Causes and Consequences of Human Trafficking in Ethiopia: The case of Women in the Middle East

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Abstract

Labor migration is a movement of people from one geographic area to the other for the purpose of securing better livelihood .Even though people have always been migrating the contemporary situation shows that the number of people living outside their country of origin has dramatically increased than the previous times. Ethiopia is not exceptional to this phenomenon where migration is initiated by both pull-push factors. But currently it is characterized by mass migration of women to the Middle East, among which majority are trafficked. Trafficking in Ethiopia is causing a number of serious problems, turning the hope of many young girls to tragedy. Several efforts in place could not unravel the consequence. This study attempts to assess the causes and consequences of human trafficking taking women in the Middle East as a case study. Applying feminist qualitative research this study found out that in addition to poverty and unemployment several interrelated factors causes trafficking.

Keywords: Feminism, Migration, Social constructivists, Trafficking, Women's right

1. Introduction

Human migration has been and still is intimately connected with the transformations of the world economy. Mass migrations were a common phenomenon in pre-modern world politics in which they shaped the fates of empires and entire civilizations.

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Only in a rather late historical phase, the rise of territorial and national states started to impose constraints on migration flows (Kieslowski, 2002). But it may be that the process of economic globalization and the gradual decline of the territorial state are now accompanied with the growth of migration. The United Nation estimates that the number of persons living outside their country of origin has reached 175 million, more than twice the number a generation ago (UN ,2003).

International labor migration whether it is voluntary or forced legal or illegal has become a major factor of social transformation in all regions of the world (Sowell, 1996). Trafficking is one aspect of Illegal labor migration. Trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of 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 (UN, 2000).

A number of studies show that 600,000-800,000 human beings are trafficked internationally each year with 80% of this population as women and children (J. Davey, 2005). Trafficking in Ethiopia, mostly takes the form of transporting migrants by fraud, deception and different forms of coercion (UNCJIN, 2010).

As the problem is getting more and more graver, deep academic investigations are scanty and the presented one was not comprehensive. Hence, this study seeks to fill the existing gaps. As trafficking is masked by the larger dynamics of human migration, the causes of trafficking in part are related to factors for migration like poverty, unemployment, and hope of securing better life in the prospective destination countries. In addition to that lack of awareness on the legal migration process and preference for swifter migration ways were identified as causes of human trafficking. Consequences of trafficking include physical, psychological, social and economical turmoil.

2. Methodology

This study applies feminist qualitative method. The philosophical assumption behind this design is social constructivist.

As social constructivists, many qualitative researchers posit that all types of knowledge are constructed within the cognitive framework and theoretical concepts of an individual: therefore all understandings of the external world are not reflections of it, but are solely subjective interpretations (Patton, 2000). From this perspective, all knowledge is predicated on the values, ideas and judgments of the individual, and is locally and contextually defined (Dane mark et al., 2002). The idea of situated knowledge links feminist research and social constructivists. Hence using social constructivist as a philosophical background for the research is found to be relevant.

2.1. Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data sources were used to conduct this research. Primary data sources were collected using the qualitative data collection instruments of in-depth interview, key informant interview, focus group discussion. These methods were very helpful to triangulate the finding with different data sources. Primary data has been collected from women intended migrants and returnees who were victims of human trafficking that are getting support at AGAR. Agar is a non-governmental and a non-profit making humanitarian organization that provides reintegration to trafficking victims returned from Middle East. In-depth qualitative interview was conducted with these women after getting appropriate endorsement from the director of the organization. Accordingly sixteen returnees were interviewed at Agar. Four prospective migrants were contacted at a place where they temporarily lived after identifying that the case is trafficking. Identifying the case as trafficking was done based on the definition of the UN Protocol to suppress and combat trafficking in human beings in particular women and children. Referring the Protocol to identify a particular circumstance as either trafficking or not is recommended by United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC, 2012). One girl was met around Lagahar Bus Station incidentally while she was finding someone who can read her the paper she had at hand. After staying with her for a while, she told that it is the broker who brought her along with her class mate from one village in North of Wollo Zone. Then we went to their temporary resident area, commonly known as Yeshi Debele, at the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Four girls lived in the room that the broker rented to keep women that come from rural areas.

