Review Article

Association Between Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Women's Knowledge of Human Trafficking

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Abstract

Human trafficking is a serious violation of human rights that disproportionately affects the marginalized individuals, particularly women and girls. This study utilized the data from the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted in Nepal to assess the knowledge of currently married women aged 15-49 about human trafficking using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaires were based on the MICS 6 standard questionnaires. The survey used a multistage, stratified cluster probability sampling design and included 14,805 women. In multivariate analysis, respondents in the second to the richest wealth quintiles (aOR range: 1.26-1.56, p<0.001) were more likely to be aware of human trafficking than those in the poorest quintiles. Women with higher secondary or above education (aOR= 29.52, p<0.001), secondary education (aOR= 10.13, p<0.001), and basic education (aOR=2.19, p<0.001) were more likely to be knowledgeable about human trafficking compared to those with no formal education. High, medium, and low media exposure (aOR range: 1.71-4.86, p<0.001) were associated with increased knowledge about human trafficking compared to no exposure. Bivariate analysis revealed that knowledge about human trafficking was significantly associated with education level, wealth index, and urban or rural residence (p<0.001). These findings suggest that interventions to increase knowledge about human trafficking should prioritize women with limited educational opportunities, low wealth status, and those living in rural areas to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking.

Keywords: Human trafficking, knowledge, Nepal, socio-demographic factors, women

Introduction

Human trafficking is a global issue that affects countries across all regions and continents, both as source and destination. It is a modern-day form of slavery that involves illegal trade with the aim of forced exploitation for profit (WHO, 2012). Trafficking individuals, often associated with brutal violence, has been acknowledged globally as a severe breach of human rights. Physical, psychological, and sexual health impacts of trafficking can be severe. Yet, the concept of harm is not included in definitions or strategies to address the well-being of victims (Oram et al., 2011). Human trafficking disproportionately affects those already marginalized and at risk, such as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those experiencing poverty, those with unstable family structures, or those with limited education (Parker, 2022).

Women trafficking, also known as the trafficking of women and girls, is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of women and girls through force, coercion, deception, or abuse of power for exploitation (UN, 2022). This exploitation can include sexual exploitation, forced labor, forced marriages, and domestic servitude. Women trafficking is a heinous crime and a serious issue in the trafficking of persons, affecting millions

of women and girls globally (Jones, 2017). Trafficking or illegal trade of women across international borders for financial profit is a global business that employs force, deception, and manipulation (Joshi et al., 2020). Trafficked women are often sourced from less affluent nations in regions such as Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. In certain areas, the growth in the sex tourism industry has led to an increase in the number of women being trafficked to meet the needs of men traveling from different places (Fraley et al., 2020). Female victims continue to be disproportionately affected by human trafficking, with five out of every ten victims detected globally being adult women and two being girls in 2018 (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). The growing demand for and supply of trafficking has made it one of the fastest-growing forms of transnational crime. This is facilitated by the ease of migration and the movement of people across borders, allowing illicit trade to operate under the guise of legal migration (Kyle & Liang, 2001). Women are disproportionately represented in human trafficking as victims and perpetrators or facilitators. Most trafficking victims are exploited for sexual purposes, domestic servitude, or forced marriages (Thapa, 2021).

In South Asia, trafficking of women and children is a serious concern. Each year, around 10,000 Nepali girls and women are trafficked to India for forced prostitution, making it one of the busiest routes in the world (Deane, 2010). It is believed that around 200,000 Nepali women and children have been trafficked and sold into India over the years and are being forced to work as prostitutes in various parts of India (Datta, 2005). It has been reported that in the last five years, human traffickers have been exploiting both domestic and foreign victims within Nepal as well as Nepali victims abroad (Huda, 2006). In 2019, the National Human Rights Commission estimated that 1.5 million Nepali people were at risk of being trafficked (US Emabassy in Nepal, 2022). The Anti-Human trafficking bureau reported that 190 women were trafficked in the fiscal year 2076/77, 183 in 2077/78, and 198 in 2078/79 (AHTB, 2078). Human trafficking is a significant problem, particularly for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as marginalized castes and ethnic minorities. Traffickers often target these groups because of their lack of economic prospects. Traffickers often use social media and mobile technology to connect with and deceive potential victims (US Emabassy in Nepal, 2022).

