-wise prevalence of domestic trafficking and cross-border trafficking for forced and bonded labour, as well as for child exploitation and sexual exploitation, exists in all four countries namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Trafficking is linked to bonded labour in brick kiln, agricultural and domestic employment and irregular migration in Pakistan. Young girls and women are particularly vulnerable to forced marriage, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, while men are trafficked for purposes of labour exploitation in other countries, including the Gulf region (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Child labour remains a major issue, and traffickers are still enticing impoverished families with promises of education or employment. In addition, the sex trafficking of women and children from Nepal to India has been documented. While there have been legal reforms, implementation is weak, largely because of corruption, the lack of victim services and limited capacity. This is a reminder that social and economic changes must go hand-in-hand with anti-trafficking laws.

### **Research Gaps and Contribution of the Study**

Although there is a vast literature on trafficking, there are certain gaps. The literature is dominated by the criminal justice sphere and victim recognition with limited understanding of the long-term social, economic and political consequences for the social systems, labour markets and governance. The research tends to focus on trafficking without taking into account its relationship with other forms of structural injustice. Little attention is also given to the concurrent social, economic and political impacts.

Generally, these studies focus on one consequence, excluding others. Economic exploitation leads to social exclusion and this in turn impacts political legitimacy. This research is built upon the previous research, which looked at trafficking as a multi-faceted phenomenon affecting individuals and society. It provides a more thorough understanding of trafficking as a danger to human security and sustainable development, rather than a criminal justice issue, by critically synthesizing the social, economic and political impacts of trafficking.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is secondary qualitative research that aims to explore the social, economic and political effects of human trafficking; and the effect of human trafficking on individuals and social systems. The study is qualitative because it seeks to examine complex social, institutional and policy issues and not to quantify variables. This research is of secondary nature which allows the research to benefit from the knowledge obtained from authentic and reliable sources without primary data collection.

The data for this study is collected from different sources which are academic journal articles, books, government reports, reports of international organisations and

human rights reports. The primary sources of information are the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report.

These reports include up-to-date information on trafficking trends, the needs of trafficking victims, policy and governance issues. Thematic analysis is used in the study to identify themes related to the social, economic and political impacts. Triangulation – cross comparison between sources increases research validity. This aids to develop critical evaluation of the crime of human trafficking and its framework.

## **FINDINGS**

In the thematic analysis of secondary sources, the consequences of human trafficking are classified into three categories, namely: social consequences, economic consequences and political consequences, where the three categories are overlapping. The outcomes of these are concurrent on the individual level (victim, survivor); and systemic level (families and communities, labour markets, state apparatuses and international relations).

### **Social Consequences**

At the personal level, victims generally suffer from extreme physical violence, The personal level, sufferers are subjected to an overwhelming level of physical violence, sexual abuse, malnutrition, unsafe working conditions and restricted mobility. Mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal ideation, are common in trafficking cases (Zimmerman et al., 2008). They are also extremely stigmatised; the entire family and community blame and reject the person who is being sexually exploited. This makes it hard to reintegrate and poses a risk of re-victimisation. Trafficking at a familial level changes the family life.

Children who are removed from school as part of forced labour and/or sexual exploitation lose out on opportunities for their future and continue to be trapped in a cycle of poverty. Parents who lose their child to trafficking are left with long-term emotional and financial impacts. Sometimes, return of trafficked children shames families, causing irreparable family tensions. Trafficking on a community level destroys trust and solidarity. There is a low level of community willingness to report trafficking or cooperate with police when they are perceived as being corrupt or ineffective. This allows for trafficking and allows traffickers to have unrestricted access. Social factors are especially pronounced in conflict areas and in countries of origin for refugees: Displacement has a negative effect on education, the family, and community protections (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017).

### **Economic Consequences**

On the personal level, victims are disempowered, without wages, their financial independence and property. It is a common form of trafficking, debt bondage, that ensures ongoing systems of dependency as victims are never able to pay

off their (fictional) debt. This is a continuation of a victim's exploitation, and will not allow an economic improvement to take place. The market level distortions of trafficking occur at the market level. Labour traffickers have the unfair advantage of having access to free or cheap workers while other employers have to pay wages, abide by labour laws etc. This contributes to the informal/illegal economy and reduces government revenues. There are an estimated \$150 billion in forced labour profits each year around the world (ILO, 2014).