In order to secure reliable data the researcher conducted focus group discussion with female returnees at their training session.

The women were attending short term training on food preparation and catering at Bama food and catering training center found around Global Hotel. They were selected based on their experiences of Middle East life and communication skill. I.e. they were working in the Middle East for more than 5 years; they had experiences of going to more than two countries in the Middle East and showed good communication skills. Finally, key informants from Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Federal Police and Public Prosecutors, were included.

Secondary data was collected from different sources including, magazines, bulletins and other related documents. Moreover domestic laws and policies relevant to the issue of human trafficking were critically assessed. From domestic laws relevant to human trafficking, the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995, the Criminal Code of Ethiopia 2005, the private employment agency Proclamation 104/1998, various directives issued by Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs were critically assessed. As it is recommended by Creswell, 2009) qualitative analysis method was used to give meaning to collected data.

2.2. Validity and Trustworthiness of the Study

 In order to ensure validity of this study, different data sources were triangulated. This was done by examining evidences from different sources of data such as in depth interview with women, key informant interview, document analysis, and informal conversation.

To keep the research ethical and academic, the researcher took every possible precaution to refrain from doing any unethical works. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of the data. The consent form was prepared on which both participants and researcher signed. Accordingly, data collection was based on the full consent of participants.

3. Findings and Discussions

Nowadays, news bulletins of Africa detailing human trafficking within the continent and across the Arabian Peninsula, places Ethiopians on the front row of those mentioned in regards to this tragic human wave; whether it is about migrants crossing the Indian Ocean by way of Eastern Ethiopia through the semi-autonomous Somali region of Punt land to reach Yemen or the oil rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Herald, 2013).

Similarly the ILO report of 2013 on migrant workers indicated that, one of the largest current international migration flows is Ethiopian women migrating to the Middle East as domestic workers, which also often occurs through trafficking. Different sources show that the number of Ethiopian women trafficked to the Middle East is high, but, accurate data indicating the incidence is lacking. Hence, as is the case in many countries affected by trafficking, data showing the number of trafficked Ethiopian women to the Middle East is always based on estimates. Though, the researcher visited different organizations for the purpose of this thesis, none of them had recorded data of trafficked women. For instance, at the time when this research was done, ILO showed that the number of trafficked Ethiopian women and children in the Middle East is as large as 130,000 (ILO, 2013). The researcher contacted different stakeholders to analyze different causes and consequences of trafficking in Ethiopia.

Table No 1. Socio- Demographic Profile of Women Victims of Human Trafficking

Category		Education	Employment	Monthly house hold income	House hold size
Informant 1		8th grade	Unemployed	Father earns	12
Informant 2		12th	Unemployed	Father	8
Informant 3		12th	Unemployed	-	6
Informant 4		10th	Unemployed	-	10
Informant 5		9th	Unemployed	Petty trade	10
Informant 6		9	Unemployed	Petty trade	7
Informant 7		8	Unemployed	Agriculture	4
Informant 12		10	Unemployed	Pension	8
Informant 16		5th	Unemployed	Street trading	5
Informant 15		3rd	Unemployed	Petty trade/mother	9
Informant 17		10th	Unemployed	Father earns	4
Informant 8		10th	Employed/informal	-	7
Informant 9		3rd	Employed/ informal	Agriculture	9
Informant 10		9th	Employed / informal	Father	12
Informant 11		Diploma	Employed/ formal	Father earns	6
Informant 13		4	Employed /informal	-	6
Informant 14		Diploma	Employed/ formal	Earns / 800 ETB	7
Informant 18		4th	Employed/Informal	Father earns	11
Informant 19		9th	Employed/Informal	-	10
Informant 20		7th	Employed/Informal	-	8

Source: Field Survey (April 2013), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

3.1. Socio-demographic Analysis

The above table shows the socio-demographic background of participants. As the age of respondents is concerned, it appears that all respondents are in the age category of Youth according to the country's youth policy. As educational achievement is concerned, almost all of the respondents barely walked far. Only two respondents joined college and awarded diploma. Given the country's salary status, let alone holding diploma, the degrees and masters holders have also failed to secure a decent life, which will instigate for migration/ trafficking.

