

Unveiling Shadows: A Comprehensive Analysis of Human Trafficking and Policy Frameworks in India

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Abstract

Human trafficking remains a pervasive and deeply rooted challenge in India, affecting millions of lives and demanding urgent attention. This paper presents a thorough examination of the complex landscape of human trafficking in India, shedding light on the multifaceted factors that contribute to its persistence. Through an in-depth analysis of existing literature, governmental reports, and case studies, this research seeks to unravel the intricate web of socio-economic dimensions surrounding human trafficking in the country.

Special emphasis is placed on understanding the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, such as women and children, and the intersection of factors that make them susceptible to trafficking. The paper also underscores the importance of addressing root causes, including poverty and lack of education, as integral components of any effective anti-trafficking strategy. This research aspires to contribute valuable insights to the discourse surrounding human trafficking in India, offering a comprehensive understanding of the current state of affairs and providing actionable recommendations to reinforce the nation's commitment to eradicate this heinous crime.

History and Background of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking refers to the illegal trade of human beings for forced labor, sexual exploitation, or commercial sexual exploitation. It involves

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through force, fraud, coercion, abduction, deception, or abuse of power for exploitation.

The history of human trafficking spans across centuries. Its root takes us back to slavery, exploitation and forced labor. The transatlantic slave trade, for example, which forcibly transported millions of Africans to the Americas between the 16th and 19th centuries, represents one of the most egregious examples of human trafficking in history. Modern forms of human trafficking differ following the fundamental pattern of abuse.

Human trafficking has historical roots dating back to ancient civilizations, where individuals were often seized and traded as slaves. In ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, people used to be captured in wars, raids or even sometimes were born into slavery. These slaves were forced to servitude and sexual exploitation. The era of colonialism and imperialism also saw widespread exploitation of indigenous people for forced labor, often in mines, plantations, and other industries. The trans - Atlantic slave trade as mentioned before, uprooted millions of Africans from their homeland for being sold to the Americans for slavery. This trade caused immense human suffering and was driven by European colonial powers such as Britain, Portugal, Spain and France. European powers played a significant role in perpetuating systems of forced labor and trafficking in their colonies as well. Later on, the Industrial Revolution led to increased demand for labor in factories and urban areas, creating opportunities for the trafficking of vulnerable individuals, including women and children, who were often subjected to harsh working conditions and sexual exploitation.

The crime continued to persist in various forms throughout the 20th century as well, including the periods of conflict and war. But during the 19th century the abolition movement got the momentum. The U.S Emancipation Proclamation (1863) was able to abolish slavery in the southern states and the 13th amendment fully abolished it nationwide. Similar efforts observed in Europe with British empire putting an end to the trans - Atlantic slave trade in 1807 and officially abolishing slavery in

all its colonies in 1833. Despite of these legal abolition, this cnmes continued in various forms such as forced prostitution, exploitation of migrant workers etc. Southern parts of the U.S and the Caribbean continued to allow sharecropping and convict leasing for the continuation of forced labor. The late 19th and early 20th century saw the rise of "white slavery" which was particularly prevalent in Europe and North America. The term white slavery referred to the trafficking of women and young girls for sex trade, often from poor regions to wealthier cities. In 1904, The International Agreement for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic was established to combat this crime which was later followed by many treaties.

After the World War II, the international human rights framework was established including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The formation of organizations like United Nations helped to spread awareness of human trafficking. However, despite these efforts human trafficking continued to remain persistent globally. In the latter part of the 20th century, human trafficking became more organized and complex, with traffickers taking advantage of global migration, weak legal systems and poverty. This is true for especially the developing and underdeveloped nations like India and Sub - Saharan Africa respectively. The rise of organized crime networks at that tinle facilitated the trafficking of people. Globalization, technological advancements and the rise of organized criminal networks have facilitated trafficking, making it difficult to combat this crime. To this day, human trafficking remains a significant global issue. International laws such as United Nations' Palermo Protocol (2000), aim to combat trafficking and protect victims. Along with the UN, various important non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF and ILO are also working together to fight this problem through legal frameworks, victim support and awareness campaigns. Global Action Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) headed in Bangkok, Thailand, conducts research, develops resources, and provides capacity-building for governments and NGOs to improve victim protection, prevent exploitation, and ensure better justice systems.