Globalization has led to increased human trafficking, which is a form of transnational crime. Globalization has also led to widening economic and demographic disparities between developing and developed countries, making transnational crime synonymous with human trafficking (Majeed & Malik, 2017). Women are disproportionately represented in human trafficking, both as victims and as perpetrators or facilitators. Females from Nepal and Bangladesh are frequently deceived by traffickers into accepting employment opportunities in India, only to find themselves ensnared in the sex trade (Kara, 2017). Traffickers also use women and girls from Central Asia, Europe, and Africa for prostitution in the Goa State (Parker, 2022). It is difficult to determine the exact number, but it is believed that there are approximately 2.5 million people worldwide who are being forced to work against their will due to human trafficking (International Labor Organization, 2005). According to the International Labor Organization, 49.6 million individuals were living in contemporary forms of slavery as of 2021, with 27.6 million being forced into labor and 22 million being forced into

marriage (ILO, 2022). Slavery, even though it was banned long ago, still exists in different forms. It is surprising to note that human trafficking and exploitation are not limited to a specific age or gender.

Although various organizations have made efforts, little progress has been made in reducing the number of individuals affected by trafficking in Nepal. The anti-trafficking programs in place are often not well thought out and are based on the personal opinions of those in charge of the organizations (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011). Additionally, there is a lack of research on the understanding and perspective of certain communities and groups when developing and executing these programs (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; Poudel & Carrier, 2000; Thapa, 2021). The majority of the information comes from non-research sources such as NGO publications rather than studies (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to grasp the perspectives and knowledge of those most vulnerable to trafficking, such as young girls and women, to effectively tackle the issue of sex trafficking in Nepal and comparable areas. This research paper aims to assess the knowledge of currently married women about human trafficking using data from a national survey. This paper is intended to be useful for policymakers, police personnel, potential victims, women activists, law enforcement committees, and NGOs working to combat human trafficking.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Setting

The research utilized the data collected from the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted in Nepal by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) with support from UNICEF. MICS is a nationwide survey that gathers information regarding various aspects of society, such as health, education, environment, social protection, domestic violence, and the socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic characteristics of individuals and households.

Study Tool

A structured questionnaire for individual women was administered in each household to all women aged 15-49 years in the survey. The questionnaires were based on the MICS 6 standard questionnaires. The questionnaires were customized and translated into Nepali, Bhojpuri, and Maithili and were pre-tested in Sindhupalchwok and Sinduli districts in March 2019. Based on the pre-test results, modifications were made to the wording and translation of the questionnaires.

Study Population and Sampling Procedure

The MICS survey focused on 14,805 married women between the ages of 15 and 49. The sampling frame for the Nepal MICS 2019 was based on the 2011 National Population and Housing Census. It used a multistage, stratified cluster probability sampling design with urban and rural arrears being the main sampling strata within each province. The sample of households was selected in two stages. First, a number of census enumeration areas were picked systematically based on their size, and then 25 households were selected through systematic random sampling from each selected enumeration area. In total, 512 enumeration areas covered 12655 households and 14,805 women (aged 15-49) (CBS, 2020).

Study Variables

The main objective of the study was to access the knowledge of married women, which was the dependent variable. The independent variables included wealth quintile, age, province, place of residence, educational status, number of children, and level of media exposure. The wealth quintile was split into five categories: poorest, second, middle, fourth, and richest. The study was conducted in all the provinces of Nepal. The age of women was divided into three categories: 15-24, 25-34, and 35 and above. Place of residence was categorized into urban and rural, and educational status was grouped into four categories: no formal education, basic education (grades 1-8), secondary education (grades 9-12), and higher secondary education or above (above grade 12). The number of children born was classified into five groups: no children, 1-2 children, 3-4 children, 5-6 children and 7 or more children. The level of media exposure was divided into three categories: no exposure, limited exposure (less than once a week), and exposure at least once a week to almost every day.