Data from Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs also shows that of the migrants of the year 2012, more than 85% are female students who either dropped or quitted schools at primary or secondary level (MOLSA, 2012).

Employment status of migrants was illustrated in the table. Employment is very crucial as it relates to livelihood question. More than half (11) of the respondents were unemployed at the time they get recruited by traffickers. And those who had a sort of employment were concentrated in informal sector.   Finally, monthly house hold income and family size of respondents was depicted in the table. As far as the former is concerned, majority of the respondents' household income was very minimal and this also initiated women's for migration. Some said that their family could not afford for their education and even for material well-being's in the household. The family size also affects the migration of women in the household. In a situation of unstable family income, large family size remains major challenge to fulfill the required needs. Women in the study also said when their family defied supporting all their kids, women who get trafficked felt responsibility of supporting back other kids. Hence, these all socio demographic characteristics of the respondent have a direct link with migration in general and trafficking in particular.

3.2. Causes of Human Trafficking in Ethiopia

Human trafficking as it was described earlier in the introduction part of this thesis is the corrupt mode of human migration. Human migration cannot be stopped, but human trafficking can be. Even if there is no single country that succeeded in stopping human trafficking, some countries could succeed in reducing the incidence of human trafficking. Hence, for human trafficking literatures identify plenty of causes in which the findings of this study also confirm.

The first cause identified in the study was poverty and lack of viable economic opportunity. Even though scholars on human trafficking argue that all criminal activities are not necessarily caused by poverty, but there is a general consensus on the fact that trafficking is closely related to developmental issues in which poverty is a major factor (UNIDOC, 2012). As it can also be seen from the above table showing the profile of participants, most of the participants were unemployed at the time they were trafficked. And those who were employed were in the informal sector that has trivial paybacks.

Women's unemployment and underemployment could partially be associated to their low level of education. It is an overt truth that women's educational attainment is directly related to their better status in the society. As it can also be observed from their profile, the educational attainment of women in this research is found to be low. Hence poverty, as a result of poor employment and unemployment was one area that exposed women to trafficking.

Lack of awareness on recruitment channel has also been identified as one point for the causes of trafficking Ethiopian women to the Middle East. As migration cannot be stopped, better knowledge of the way to process one's movement could save the trouble gained from trafficking.

Trafficking is processed by dishonest agents who claim to have established contacts with employers oversees. These agents place victims in exploitative conditions. As majority of respondents replied, at the time of their recruitment, they did not know the difference between the honest and dishonest agents. Hence after placing victims at employment, they totally withdrew themselves from the affair. In time of anxiety, victims do not get someone to relieve them from the condition.

Some of the respondents who knew the actual and counterfeit type of travel arrangements said that, they preferred the later one which led them to the worry they were in at the time of interview; it is the swifter way of migration. Migration through government's consciousness was lengthy and tiresome for them. Hence causes of trafficking are multifaceted and in most cases interlinked. Poverty plus lack of awareness on recruitment channels and preference for swifter channels put women into trafficking network in the above two cases.

Moreover, in current Ethiopia, in addition to the above causes the greatest problem raising the incidence of human trafficking is the prevalence of traffickers throughout the country. This cause was found to be significant in which all key informants from government and non government offices supported. Traffickers have extended their network from the lower kebele level to the bigger cities through which they can track potential victims. Traffickers brainwashes poor girls and women's by false promises of glorious life in the Middle East. Hence prevalence of traffickers is one factor identified in the study.

Pressures from families, friends and neighbors were also mentioned by respondents as it has influenced their decision to migrate in general and trafficking in particular.