1. Scope and Prevalence of Human Trafficking

The scope and prevalence of human trafficking is difficult to measure precisely due to its clandestine nature, but available statistics provide a sobering picture of the scale of the problem. According to International Labor Organization (ILO), approximately 50 million people were living in slavery globally in 2021. It was mostly linked with organized crime, corruption and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals. UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) reports that human trafficking is a thriving multi-million-dollar industry, with an estimated 2.5 million people trafficked at any given time. The Global Slavery Index (2018) estimates that there are 40.3 million victims of modern slavery worldwide, with 71 percent of them being women and young girls and 25 percent being children.

Among all forms of human trafficking, sex trafficking continues to be the most reported form of trafficking, accounting for nearly 60 percent of all victims globally. In this form, women and young girls (even minors) are being forced to be exploited in prostitution and pornography. Labor trafficking, on the other hand, involves victims forced to work under abusive conditions, often in agriculture, construction, mining, domestic work, and manufacturing. Besides these two, another heinous form of human trafficking involves organ trafficking. This aspect is furthermore covert, where individuals are trafficked irrespective of their gender, for organ harvesting. This is why getting exact statistics on this form of crime is very risky and nearly impossible.

Human trafficking networks function across borders, taking advantage of the global demand for cheap labor, sex work, and exploitation. Human traffickers take advantage of economic vulnerabilities such as poverty, lack of education, gender inequality, and political instability to recruit and control victims. As per the latest estimates by UNODC **Asia-Pacific** has the highest number of human trafficking victims, followed by **Africa** and **Europe**. Countries like **Thailand, India, China, and Vietnam** report large numbers of trafficking cases. Meanwhile, in North America, Canada reports the highest incidence of human trafficking in the recent times. The

trafficking issues are even more complex here due to migration and refugee crises (Perry, 2018).

This paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the incidence of human trafficking in India through the lens of Economics with its global history and prevalence at the backdrop and discuss the policy frameworks to put an end to this heinous crime. In order to do that, we need to thoroughly look into the relevant Indian statistics available on this crime. Human trafficking in India affects millions of individuals, especially women and children. While it's challenging to obtain precise numbers, various estimates (such as NCRB¹ reports) suggest that India is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking. According to the latest report, over 23,000 cases of human trafficking were reported in India in 2020. The actual number is expected to be much higher due to underreporting of cases. Certain states in India, such as Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh, report high incidences of trafficking due to economic vulnerability and migration patterns (Dutta, 2011). And as far as the metro cities are concerned, **Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata** are prominent transit and destination points for trafficking networks, particularly for sexual exploitation (Sarkar, 2014). Table 2.1 exhibits the state wise statistics (from NCRB report) on human trafficking for India during 2016 - 2022.

Table 2.1: State Wise Total no. of Minor & Adult Trafficked Victims during 2016-2022

	Trafficked Individuals	
State	Below18	Above 18
Andhra Pradesh	199	2127
ArunachalPradesh	26	5
Assam	1006	985
Bihar	2471	477
Chhattisgarh	501	742
Goa	15	407
Gujarat	566	244

	Trafficked Individuals	
State	Below 18	Above18
Haryana	95	214
Himachal Pradesh	17	181
Jharkhand	1313	666
Karnataka	545	1251
Kerala	1008	362
Madhya Pradesh	671	395
Maharashtra	631	5195
Manipur	37	219
Meghalaya	58	14
Mizoram	89	32
Nagaland	2	18
Odisha	1665	3613
Punjab	173	71
Rajasthan	6116	380
Sikkim	10	6
TamilNadu	448	1366
Tripura	22	15
Uttar Pradesh	1107	486
West Bengal	3931	1395
All India*	22722	20866

***Except Jammu & Kashmir Source: NCRB Reports**

The table above considers male and female victims together and reports the total incidence state-wise. The data is, however, divided into two groups, adult and minor, and it indicates the severity of the problem in the Indian context. In the last six years, more than forty-two thousand Indians have been the victims of human trafficking, and the numbers are increasing day by day. The condition is most severely painful in states like Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha. The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened the human trafficking crisis in India, vvith

the economic downturn, decreased employment, and hindrances in law enforcement efforts creating more room for traffickers to exploit vulnerable populations. Reports showed a rise in illegal organ and child trafficking and online exploitation during the pandemic (Deshmukh, 2022).