Data Analysis and Management

The statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were utilized to outline fundamental socio-demographic variables. The bivariate (Chi-square test) and multivariate analysis (binary logistic regression) were performed to determine the relationship between the independent variables and knowledge. Bivariate analysis was performed to examine the association between independent and dependent variables, and multivariate analysis was performed to determine the net effect of independent variables on dependent variables.

Ethical Considerations

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) approved the survey protocol as per the Statistical Act (1958) in September 2018. The Statistical Act enables CBS to conduct surveys according to the government's ethics protocol without involving an institutional review board (IRB). The protocol included a Protection Protocol, which outlines the potential risks and strategies to mitigate them during the life cycle of the survey.

The questionnaires were administered with a thorough introduction and verbal consent by respondents. All respondents were informed of the voluntary nature of participation in the survey, their right to refuse to answer all or particular questions, and to stop the interview at any time. They were also informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of their information.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Currently Married Women

Data used in this study were extracted from the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 (CBS, 2020). In the MICS study, 14805 married women were surveyed. The wealth distribution of the participants showed that the wealthiest quintile was represented by 23% of participants, whereas the poorest quintile was represented by 18%. By province, the highest number of respondents were from Bagmati (25%), followed by Lumbini (19%), Madhesh (17%), Koshi (16%), Gandaki (9%), Sudhurpaschim (9%) and Karnali (5%). Most women lived in urban areas (69%) compared to rural areas (31%). The age distribution of the

participants showed that the largest group of women were aged 15-24 (35%), and the second largest group was 35 years or older (34%). Regarding education, 37% of the women had completed secondary education, 27% had basic education, and 27% had no formal education. Concerning the number of children, the largest group of women had one or two children (43%), while the second largest group had no children (27%). As for media exposure, the largest group of women had low exposure (37%), followed by medium exposure (27%), and the smallest group had no exposure at all (23%). (Table 1)

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Currently Married Women

Variables	Categories	N	%
Wealth index quintile	Poorest	2613	17.7
	Second	2836	19.2
	Middle	2890	19.5
	Fourth	3126	21.1
	Richest	3339	22.6
Province	Koshi Province	2419	16.3
	Madhesh Province	2567	17.3
	Bagmati province	3684	24.9
	Gandaki province	1257	8.5
	Lumbini province	2826	19.1
	Karnali province	798	5.4
	Sudhurpaschim province	1255	8.5
Place of residence	Urban	10281	69.4
	Rural	4524	30.6
Age of women	15-24	5239	35.4
	25-34	4513	30.5
	35 and above	5053	34.1
Education	No formal education	3945	26.6
	Basic (Gr 1-8)	4021	27.2
	Secondary (Gr 9-12)	5510	37.2
	Bachelor's degree and higher	1328	9.0
Number of Children born	None	4366	29.5
	1-2	6297	42.5
	3-4	3324	22.5
	5-6	685	4.6
	7 or more children	133	0.9
Level of media exposure	No exposure	3463	23.4
	Low	5426	36.6
	Medium	4046	27.3
	High exposure	1870	12.6

Knowledge of Human Trafficking Issues

Most of the women in the survey (72%) had heard about human trafficking. When asked about their understanding of it, nearly all of them (95%) responded it was the "buying and selling of people with any motive," and almost the same amount (94%) defined it as "forcing someone into prostitution, with or without profit." A significant proportion of respondents (89%) understood human trafficking to include "removing human organs illegally," and a large number of them (83%) understood it to include "taking children from one place to another for

education or adoption without their parent's consent." A similar amount (81%) understood it to include "forcing children   into hazardous work without their consent," and nearly four out of five (78%) understood it to include "forcing children into domestic and entertainment work without their consent." Additionally, two-thirds of respondents (68%) understood human trafficking to include "forcing children into hazardous work with their consent," less than three-fifths (58%) understood it to include "forcing children into domestic and entertainment work with their consent," and 56% understood it to include "taking children from one place to another for education or adoption with their parent's consent." (Table 2)

