

Sex Trafficking in India: why we recommend adapting the Swedish Model

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1. What is human trafficking and why is it such a big problem?

Human trafficking occurs when people are deceived, coerced or abducted and taken to new locations where they are trapped by force or the fear of violence. Most often a victim of trafficking is forced to work while someone else profits. They are slaves in a situation with no freedom to leave.

As you have seen in the TAKEN iBook, girls in India are tricked and trafficked to Mumbai to become sex workers in the Red Light District. They have no chance of escape and constantly fear violent abuse. Typically, a trafficking victim's tasks will include domestic servitude, factory work, farming, mining, drug harvesting, etc. Human trafficking is a silent, underground crime and is one of the fastest growing illegal activities in the world. As an illegal industry, Human Trafficking generates vast incomes that only the drug trade can match. Present in every country in the world it allows criminals to profit from the trade and forced labour of other enslaved people.

At any given time in India it is estimated that 20 to 65 million people are victims of forced labour. This demand is driving human trafficking and 90% of current victims are recruited from inside India, often from the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

As you have also discovered in TAKEN, it is common for women and girls to suffer sexual violence when they are trafficked, often revolving around the sex trade¹. These women and girls are held against their will and used for sexual purposes. The majority of victims are just girls. The average of age a trafficked girl in India is just 11 years old.

Human trafficking is not only illegal and wide-spread, it is a gross violation of human rights. No human should be kept against their will or suffer at the hands of violent captors, especially sexual violence.

We feel that the Indian Government could be doing more to prevent and protect victims of trafficking.

2. What can the Indian Government do to stop human trafficking and most importantly, what can they do to help the women and girls in Mumbai's Red Light district?

In October 2012, the fatal gang rape of a 23-year-old student put a global spotlight on the high levels of sexual violence and abuse of women and girls in India. The world quickly learnt that women and girls in India lack safety and security and alarmingly that social attitudes contribute significantly to these high rates of sexual and physical violence.

Today, you read TAKEN, a story that covers 10 years of sexual violence against girls and women in Mumbai's red light district. Sex trafficking is very complex, hidden and protected by extreme corruption. It has been allowed to go on for many, many years and there is no sign of it stopping.

Reports by various NGO's reveal that the sex trafficking of girls and women is widespread in India with Mumbai known as the capital of the country's sex industry.² Although the Indian government has set up special Anti Human Trafficking Units, a Child Welfare Committee in each state and special Juvenile Police Units, the prosecution of traffickers and accomplices is next to non-existent. The 2013 US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report states; "traffickers are increasingly better organized and adapting to state government crackdowns on well-known establishments or routes of human trafficking." The report goes further to say

¹ US 2013 TIP report on India, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/210739.pdf>

² http://www.ecpat.net/Ei/pdf/A4A_II/EXSUM_A4A_SA_INDIA.pdf

that corruption is preventing local police and law courts from operating effectively.

To make matters even worse, the victims of sex trafficking are treated as criminals.

India prohibits most forms of sex trafficking under the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA) however; the ITPA also criminalizes other offenses, including prostitution, and it is often used to prosecute sex trafficking victims. An expert estimated 85 percent of all prosecutions under the ITPA were against the women and girl victims for prostitution rather than the traffickers.³ Only by prosecuting traffickers and those who purchase sexual services, can the problems of sex trafficking be curbed.

We feel that the Indian Government and the people of India need to take violent and sexual crime against women, more seriously. Immediate action is required so that sex trafficking crimes are prevented and punished appropriately.

It is our recommendation that in order to change the cultural attitudes towards sexual violence against women in India, to curb the demand for sex and the crimes of human sex trafficking, action must be taken to stop treating victims as criminals and that the purchase of sex should be made illegal. Those who sell sexual acts should also be decriminalized.

3. The Swedish Model - Criminalize those who buy sex, not those forced to sell sex

On 1 January 1999, Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce laws that made the purchase of sex illegal and to decriminalize those selling sexual services.

The Swedish Parliament stated their reason for this move saying that prostitution was a form of inequality against women causing harm to individuals and society, often resulting in crime and violence and women rarely entered this field out of choice. Believing this law to be of social interest The Swedish Parliament decided to target demand and the individuals paying for sex, in an attempt to reduce street prostitution and human trafficking.

This law was history in the making and very controversial. It was the first time that a government had taken this radical approach; many were skeptical however women's organizations globally applauded the decision.

4. Why should the Indian government examine, consider and implement the Swedish model?

The women and girls in Mumbai's red light district are terrified of the police and terrified of being sent to prison. These girls have been deceived and violated by hardened criminals. Why should these women and girls be treated like criminals, when in fact, they are victims? Police officers should be given the power to help these victims; they should all be able to offer a sympathetic response, including support services to end this industry.

Focusing on the demand for sexual services has been proven to reduce prostitution and human trafficking. Several countries around the world have adapted these laws since Sweden took the plunge, including Norway, Iceland, Lithuania, South Korea and Cambodia.

These laws have also been proven to have a positive impact on society's attitudes towards buying and selling services from women. Consumers of sexual services need to take responsibility for their own actions.

By criminalizing the purchase of sexual services the Indian Government can send a very strong message to its people that women should not be treated as objects or bought and sold for sex.

³ US 2013 TIP report on India <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/210739.pdf>

5. What difference could the Swedish model make?

The Swedish laws, criminalizing the purchase of sex rather than the selling of sexual services has been proven to be a deterrent. Since the laws were introduced in Sweden in 1999, fourteen years ago, a significant reduction in trafficking and prostitution has been reported as well as an end to the recruitment of new women for the industry⁴. Sweden is no longer an attractive destination for traffickers, and the number of men purchasing sexual services has fallen significantly.⁵

A study of the first 10 years of the ban revealed that street prostitution levels had decreased by 50%. Surveys also demonstrated an increase in public support for the ban and a declining number of men who admit to having purchased sex.⁶ Swedish police also report "Buying sex is regarded as one of the most shameful crimes you can be arrested for"⁷

While it is still too early to evaluate the results of the other countries who have adapted the Swedish Model, the UN Trafficking Protocol, the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the head of UN Women have all called for governments to combat the demand for sex services in order to prevent sex trafficking and promote gender equality.⁸

⁴ [Swedish Prostitution Ban An Apparent Enormous Success.](http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2007/nov/07111506.html)
<http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2007/nov/07111506.html>

⁵ <http://www.demandchange.org.uk/index.php/facts/facts>

⁶ <http://nppr.se/2010/07/02/evaluating-the-swedish-ban-on-the-purchase-of-sexual-services-the-anna-skarhed-report/>

⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/why-the-games-up-for-swedens-sex-trade-8548854.html>

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