



SHARE

SHARE Newsletter

October 2020

Editor's note: The COVID-19 pandemic in Hong Kong is still unsettled and the labour market has been severely damaged. When the local situation worries us deeply, we are even more worried about the situation of the poor in developing countries. Not only do they face the risk of infection, they also suffer from losing their livelihoods and food shortage due to the pandemic. In order to survive, they desperately find a way out, and they are more likely to fall into the prey of human traffickers.

This issue of *SHARE* will talk about the more rampant human trafficking problem under the pandemic, especially the situation of poor children who are the most vulnerable to the influence of online fraud ("Focus"). Also we will share how our partner has responded to the "new normal" and continued in rescuing work under the pandemic ("Blessings by Offering"), and mobilised the church and community to fight against child trafficking ("Learn a Little More"). May the Lord who laments with us, encourages us to hear and respond to the needs of the exploited and trafficked ("Back to the Bible").

Hidden Crisis in the Pandemic: Human Trafficking

Written by Clara Chiu (Head of Partnership Development)

From July 20th to 23rd this year, several CEDAR staff participated in the "Asia Region Anti-Trafficking Conference" (hereinafter referred to as the conference). The conference was held for the first time three years ago, and this year is the third. It was changed to conduct online due to the pandemic. The purpose of the conference is to gather people from all parts of Asia who are concerned about human trafficking, and learn about it with other forms of modern slavery through various workshops, and know more about the latest anti-trafficking measures.

[Our partner] told us that although the child marriage problem in India has been slowing down in recent years, under the negative economic impacts of the pandemic, this vice has revived.

- Clara Chiu, Head of Partnership Development



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During the meeting, representatives from different organisations mentioned that the situation of human trafficking has become worse under the raging pandemic. Among them, Matt Friedman, the CEO of an international non-profit organisation The Mekong Club, and former Regional Project Manager at the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking, shared the topic "The Impact of COVID-19 on Supply Chains". He said that during the pandemic, the demand for many commodities has fallen. Due to the tight interlocking of supply chains under globalisation, it has caused the world economy to contract. Especially in poor countries, where the rights of workers have always been neglected and factory activities are declining, the wages of workers are being delayed. Some of them are even forced to work without getting paid.

After Millions of Workers Got Unemployed



Take Bangladesh as an example, as the world's second largest apparel exporter, the country is an important base for fashion production. The local clothing industry employs millions of workers (mostly women) to produce clothes for Western fashion brands. In May this year, it was reported that the pandemic caused a sharp drop in clothing sales. Brands and other retailers cancelled or suspended orders worth more than US\$3 billion from garment factories in Bangladesh, and 2 million jobs might be cut. In developing countries, women are often vulnerable. Once they lose the chance to earn a living, they will often become the prey of human traffickers. Deception and abduction are common methods used by human traffickers.

Participants at the conference said that many human traffickers pretended to be "prosperous in their lives". They usually went to poor villages, deceiving the villagers for leaving the village to earn money, so that they could be as elegant as the traffickers themselves. As a result, the poor fell into the trap of the traffickers and were forced into slave labours or selling their bodies.

In India, a country with serious human trafficking in Asia, we have been supporting the local partner Evangelical Fellowship of India-Children at Risk (EFIC@R) to teach the youth with anti-trafficking knowledge, and establish a team to combat human trafficking in Bihar, a state where it is known for its poverty.

EFIC@R told us that although the child marriage problem in India has been slowing down in recent years, under the negative economic impacts of the pandemic, this vice has

revived. In order to reduce expenses, poor families sell their daughters to others as "brides." For example, a 12-year-old girl named Hiya (pseudonym) was sold by her family to a 50-year-old man for 20,000 Indian rupees (equivalent to HK\$2,000). The partner could hardly do anything to stop. Another girl, Akshara (pseudonym), was only 8 years old and was forced to marry a 40-year-old man. Fortunately, the partner and residents in the community were alert and took timely action to rescue the girl. In the end, the girl was saved.

From Offline to Online

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) issued preliminary findings on the impact of the pandemic on human trafficking in April this year. According to UNODC, schools in poor countries are not only educational units, but also "the main source of shelter and nourishment" for poor children. In some countries, schools are closed due to the pandemic, and many poor children are "forced on to the streets in search of food and income". This not only increases their risk of contracting the virus, but also makes them more vulnerable.

In addition, under the pandemic, many children have switched to studying and socialising online, and online sexual predators take this opportunity to target children. Representatives of organisations in the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia all stated in the conference that the number of children being deceived or forced to take obscene photos and videos online has increased during the pandemic. EFIC@R also shared their frontline observation with us – the poor children in villages had to walk nearly 50 kilometers away from home to attend classes at the computer center because they did not have Internet access at home. The long distance has increased their risk of being trafficked.

Today, human trafficking has become the world's second largest illegal trade after drugs, with more than 40 million people being trafficked worldwide. During the pandemic, the mandatory anti-pandemic measures implemented by various countries and the increase of police patrols at borders and streets have not reduced the occurrence of human trafficking. On the contrary, criminal activities have become more concealed. Victims have also become more difficult to seek help due to the suspension of public services, thus creates opportunities for criminals.

In order to effectively combat human trafficking, a multifaceted approach is necessary - legislation, justice, community education and prevention, so as to respond to the "new normal" situation caused by the pandemic.



(EFIC@R's Literacy Centre cum Child Club in one of the India's poor villages)

Rescue Girls from Red Light Area of India during COVID-19

Written by Timothy Lam (Communications Officer) & Edward Lai (Senior Communications Officer)

Our Nepalese partner recently told us that they rescued two girls from a red light area of India. The situation of the girls was very vulnerable so our partner carried out rescue even under the threat of COVID-19 and closing of borders.