Table 2

Knowledge of Human Trafficking Issues

Variables	Categories	N	%
Knowledge of Human trafficking	Yes	10694	72.2
	No	4111	27.8
Human trafficking is buying and selling human beings with any motive	Yes	10105	94.5
	No	410	3.8
	Don't Know	176	1.6
	No Response	3	0.0
Human trafficking as engaging others in prostitution with or without deriving any benefit	Yes	10043	93.9
	No	448	4.2
	Don't Know	202	1.9
	No Response	1	0.0
Human trafficking as removing human organs except by law	Yes	9460	88.5
	No	722	6.8
	Don't Know	511	4.8
	No Response	1	0.0
Human trafficking as engaging adolescent boys and girls in domestic and entertainment works with their consent	Yes	6174	57.7
	No	3927	36.7
	Don't Know	589	5.5
	No Response	4	0.0
Human trafficking as engaging adolescent boys and girls in domestic and entertainment works without their consent	Yes	8309	77.7
	No	1810	16.9
	Don't Know	575	5.4
	No Response	0	0.0
Human trafficking as engaging adolescent boys and girls in hazardous works with their consent	Yes	7225	67.6
	No	2791	26.1
	Don't Know	677	6.3
	No Response	1	0.0
Human trafficking as engaging adolescent boys and girls in hazardous works without their consent	Yes	8658	81.0
	No	1441	13.5
	Don't Know	591	5.5
	No Response	4	0.0
Human trafficking as taking boys and girls from one place to another in the name of education or adoption with the consent of their parents	Yes	5937	55.5
	No	4163	38.9
	Don't Know	589	5.5
	No Response	6	0.1
Human trafficking as taking boys and girls from one place to another in the name of education or adoption without the consent of their parents	Yes	8883	83.1
	No	1295	12.1
	Don't Know	514	4.8
	No Response	2	0.0

Association Between Women's Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Knowledge of Human Trafficking

A bivariate analysis (Chi-square test) was performed to assess the participant's understanding of human trafficking across various demographic factors. The results showed a significant relationship (p<0.001) between knowledge of human trafficking and the wealth quintile. The highest proportion of women who were aware of human trafficking was among those in the wealthiest quintile (89%), and the lowest was among those in the poorest quintile (56%). In terms of provinces, a significantly higher percentage of respondents from Bagmati (87%), Gandaki (85%), and Province 1 (81%) had heard of human trafficking compared to those in other provinces, such as Sudhurpaschim (77%), Lumbini (64%) and Karnali (55%). Additionally, a higher proportion of women living in urban areas (76%) knew about human trafficking than those in rural areas (65%). The results also showed that knowledge of human trafficking was higher among younger age groups, with the highest being women aged 15-24 (80%). Furthermore, the level of education was positively related to knowledge of human trafficking, with the highest being among women with higher secondary or higher education (98%) and the lowest being among women with no formal education (47%). Similarly, women with no children (85%) had higher knowledge of human trafficking than those with children. Media exposure was also significantly related to knowledge of human trafficking, with the highest being among women with high exposure (96%) and the lowest being women with no exposure (46%). (Table 3)

Table 3

Knowledge of Human Trafficking According to Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Currently Married Women