2. *Economic and Social Factors*

In the Indian context, poverty, lack of education, unemployment, gender discrimination, social marginalization, and caste-based discrimination are among the primary factors that make people susceptible to trafficking. Poor families face financial difficulties, making them vulnerable to traffickers who promise better job opportunities, financial security, or a better life for their children. Regional economic disparities within India, particularly between rural and urban areas, create pockets of vulnerability. People in less developed regions are susceptible to the risk of trafficking, as traffickers can easily lure them. In many rural areas, limited access to education, skills training, and employment opportunities leads individuals, especially women and children, to seek employment in urban centres or abroad. Traffickers exploit this desperation, offering false promises of legitimate work (Bagchi & Sinha, 2016).

The informal structure of the Indian economy, where labor laws are poorly enforced, creating a high demand for cheap, unregulated labor, also provides a fertile ground for human traffickers to operate. Industries such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, and the sex trade often rely on cheap or forced labor, creating opportunities for traffickers to exploit individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities (Naik, 2018). India shares porous borders with several countries, which further facilitates the cross-border trafficking of individuals for various purposes, such as forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Trafficking routes often extend to neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.

Certain social and cultural factors equally contribute to this crime as do economic ones. Women and girls in India are extremely affected by human trafficking. Gender disparity, age-old patriarchal norms, and the

position of women as less valuable than men in a typical Indian society increase the risk of abuse. In most cases, particularly women and girls are trafficked for domestic servitude, forced marriages, or sexual exploitation (Roy & Chaman, 2017). Marginalized communities in some of the Indian states (such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh), including Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and tribal groups, face immense discrimination and segregation from mainstream social and economic activities. This vulnerability makes them easy targets for traffickers, as their disappearances often go unnoticed and unreported, and the corrupt legal system often doesn't give importance to these cases (Pandya & Pandya, 2011).

India has enacted several laws and policies to combat human trafficking, including the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA) in 1956, the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act in 1975, and the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act in 1986. Despite these efforts, cases of trafficking continue to rise year after year, mainly because of Corruption within law enforcement agencies and a lack of training (Vidushy, 2016). Also, the rehabilitation of trafficked victims is insufficient. Rescued victims often face stigmatization and are not accepted even by their family members. Inadequate support systems and legal and psychological assistance make them vulnerable to re-trafficking. Also, corruption at local levels of government and border controls helps the traffickers to operate with minimal resistance. This phenomenon weakens the effectiveness of legal frameworks designed to prevent trafficking (Najar, 2014). Trafficking rings are often linked to organized criminal networks that include multiple levels and forms of exploitation. These networks prosper in surroundings where law enforcement and social cohesion are weak.

3. Psychological and Health Consequences

While the immediate physical abuse and exploitation experienced by trafficked individuals are often visible, the more profound and enduring consequences are psychological, emotional, and social. These hidden scars of trafficking are often overlooked, yet they represent a critical aspect of the individual's vulnerability, as they can significantly impact their

recovery and reintegration into society. Victims of human trafficking experience extreme forms of emotional and psychological abuse, including physical assault, sexual violence, and emotional manipulation. The trauma is multiplied by living in constant fear, helplessness, and a sense of powerlessness. This often leads to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition causing flashbacks from the past, nightmares, severe anxiety, and hypervigilance. Victims held captive for a very long period often develop complex PTSD symptoms, which involve emotional distress, difficulties in relationships, and a pervasive sense of guilt or shame. This is why the rescued trafficked victims often find it difficult to return to mainstream societal life and isolate themselves. Sometimes, if things go worse, without proper support and counselling, they often take their lives out of despair (Tudorache, 2004).