These two girls, who were physically and mentally weak, had undergone different circumstances. One of the girls named Nagina (pseudonym, 11 years old) had been sold by her own mother to a relative as a servant, due to poverty. The other girl named Lola (pseudonym, 16 years old) had been harassed sexually by her own father, after the death of her mother last year. She was going to be taken to work in brothel right before our partner's intervention.

Soon after our partner found out what these girls have gone through, they did everything to rescue them. Even though India had seen record daily rise in the number of COVID-19 infections and Nepal-India border was also closed, they communicated with the local government and the border police. And finally they brought the girls to the shelter home. We feel at ease that our partner staff and the girls were tested negative for COVID-19. This rescue has been very challenging, because both the relative whom Nagina had been sold to and the father of Lola were dangerous or criminal men. But with the grace of God, our partner managed to bring them to Nepal at their shelter. We thank God for every step He helped in the rescue.

Our partner said, "It's such a relief to have the two girls (out of their dangerous environments)."

Please pray for the survivors and our partner's ministry of protecting human trafficking victims and sexually exploited women and children. You can read more our partner's story in battling against human trafficking: eng.cedarfund.org/aht/.



Listen to the Cries of the Oppressed

Written by Tony Chan (Senior Partnership Development Officer)



"During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God." (Exodus 2:23)

The old Pharaoh promised to the prime minister Joseph that Joseph would take his father's family to live in Egypt and live in the "best part of the land" (Genesis 47:6), the region of Goshen. Jacob, the ancestor of the Israelites, was able to reunite with his son Joseph and escape the famine with his family, so he seized the opportunity and moved to Egypt with his family of 70 members. Over the years, Jacob's family and his offspring lived in Goshen, where they led a prosperous life and increased in numbers. However, the promise of the Egyptian authority did not extend to the new king. Many years later, the pharaoh did not like these foreigners and treated them badly.

Imagine the entire kingdom of Israel as a whole. At first, they thought that Egypt was a good refuge from famine, but then it became a hell on earth. The people were tortured and insulted every day.

By substituting the feelings of the oppressed Israelites of that generation, you may complain that your ancestors made the wrong decision to go to Egypt for their own interests at the time, hence falling into the hands of this evil kingdom. You can also substitute Jacob's mood. If he had a chance to know that his decision would cause the future generations to suffer, he would have probably regretted it too.

In any case, the Bible verse that the cries of the oppressed went up to God delivers a very important message. Because the Lord listened to the cries of the oppressed, He later used Moses to save them and deliver them from their arduous conditions.

In terms of human trafficking, many poor people let their children go out to work and earn money to support their families because of their economic hardship. They used to think it was an opportunity to change their lives but in turn becomes a crisis. Later, the children are trafficked to dungeons, such as the red light districts and the sweat factories, where they are treated like slaves every day. These are the plights of the poor, and I believe the Lord already knows as He listens to them. As for us who follow God must also listen to the cries of the poor, so that we become the Lord's instruments and fulfill His good will of saving victims of human trafficking.

How to Combat Child Trafficking under the "New Normal"?

Written by Edward Lai (Senior Communication Officer)

As the pandemic is raging around the world, criminals do not only "hunt" civilians in a hidden way in poor villages, they also target their prey via the internet. By using their poor and fragile situation, they can easily force or lure the victims to work in sex industry, or engage in forced labour or any work that is obviously not commensurate with pay. Facing the "new normal" under the pandemic, Aashima Samuel, EFIC@R's National Director, who has been engaged in anti-child trafficking for many years, shared her team's coping strategies.



Aashima Samuel

also meet regularly with village leaders to discuss how to establish a safe environment for the children. Under the lockdown, we used online instant messaging software to communicate with church pastors, watch groups, vigilantes groups and residents in the district to identify victims. We have successfully rescued three victims recently who were about to be trafficked for sex.

Q: During the pandemic, more children are changing to online learning and socialising, which makes them more vulnerable to sexual predators. How do you deal with this challenge?

A: Nearly half of India's population is under 25. Young people or children are easily lured by false promises on social media platforms and become prey to sexual predators. To protect them, we should start with personal contact and community monitoring. Therefore, we keep in touch with young people through the network of local communities, watch groups, churches, and volunteers to remind them of online sexual exploitation and teach them how to identify suspected offenders. We also provide training for community residents so that they know how to report any suspected trafficking activities immediately.

Q: How does your team equip churches and local communities to fight child trafficking?

A: In terms of preventive education, we have conducted online youth seminars. In the seminars, we encouraged young people to participate in the communities' anti-pandemic work, and explained the current situation of human trafficking to them. We also shared real cases on social media platforms, including how children were trafficked for forced labour, or sold as "brides" to middle-aged people. In the end, we hope to strengthen public awareness of anti-child trafficking.

In the recent floods in Bihar, we found that human traffickers lured the poor to follow them on the pretext of providing jobs to them. In addition, human traffickers took advantage of the government's humanitarian work under the pandemic, pretending to be humanitarian aid workers, in order to gain the trust of poor communities and pave the way for trafficking in the future. In view of this, we have established close ties with village council leaders. We talked to the leaders about the need to understand the situation of residents leaving the village, as well as paying attention to human traffickers who entered the village. We also encouraged the leaders to embark on the long-term development of villages and bring justice to the victims of trafficking.

In addition, we have set up watch groups in the villages to track all suspicious persons and pay attention to the situation of the children in the villages to ensure their safety. The watch groups



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