		Knowledge of Human Trafficking		Total	
		No	**Yes**	**%**	**N**
Wealth index quintile*	Poorest	43.9	56.1	100.0	2613
$\chi^2 = 948.8$; p < .001	Second	34.6	65.4	100.0	2836
	Middle	31.9	68.1	100.0	2890
	Fourth	22.2	77.8	100.0	3126
	Richest	10.9	89.1	100.0	3339
Province*	Province 1	19.5	80.5	100.0	2419
$\chi^2 = 1564.8$; p < .001	Madhesh Province	51.9	48.1	100.0	2567
	Bagmati province	12.8	87.2	100.0	3684
	Gandaki province	14.7	85.3	100.0	1257
	Lumbini province	35.6	64.4	100.0	2826
	Karnali province	44.9	55.1	100.0	798
	Sudhurpaschim province	22.6	77.4	100.0	1255
Place of residence*	Urban	24.5	75.5	100.0	10281
$\chi^2 = 183.0$; p < .001	Rural	35.3	64.7	100.0	4524
Age of women*	15-24	19.9	80.1	100.0	5239
$\chi^2 = 420.6$; p < .001	25-34	25.7	74.3	100.0	4513
	35 and above	37.7	62.3	100.0	5053

Education*	None	58.8	41.2	100.0	3945
$\chi 2 = 3447.3$; p < .001	Basic (Gr 1-8)	32.7	67.3	100.0	4021
	Secondary (Gr 9-12)	8.2	91.8	100.0	5510
	Higher	1.7	98.3	100.0	1328
Number of Children born *	None	15.5	84.5	100.0	4366
$\chi 2 = 1325.3$; p < .001	1-2	23.4	76.6	100.0	6297
	3-4	43.1	56.9	100.0	3324
	5-6	63.9	36.1	100.0	685
	7 or more children	67.2	32.8	100.0	133
Level of media exposure*	No exposure	54.3	45.7	100.0	3463
$\chi 2 = 2149.2$; p < .001	Low	29.6	70.4	100.0	5426
	Medium	13.6	86.4	100.0	4046
	High exposure	4.2	95.8	100.0	1870
Total		**27.8**	**72.2**	**100.0**	**14805**

***=p<0.001

Multivariate Analysis

The results of the multivariate analysis showed that six factors, wealth quintile, province of residence, age, education, number of children born, and level of media exposure, had a significant impact on the knowledge of human trafficking among currently married women in Nepal. Respondents in the second (aOR=1.52, 95% CI=1.32-1.77), middle (aOR=1.50, 95% CI=1.29-1.74), fourth (aOR=1.56, 95% CI=1.33-1.83), and richest wealth quintiles (aOR=1.26, 95% CI=1.28-1.89) were more likely to have knowledge of human trafficking compared to those in the poorest quintile. Women who lived in Madhesh (aOR=0.24, 95% CI=0.20-0.28), Lumbini (aOR=0.48, 95% CI=0.41-0.55), Karnali (aOR= .522, 95% CI= .42-.65), and Sudhurpaschim (aOR=1.4, 95% CI=1.16-1.7) provinces were less likely to have knowledge about human trafficking compared to those in Province 1. Additionally, women with higher secondary or more education (aOR=29.52, 95% CI=18.9-46.0), secondary education (aOR=10.13, 95% CI=8.71-11.79), and basic education (aOR=2.19, 95% CI=1.96-2.45) were more likely to be knowledgeable about human trafficking compared to those who had no formal education (aOR=029.52, 95% CI=18.9-46.0). Women with 5-6 children (aOR=0.54, 95% CI=0.42-0.68 (p<0.001) and 7 or more children (aOR=0.60, 95% CI=0.39-0.92 (p<0.05) were less likely to know about human trafficking compared to those with no children. Finally, women with high (aOR=4.86, 95% CI=3.75-6.32), medium (aOR=3.26, 95% CI=2.85-3.73), and low media exposure (aOR=1.71, 95% CI=1.54-1.91) were more likely to have knowledge about human trafficking compared to those with no exposure. (Table 4)

Table 4

Multivariate Analysis Between Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Knowledge of Human Trafficking Among Currently Married Women