The trauma experienced by trafficked individuals is far-reaching, with hidden scars that affect not only their immediate well-being but also their long-term vulnerability and ability to reintegrate into society. The psychological, emotional and social consequences of trafficking are profound, and survivors often face significant challenges in rebuilding their lives after escaping exploitation. The stigma, isolation, and lack of support that survivors face further exacerbate their vulnerabilities, making it difficult for them to recover and rebuild a sense of normalcy. To support the healing and reintegration of trafficking survivors, the hidden scars of trauma must be recognized and addressed, and comprehensive support systems must be put in place to help survivors rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

In sex trafficking, particularly, victims may experience feelings of shame and degradation, believing that their value is reduced to their bodies, which can lead to long-term issues with self-esteem and self-worth. Cultural stigma in India and other countries, especially surrounding sex work, bonded labour, or exploitation, makes it even harder for victims to seek help or return to society. Things become even worse when the victims start to develop Stockholm syndrome and cognitive dissonance. The former is when the victim starts to develop a bond with their abuser, even defending or feeling empathetic towards them. This happens due to

constant exposure to intimidation along with the abuser offering basic needs (Such as water, food, etc.). This bond further complicates their escape and rehabilitation process. Cognitive dissonance further starts to develop when the victim starts to believe that their situation is not so bad and they start using coping mechanisms to rationalize their abuse to survive mentally (Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006). Some victims of trafficking turn to drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism to numb emotional pain or as a way to tolerate the physical abuse they are facing. This leads to the development of substance abuse, further complicating their recovery.

Rehabilitation for survivors of human trafficking is a complex, multifaceted process that goes beyond physical recovery and demands a holistic approach addressing psychological, emotional, and societal challenges. Trafficking victims experience not only immediate physical abuse and exploitation but also long-lasting emotional and psychological trauma that affects their ability to rebuild their lives post-rescue. These survivors are often left with deep scars that complicate their reintegration into society, from pervasive post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to the societal stigma they face as a result of their exploitation. The path to rehabilitation for trafficking survivors is a long and arduous journey, requiring comprehensive, multidimensional support systems that can address their unique needs across a spectrum of psychological, emotional, and social dimensions. This paragraph will explore the psychological, emotional, and societal challenges faced by survivors, focusing on PTSD, stigma, and the barriers to rebuilding their lives, while advocating for the implementation of holistic support systems designed to aid in their recovery. In addition to the direct effects of trafficking, the hidden scars left on individuals can also impact future generations. Children who are trafficked or born into trafficking situations may experience intergenerational trauma, which can have lasting effects on their mental health and well-being. Research suggests that children born into environments of trafficking and exploitation may be at greater risk of developing emotional and psychological disorders, as well as being more vulnerable to becoming trafficked themselves in the future (Cohen et al., 2019). These children may grow up in environments characterized by

abuse, neglect, and exploitation, which can have long-term consequences on their development and future opportunities.

Trafficked individuals in the sex trade are also at heightened risk for HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and other sexually transmitted diseases due to unprotected sex and lack of access to healthcare. According to reports from the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) India, women and children trafficked for the sex trade in India are at significant risk for HIV/AIDS. The lack of access to preventions, medical treatment, and regular check-ups increases the vulnerability of these victims to life-threatening diseases. Women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced marriages in India and globally may suffer from reproductive health problems, including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and gynecological issues resulting from abuse. India also has a sufficiently large number of people trafficked for bonded labor, especially in industries like agriculture, brick furnaces, and construction. These victims often face brutal physical punishment, exhaustion, and dangerous working conditions, leading to long-term health problems. Trafficked women and children are also especially vulnerable to malnutrition, due to scant food, irregular eating, and the exhausting nature of their work, which further weakens their physical and emotional health. Children trafficked for child labor or sexual exploitation are at an increased risk of developmental delays, emotional trauma, and long-term health issues due to neglect, abuse, and lack of proper care.

A study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2017) found that many trafficked individuals remain in a state of trauma for years after their release, struggling to trust others or feel safe in their environment. Many trafficking survivors come from marginalized backgrounds and may have low levels of education or training, which can hinder their ability to find gainful employment. The cycle of poverty and exploitation that many trafficked individuals are born into is further perpetuated if they cannot access resources to improve their skills, education, or overall employability.

