

The Role of Chennai NGOs in Combatting Human Trafficking

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Abstract : Sex trafficking is a type of human trafficking involving prostitution of individuals for sexual exploitation. The stigma and social isolation they face in the society often makes it difficult for them to become rehabilitated from trafficking, due to which many of them continue in prostitution for years after being sex trafficked. Victims are subjected to violations of their fundamental human rights, deprived of basic medical facilities and undergo long-term abuse. This paper focuses on the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the rescue and rehabilitation of victims of sex trafficking. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 survivors of sex trafficking, five sex workers and 14 non-community staff members of a project running NGO in the city of Chennai in South India. Chennai has a number of NGOs that are involved in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programs. In many cases, rehabilitation of sex trafficking victims is also a mandate of these NGOs. This particular NGO was also involved in development activities towards the eradication of HIV/AIDS. For instance, they were engaged in inculcating safe sex practices among high-risk groups such as sex workers or in fighting for sex worker rights. The study found that the NGO's role in combatting sex trafficking is overrun by the way it approaches these issue related to HIV/AIDS. Further, their activities are dependent solely on funding. Given that gradually, international funding for HIV/AIDS has slowly been withdrawn, there have been problems such as reduction in the salary of the project staff, the outreach workers and peer educators, many of whom were survivors of sex trafficking who have been able to survive on their wages instead of continuing in prostitution. Therefore, till date, the project funding has helped in making them aware of the health and social consequences of continuing in prostitution, and in supporting them socioeconomically, but the lack of funding may also lead the NGO workers into a state of unemployment, poverty and eventually into being re-trafficked. The study concludes by pointing to the need for disengaging anti-trafficking efforts from the HIV/AIDS related programs.

Keywords : non-governmental organization role, non-governmental organization staff, sex trafficking survivors, sex workers

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