Some of the women victims of human trafficking said that they even fall an easy prey to trafficking because of inappropriate information from peers and other nearby people. Families also expect a lot from migrating girls and women so that they encourage migration. Some had also lent money to be paid for the traffickers from their neighbors to send their daughters.

3.3. Consequences of Human Trafficking in Ethiopia

The consequences of human trafficking can be social, political and economical. But as the main focus of this study is the victim's perspectives, the economic consequence outshines the other one. Most of Ethiopian women become victims of human trafficking in their process of migration to earn a better livelihood. Earning a better livelihood was an overriding factor for women's migration in general and trafficking in particular. The end result of trafficking is exploitation of victims for different purposes. Traffickers receive huge amount of money from potential victims and their families too.

In most cases this money comes from selling of movable and immovable properties, such as cattle and land. Also they take credit from siblings and neighbors.

Women who get trafficked in most cases get back to their country empty handed, because they do not have legal permit for employment and their employers do whatever they like to exploit them. Hence, let alone getting their life improved, they get into long lasting trouble in their life.

Therefore, the economic impact of trafficking is capital as it not only affects the migrant, who get back empty handed, but also their family and the country as a whole. Migration which was thought to respond to the economic crisis of the family and the migrant becomes a heavy burden to the entire household. Another consequence which is not distinctly apart from the economic one is the social side of human trafficking.

As discussed, majority of women who migrate borrow money from other people in the pledge of returning it when they get back. But the real situation in the destination country is not as true as pledged and they come back mentally and physically abused. The abuse is multifold and includes beating, confinement, starvation, being thrown from building, rape and sleep deprivation, and in the worst form death. Hence, it is not difficult to imagine how mad these women would be.

Psychological disorder resulting from this depression is one of the ill health women returnees faced in this study. All of women interviewed got psychological treatment at Emmanuel Specialized Mental Hospital and still were suffering from not maintaining good health status.

In addition to extreme abuse, women whose hope to change the life of their family was turned to tragedy also thinks about the debt crises they are in. The social consequence of trafficking not only affects the victims but also their family, other siblings and the country as a whole. Finally, trafficking has also a political consequence, in that countries are now being evaluated by the rate of human trafficking. As trafficking is a human rights violation at all its stage, international human rights instruments always dictate that human rights should not be violated. Hence, violation of human rights spoils the country's good image and also roughs the foreign relation between sending and receiving countries. Generally the consequence of human trafficking is one of the untold stories in Ethiopia.

3.4. National Efforts to combat Human Trafficking in Ethiopia

Trafficking in human beings has become a modern migration challenge, demanding a strong, comprehensive and coherent response from governments and the international community at large.

Recent developments reveal that trafficking in human beings constitute a major form of organised crime, while the total scale of incomes of trafficking can be compared with illegal incomes of drugs and weapons(UNOCD, 20012). The international aid agencies have responded to recent increases in the practice, particularly in the trafficking of women and children across national borders for the commercial sex industry, and forced labour by dedicating substantial resources to developing effective solutions.

Governments around the world are also attempting to implement new laws and legal strategies to meet the challenges of this problem (US Department of States, 2010).

Also in Ethiopia trafficking is becoming a topical issue after hundreds of Ethiopians lost their life, came back severely abused and exploited physically and emotionally. Ethiopian women who are trafficked to the Middle East are the subjects of serious violence and human rights abuse.

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in human beings calls for three interrelated interventions to combat human trafficking. i.e. prevention, protection, prosecution. As an effective prevention strategy, there is no comprehensive national policy on human trafficking in Ethiopia. Policy instruments in some other areas directly relevant to the problem such as labor migration policies are also lacking. As far as national laws are concerned, certain provisions in the constitution, and the Criminal Code of Ethiopia prevents trafficking in person, but in both cases there is no complete and comprehensive definition of trafficking. In addition, there are different directives issued by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) preventing human trafficking. Besides their insufficient existence, the major gap identified from these laws and directives are their implementation. Poor implementation results from poor awareness of the laws itself, both from law enforcement organs and the public at all.