4. Review of Relevant Literature

Bales (2004) describes modern slavery as a social and economic bond wherein an individual is subjected to abuse and receives no compensation for their labor, leading to economic exploitation. Crime experts anticipate that within the next decade, human trafficking is expected to exceed both drug and arms trafficking in terms of frequency, impact on human welfare, and profitability for criminal organizations (Schauer and Wheaton, 2006). Human trafficking epitomizes an extreme form of labor exploitation and is often seen as a sinister aspect of globalization (Jones et.al, 2007). Human trafficking involves the recruitment and exploitation of individuals for various purposes such as prostitution, sweatshop labor, begging, domestic work, forced marriages, adoption, agricultural and construction work, involvement in armed conflicts (including as child soldiers), and other forms of manipulative labor or services. The task of accurately estimating the number of human trafficking victims is extremely challenging, to the extent that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has acknowledged that achieving a precise statistical goal in this regard may be impossible (UNODC, 2006, p. 45). Human traffickers bridge the gap between labor supplies in origin regions and labor demands in destination regions. The corrupted structure of politics and law enforcement worsens the challenges by hampering efforts to obtain accurate information on human trafficking and facilitating traffickers in transporting and exploiting their victims with ease. Chuang (2006) describes human trafficking as an "opportunistic reaction" to the conflicting pressures between the economic need to migrate and the politically driven limitations on migration.

While scholars in the field of human trafficking acknowledge that not all criminal activities stem directly from poverty, there is a widespread agreement that trafficking is intricately linked to developmental concerns, with poverty being a significant contributing factor (UNIDOC, 2012). In many instances, the fundamental factors contributing to human trafficking share similarities, such as the underlying economic and social conditions. However, when viewed on a broader scale, the patterns of human trafficking exhibit diversity and are also influenced by

geographical and regional differences (Cameron et al. 2008). Generally, both the literature on human trafficking and human smuggling highlight that a significant portion of those migrating illegally have low levels of education and skills. This trend is likely due to government immigration policies that primarily target low-skilled migrants (Bales, 2007). The market for Human Trafficking is a monopolistically competitive one because it consists of many buyers and many sellers (organized groups or loose networks of entrepreneurs) who deal in differentiated products. Traffickers do not usually encounter significant barriers from other sellers and they have some control over the selling price of their product (Zhang and Chin, 2002).

Criminal justice experts and sociologists argue that various push and pull factors render populations susceptible to exploitation in the labor market and potentially to human trafficking. The research examines the characteristics of individuals opting to relocate, such as gender (Ehrenreich and Hoschild, 2003; Klueber, 2003), education (Richard, 2004; Kelly, 2002; Klueber, 2003), and age (Green, 2008). Additionally, studies investigate the impact of political instability (Derks, 2000; Hughes, 2000 and 2002), globalization (Bales, 2005), income disparities between developed and developing nations (Bales, 2000; 2003), as well as the influence of worldwide capitalism and transnational corporations (Anderson and

Davidson, 2003). Furthermore, factors like the widespread devaluation and marginalization of women and children (Demleitner, 2011) along with poverty, lack of education, urbanization, limited access to employment and educational opportunities, cultural norms, traditional practices, domestic violence, corruption, conflicts, and challenges in obtaining visas are also significant contributors to human trafficking in almost each country in the world (Ejalu, 2006).

5. Findings

According to NCRB records, there are 1794 identified origins in India from where mostly female victims are trafficked. This trafficking industry involves numerous stakeholders and operates as a billion-dollar business

with a comprehensive network that extends from powerful figures to local traffickers in villages. The industry in India has become highly organized, ranking as the world's third-largest crime following drug and arms trafficking. Thousands of criminals operate professionally within this organized crime network, which fuels other criminal activities and has significant social repercussions. Often, trafficking involves the manipulation and deception of girls and their families. For example, in various villages in West Bengal, reports indicate that traffickers gain access to girls by posing as grooms who do not demand dowries. Additionally, trafficking has been enabled by the involvement of relatives, friends, teachers, and placement agencies of the victims. Exploited girls are often compelled to lure other girls from the same area where they were initially trafficked. This research aims to delve deeper into the prevalence of crime and shed light on the root causes of human trafficking within Indian states between 2016 and 2022. It also seeks to offer recommendations to policymakers and practitioners to emphasize the importance of addressing this issue based on the research findings.