Predictors		aOR	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Wealth index quintile	Poorest (ref.)	1.00		
	Second	1.534***	1.327	1.772
	Middle	1.504***	1.296	1.745
	Fourth	1.563***	1.334	1.832
	Richest	1.563***	1.289	1.895
Province	Koshi (ref.)	1.00	-	-
	Madhesh Province	0.243***	0.209	0.283
	Bagmati province	1.130	0.958	1.332
	Gandaki province	1.117	0.908	1.373
	Lumbini province	0.480***	0.414	0.556
	Karnali province	0.522***	0.422	0.647
	Sudhurpaschim province	1.409***	1.165	1.704
Place of residence	Urban (ref.)	1.00	-	-
	Rural	1.036	0.938	1.144
Age of women	15-24 (ref.)	1.00		
	25-34	1.288**	1.117	1.486
	35 and above	1.301**	1.112	1.522
Education	None (ref.)	1.00		
	Basic (Gr 1-8)	2.197***	1.964	2.457
	Secondary (Gr 9-12)	10.135***	8.712	11.791
	Higher	29.529***	18.947	46.022
Number of Children born	None (ref.)	1.00		
	1-2	0.895	0.776	1.032
	3-4	0.847	0.713	1.006
	5-6	0.540***	0.426	0.684
	7 or more children	0.600*	0.392	0.920
Level of media exposure	No exposure (ref.)	1.00		
	Low	1.717***	1.540	1.913
	Medium	3.265***	2.853	3.736
	High exposure	4.869***	3.752	6.321
Constant		524***		
-2 Log likelihood		12254.2		
Cox & Snell R Square		0.298		

***=$p<0.001$, **=$p<0.01$ and *=$p<0.05$, ref= reference category

Discussion

This study showed a positive correlation between knowledge and other variables such as province, wealth quintile, gender, age, education, place of living, and media exposure. The logistic regression analysis results indicate that several factors, such as gender composition of specific provinces, urban dwelling, younger age, higher education, childlessness, and greater media exposure, positively correlate with increased knowledge of human trafficking. It can be inferred from the results that the availability and accessibility of information regarding human trafficking significantly impact individuals' knowledge of the issue (Azage et al., 2014; Sapkota,

2018). The result also shows that the richest women are more likely to have knowledge compared to those who are poor. A study conducted in Southeast Asia found that poverty was associated with lower knowledge of human trafficking (Perry & McEwing, 2013). The level of knowledge of the wealthy women could be due to exposure of information about human trafficking through networks and communities engaged in activism and advocacy work (Gonçalves et al., 2020; US Emabassy in Nepal, 2022). Finally, poverty and lack of resources can also be a barrier to knowledge of human trafficking. Women from the poorest quintile may be more focused on meeting their basic needs and may not have access to information or resources to learn about these issues (Lee, 2005; Perry & McEwing, 2013).

Our study found that the women who had obtained higher level of education attainment were more likely to have better knowledge of human trafficking. The finding is similar to the study conducted among Portuguese college students (Gonçalves et al., 2020). This result suggests that college-aged individuals are particularly well-informed about the issue. This could be due to the fact that many college students are actively seeking out information about current events and social issues and that universities and colleges often offer programs and initiatives aimed at raising knowledge about human trafficking (Gonçalves et al., 2020; Shrestha et al., 2015).

Our study has also indicated that women from underprivileged areas possess a comparatively lesser knowledge of human trafficking, specifically in relation to Nepal, namely the women from the Madhesh, Lumbini, Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces. A previous study conducted in 2015 also highlighted the lack of knowledge among women in rural areas regarding human trafficking and their perception that sex trafficking was not a significant issue. The reasons behind this disparity in knowledge can be attributed to various factors. Urban areas tend to have greater exposure to media, education, and community resources, which can contribute to a higher level of knowledge about social issues such as human trafficking. In contrast, rural areas often face challenges such as limited access to education, lower media penetration, and a lack of targeted knowledge campaigns specifically tailored to rural communities (Cole & Sprang, 2015). Furthermore, the findings of this research indicated that a majority of women (69.4%) who have knowledge about human trafficking were living in urban areas, while less than one-third (30.6%) of women residing in rural areas were unaware of it.