Trafficking re-enthrones poverty for countries. Vulnerable groups in developing world with low productivity and exploitative work conditions are not able to save and invest in skills. The scarcity of resources also imposes on governments the need to allocate on law enforcement, victim rehabilitation, health, and social protection, which are all resources that could be used for development. Preventative measures are not as well funded as reactive measures (which are very costly), trafficking is a hidden crime. Global supply chains make economic impacts complicated. Agriculture, textiles, fishing, mining and manufacturing. The boundaries of fair exploitation of the labour force are then blurred, as consumers and companies can profit on the exploitation of labour in destination countries without explaining why.

### **Political Consequences**

On an institutional level, trafficking weakens the State and the rule of law. Lack of coordination among agencies, inefficiency at the borders, and corruption all allow traffickers to exploit these situations to their own profit. Corruption is a powerful enabler: law enforcement, local and border authorities facilitate trafficking by bribing or falsifying documents or by failing to act (UNODC, 2022). This damages the trust in the government and hinders anti-trafficking efforts. The institutional level, vulnerable judicial frameworks and inadequate victim support lead to weak prosecution rates.

Trafficking is a profitable business for organised crime since there is no deterrent effect on trafficking. In extreme cases, government officials are complicit, trafficking becomes legalised in some sectors or regions of the country. International relations and foreign aid are also impacted by trafficking. Governments' efforts to combat trafficking are considered in the U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, which impacts their global standing and diplomacy. Sanctions or reductions in foreign assistance are imposed on countries for "inaction. Over-secure-ification can result in victimisation, and trafficking is being talked about in the migration and border security arena.

Fundamentally, trafficking continues to occur because the underlying causes of trafficking - poverty, inequality, lack of employment, war and discrimination - remain unsolved. The Palermo Protocol (2000) and national anti-trafficking laws have raised awareness, though this is patchy. In many anti-trafficking policies, criminal prosecution is overemphasised at the expense of prevention and protection, as well as the socio-economic causes.

## DISCUSSION

The results confirm that human trafficking is not a crime control issue. Rather, trafficking is a multifaceted phenomenon that both results from and contributes to social inequality, poor governance and marginalisation. This section brings together the three consequence categories, and describes their relationships, theoretical and policy significance.

### **Interconnections Between Social, Economic, and Political Consequences**

It may seem that the most important discovery of this study is that social, economic and political impacts are interrelated. Economic exploitation (unpaid work, debt bondage) leads to social exclusion (stigma, rejection by family) which leads to political mistrust (women think that authorities are corrupt, that they do not care for them). Poor political trust results in non-reporting and non-compliance, allowing trafficking networks to flourish and therefore, economic exploitation to also take place. This vicious circle is the reason for the persisting prevalence of trafficking despite regulations. In Pakistan, for example, a bonded labourer in a brick kiln (economic exploitation) can come home and be socially ostracized (social consequence).

If local police know and accept bribes from the kiln owners (political consequence), they will not pursue justice. If not otherwise, the victim is liable to re-trafficking and the corrupt economic practice will continue. We need to make a step on every level at the same time in order to break the cycle.

### **Theoretical Implications**

We strongly support structural violence theory (Galtung 1969). Poverty, gender inequality, low education, discrimination are not just "context factors" but are negative mechanisms that work to the detriment of the individual, by limiting them in their access to basic needs and their rights to the legal system. Human trafficking is thus a symptom of injustice, rather than a crime. Our results also corroborate the strain theory (Merton, 1938). Those who are victims usually move and work in unsafe occupations due to lack of available avenues. Smugglers and traffickers are also immersed in a context where the underground economy is commonplace.

This means that measures against trafficking will have little impact if not accompanied by measures aimed at promoting economic opportunities and social protection. There is support for feminist theory in the gendered effects in terms of sexual exploitation, forced marriage and domestic servitude. To ensure gender equality it is essential that gender-based vulnerabilities are resolved by considering gender in policy, particularly when those vulnerabilities are caused by a patriarchal framework that commodifies women's sexuality and legalizes economic subordination.

The theory of globalization (Shelley, 2010) helps describe the global networks of trafficking and abuses in the supply chain. Demand for cheap labor and sex services fuels trafficking and a lack of international labour protections conceals exploitation. The homogeneous perception of trafficking as a problem of "bad guys" in poor countries is complicated by these insights.

## **Policy Implications and Research Gaps**

Existing responses to trafficking continue to focus heavily on prosecution. Trafficking will continue unless there is a deliberate and coordinated response at the same time through prosecution, poverty reduction, education, labour rights, social protection and corruption. In order to stop trafficking, the root causes need to be addressed, not the symptoms. It is advisable to enhance the victim protection, particularly social reintegration. Anti-stigma programmes, psychological care programmes and economic empowerment programmes are important and poorly funded.