For this objective the researcher had an interview with six law enforcement bodies: public prosecutors, police and justice organs. Some of them said that law enforcement bodies in particular the regional one have no clear idea on whether the free movement of people is different from illegal movement. In addition to the domestic laws, Ethiopia has ratified a number of regional and global laws and conventions that prohibit trafficking in human beings.

Among which, African Charters on human rights, convention on the elimination of all forms of discriminations against women (CEDAW) and ILO Conventions primarily talk about human rights of trafficking victims. Ethiopia has been blamed for not ratifying the Palermo Protocol. The protocol to suppress and punish trafficking in human beings, in particular women and children is believed by international communities as the most important and decisive instrument to combat trafficking in women and children. But interestingly enough, Ethiopia has recently ratified this protocol as of March 2012. If this protocol is effectively implemented, dramatic change would happen on the incidence of human trafficking in Ethiopia. As the relevance of the ratified laws is concerned, the FDRE constitution under article 9 states that all International agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land and should be implemented accordingly. Media is also a powerful intervention tool for the dissemination of information and raising awareness of the community with regard to the nature of work in the overseas countries. In Ethiopia involvement of Media in terms of human trafficking could be seen as a reactive measure. It is only when problems occur that the Media airs the issue.

Thus, there is a problem on warning potential migrants in advance of the living and working conditions including how to process their migration. When people are aware of   what is legal and illegal as well as how to protect themselves from traffickers, they would make an informed decision than darkly entering in to the net work of human trafficking.   Generally, as regards to the prevention of human trafficking in Ethiopia, due to the above stated gaps in policies, legislations and information disseminating campaigns, the prevention efforts were not effective as compared to the seriousness of the issue.

As regards the prosecution of trafficking offenses, it is minimal compared to high rate of trafficking. The first reason is low rate of cases reported to police from victims or their families. For instance, none of my research participants took their cases to court.   Besides nominal number of cases reported to courts, the prosecutors said that most of the time, claimants withdrew from the issue, making the prosecution complex. Finally, the low rate of prosecution is because of poor awareness from the victims and their families, on who is to be considered as guilty. Sometimes trafficking victims feel as if they are guilty of arranging their migration with traffickers. But the trafficking Protocol dictates that trafficking victims are not responsible for arrangement of their migration through traffickers.

In addition to the gaps in the above two interventions, there is no direct assistance to trafficking victims from Government in Ethiopia than few NGOs giving shelter to victim returnees.

4. Conclusions

This study attempted to investigate causes and consequences of trafficking of Ethiopian women to the Middle East. In Ethiopia, migration in general and trafficking in particular has a gendered dimension due to feminization of poverty.

The finds of this study can confirm that trafficking is becoming one of the social, economical and political issues in Ethiopia. As the main objective of this study was to identify causes and consequences of trafficking of Ethiopian women to the Middle East, the situational knowledge and voices of victims are incorporated to give room for their stand point. In recent times the number of trafficked Ethiopian women to the Middle East has dramatically increased. To realize the economic demand of themselves and their families, many young migrants are now becoming victims of human trafficking.

Trafficking even if it has roots in economic demands of the victims, in addition, factors like poor awareness on recruitment processes, preference for quicker method of migration, prevalence of traffickers throughout the country who brainwashes young girls with false promises, and poor understanding on the risks involved in trafficking intersect and put women in trafficking networks. The overlap of factors for trafficking of women is closely linked to the idea of intersectionalist feminist theory.

These are overlapping concepts in origin countries that traffickers use to traffic women, and when these women reach their destination, several additional intersecting concepts put women to oppression. To mention few, the cultural differences, language, the legality issues, the class differences and even the color differences intersect and again prepare trafficked women for further oppression. The consequence of trafficking is multifold including the social, economical and political. When intervention efforts are concerned, still there is a long way to go to combat human trafficking in Ethiopia. Because, interventions done so far are a type of trying to put the fire out after it went off, which could not contribute to combat human trafficking.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest and views expressed are personal.

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