This study has discovered that there exists a correlation between a woman's age and her level of knowledge, with older women exhibiting a higher level of knowledge. Research conducted in both South Nigeria and Nepal produced similar outcomes, demonstrating that many young women had the highest level of knowledge about human trafficking(Okonofua et al., 2004; Shrestha et al., 2015). These results reinforce the idea that younger generations, especially women, are more likely to have better knowledge of the issue due to their greater access to information and technology (US Emabassy in Nepal, 2022; Lee, 2005). The study revealed that younger individuals generally have a higher level of knowledge of human trafficking, with the highest being among women aged 15-24 years than other categories.

Our study also discovered the level of media exposure is associated with women's knowledge. A similar investigation carried out among adolescent female students in Nepal

(92.5%) and Ethiopia (94.6%) revealed that media exposure (92.5%) played a significant role in shaping their understanding of human trafficking (Azage et al., 2014; Shrestha et al., 2015). When people are exposed to news articles, and other media outlets that report on the issue of human trafficking, they gain a deeper knowledge of the subject. The more people are exposed to media coverage of human trafficking, the more likely they are to learn about the issue and its effects. This exposure could help increase their knowledge of the issue, educate individuals about the warning signs, and raise the overall level of knowledge about human trafficking. By being informed about the issue, individuals can take action to help prevent it and protect themselves and others from falling victim to human trafficking (Azage et al., 2014; Lee, 2005; Thapa, 2021). The research indicated that the extent of media coverage significantly affected an individual's knowledge of human trafficking. Women who were frequently exposed to media had a greater level of knowledge (96%) about human trafficking compared to those with low media exposure (46%).

This study assessed the women's knowledge regarding human trafficking. The results indicated that about 72% of married women had some knowledge of the issue. A similar result was evident in a cross-sectional study conducted in Nepal, that a substantial proportion of women, 76%, were familiar with human trafficking through either hearing about it or reading about it (Shrestha et al., 2015). However, the results of the study showed a lower level of knowledge about human trafficking compared to the study conducted in South Nigeria (Okonofua et al., 2004) but higher than the study conducted in Ethiopia (60%) (Azage et al., 2014).

Strengths and Limitations

This study is one of the few studies that focuses on the association between socio-demographic characteristics of currently married women aged 15-49 and their knowledge of human trafficking. An advantageous aspect of this study is its extensive sample size, which renders the findings representative and dependable. Additionally, the data collection procedures used by MICS comply with global standards, thereby facilitating comparison with other surveys and enabling the monitoring of progress over time. Although presented in a user-friendly format that assists policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, there are also certain restrictions associated with this study. Namely, the accuracy of the data collected is contingent upon the time of the survey and may not reflect any modifications that may have transpired since the study's completion. Furthermore, selection bias may be present, particularly in hard-to-reach locales, and the accuracy of the data hinges on the precision of the data collectors as well as the respondents' willingness to provide accurate information.

Conclusion

The study aimed to assess the knowledge of human trafficking among the married women in Nepal. This study has demonstrated a positive correlation between knowledge and various other variables, including province, gender, age, place of residence, and exposure to media. A significant relationship was found between knowledge of human trafficking and the wealth quintile, with the highest proportion of knowledge being among the wealthiest quintile. The results showed that most of the surveyed women have heard about human trafficking. Overall, the study highlights the need to improve knowledge of human trafficking among women in

Nepal, particularly those in rural areas, from lower wealth quintiles, older age groups, lower levels of education, women with children, and women with low media exposure.

Therefore, the government, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and other relevant stakeholders need to prioritize efforts to ensure that girls and women have equitable access to information about human trafficking. By doing so, they can increase knowledge and improve attitudes towards the issue, ultimately working towards preventing exploitation and abuse and increasing public support for efforts to combat human trafficking.

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