To prevent re-trafficking, legal livelihoods, housing and social acceptance are required. As far as research goes, this study corroborates the findings of many studies which focus on the consequences of trafficking. Research should develop a holistic model to represent the social, economic and political consequences over time. Survivors' long-term reintegration would be better understood with longitudinal studies that follow them for a few years after they leave. Cross-country studies would also provide policy with information on effective interventions.

### **Limitations**

This study is a secondary qualitative study. First-hand accounts of survivors, the police, and policy makers would be better. Yet, the thematic analysis of high-quality international sources provide valuable insights that are congruent with existing theory. Finally, trafficking in persons is not only the crime of the 21st century but also a failure of humanity, and a threat to human security, sustainable development and legitimacy. Trafficking prevention requires going beyond a criminal justice approach to one that focuses on root causes of inequality, strengthen governance, and ensure the protection of marginalised groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to gain insight into the social, economic and political effects of trafficking, especially the effect of trafficking on individuals and societies. The research has revealed that the issue of human trafficking cannot be limited to a crime by using a secondary qualitative approach made through the study of academic journals, reports of the international organisations and government documents. Rather, trafficking is a multifaceted problem that is both a symptom and cause of structural inequality, poor governance and social exclusion. The study reveals the physical and psychological abuse, social stigma and family breakdowns are all devastating and long-lasting social impacts. The stigma and ostracism experienced by trafficked persons in their communities makes reintegration to society challenging and re-victimisation a risk. Economic impacts include labor market distortions, market competition and the creation of vast illicit profits - estimated at \$150 billion per year. Tax evasion costs governments money and prevents them from using resources for proactive development purposes and instead devotes resources to reactive law enforcement and victim care. Politically, trafficking is a threat to the legitimacy of the Government, exposes corruption, undermines the rule of law and

public confidence. Low conviction rates and the lack of tackling underlying issues can allow traffickers to operate regionally with impunity. Importantly, this study has demonstrated that social, economic and political impacts cannot be divorced. Economic exploitation results in social exclusion which results in political mistrust and de-legitimation of institutions. There is weak institution and thus, continuing trafficking results in further trafficking. That's why trafficking persists despite the international focus and legislative action, including the Palermo Protocol. The results of the study have theoretical implications. The findings are consistent with the theories of structural violence theory, strain theory, feminist theory and globalization theory, which all argue that trafficking is not an aberration, but a component of a bigger system of inequality. Policies to stop trafficking and forced prostitution that focus exclusively on criminal prosecution without taking into account, among others, poverty, gender inequality, labour exploitation, corruption and stigma are unlikely to be effective. Treating the root causes of trafficking is key to its prevention and addressing psychological suffering, economic injustice and stigmatisation is vital to victim protection. There are several limitations in our research such as the fact that we used secondary data and we didn't collect it. Future research should employ a longitudinal and integrated approach to understand the dynamic social, economic and political effects. Cross-country comparisons of legal and economic systems would also contribute to determining best policy approaches.

## REFERENCES

- Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. Free Press.
- Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Cohen, L. E., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review*, 44(4), 588–608. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094589>
- Esses, V. M., Medianu, S., & Lawson, A. S. (2013). Uncertainty, threat, and the role of the media in promoting the dehumanization of immigrants and refugees. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(3), 518–536. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12027>
- Human Rights Watch. (2025). *World report 2025: Human trafficking and forced labor concerns*. Human Rights Watch.
- International Labour Organization, Walk Free, & International Organization for Migration. (2022). *Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage*. International Labour Organization.
- International Labour Organization. (2014). *Profits and poverty: The economics of forced labour*. International Labour Office.
- International Organization for Migration. (2022). *World migration report 2022*. International Organization for Migration.
- Johan Galtung. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Robert K. Merton. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological*

- Review*, 3(5), 672–682. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2084686>
- Shelley, L. (2010). *Human trafficking: A global perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- True, J. (2012). *The political economy of violence against women*. Oxford University Press.
- U.S. Department of State. (2024). *Trafficking in persons report 2024*. U.S. Department of State.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). *Global report on trafficking in persons 2022*. United Nations.
- United Nations. (2000). *Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. United Nations.
- Zimmerman, C., & Kiss, L. (2017). Human trafficking and exploitation: A global health concern. *PLoS Medicine*, 14(11), e1002437. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002437>
- Zimmerman, C., Hossain, M., & Watts, C. (2011). Human trafficking and health: A conceptual model to inform policy, intervention and research. *Social Science & Medicine*, 73(2), 327–335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.05.028>