6. Research Gap and Formation of Hypothesis

Trade in human beings in India, particularly women and children, is driven by various factors, categorized into push and pull factors. Lack of education and employment opportunities, especially for women in rural areas, also contributes to the same. Push factors include pressure to gather dowries, dysfunctional family environments, domestic violence, and low societal status for girl children. Extreme poverty not only compels individuals to fall prey to traffickers but also incentivizes some to engage in trafficking themselves, particularly those who see no other means of escaping exploitative environments such as prostitution. On the other hand, pull factors involve enticing employment opportunities in urban centers, promises of easy money and better living conditions made by traffickers, demand for young girls for marriage in different regions, and the demand for cheap labor in sweatshops, as well as for adoption and sexual exploitation. The expanding sex industry, military concentrations in certain areas, and misconceptions about HIV/ AIDS and virginity also contribute to the demand for trafficked individuals. Additionally,

practices like female feticide in regions with skewed gender ratios further fuel internal trafficking, with traffickers often luring girls from distant states under pretenses of marriage only to force them into prostitution later.

The state-wise NCRB data (see Table 2.1) for the years 2016-2022 provides a detailed breakup of trafficked individuals for below and above 18 years category. The push and pull factors behind human trafficking as mentioned in section 3, among them the most important and significant ones, as per the available literature, are also considered for different states during the exact same period. The hypotheses were then constructed following the findings of existing literature. The socio-economic determinants of human trafficking in India considered for this study are - Poverty Rate, Literacy Rate and Unemployment Rate (Rural and Urban separately).

Hypothesis 1: Human trafficking is positively related to the rate of poverty. When people are living in extreme poverty, they become more vulnerable to exploitation and are willing to take risks for the promise of better economic opportunities.

Hypothesis 2: Incidence of human trafficking is inversely related to the rate of literacy. Without proper education and information, individuals are less likely to recognize the signs of trafficking or understand their rights, making them more susceptible to exploitation. Also, if a large section of society is uneducated, then a lack of decent employment opportunities forces them to such criminal activities.

Hypothesis 3: This follows from the second hypothesis itself. Traffickers prey on the vulnerability of unemployed people, promising jobs and a better life in exchange and lure them to run away. So, if unemployment increases, the incidence of trafficking is also likely to increase.

7. Findings

The data on the poverty rate, literacy rate and the rural and urban unemployment rate have been obtained from the statistical handbook of Indian states published annually by the RBJ2. Poverty rate is simply the

head count ratio of people living below the poverty line over the years. Literacy rate for different states overtime indicates the percentage of people who know how to read and write. Unemployment rate (both rural and urban) on the other hand are obtained from the RBI Statistical Handbook on Indian Economy for the selected years, available free of cost on the RBI website. It basically indicates the no. of people per thousand persons who do not have a gainful work even for one hour a day on the basis of weekly status approach. To test the above-mentioned hypotheses a Multivariate Regression (MLRM) is carried out keeping the incidence of human trafficking as dependent variable and the above mentioned factors as the independent variables. Table 7.1 reports the primary regression results.

Table 7.1: MLRM Regression Results

Dependent Variables	Coefficient	P-values
Poverty Rate	0.047	0.099
Literacy Rate	-9.769	0.057
Unemployment Rate (Urban)	-1.882	0.180
Unemployment Rate (Rural)	0.310	0.084
R ² = 0.840		

Source: Author's calculation

The regression result above displays that the variables such as poverty rate, literacy rate and the rural unemployment rate are the statistically significant variables at 10 percent level of significance. However urban unemployment rate comes out to be statistically insignificant and the coefficient sign is also opposite. This confirms that the first two hypotheses are true and the third hypothesis is partially true. The respective coefficients of the significant explanatory variables also have the desirable signs which proves the acceptance of the hypotheses i.e. incidence of trafficking increases with increase in poverty and

unemployment and decreases with improvement in literacy rate. This claim is also perfectly consistent with the existing literature.

8. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Human trafficking undermines the dignity and safety of its victims, flagrantly violating their fundamental human rights. Despite India's constitutional guarantees of gender equality, these principles often remain hollow promises in practice. Effectively combating trafficking and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable individuals necessitates unwavering political determination from the government to enforce anti-trafficking laws. When crime becomes intertwined with profit, as seen in human trafficking, it morphs into a profound societal menace. However, the solution remains within our grasp if decisive actions are taken, including the formulation and strict implementation of policies. Failure to act promptly risks irreversible consequences, making it imperative to act swiftly before it's too late.

To effectively combat cross-border trafficking, it is essential to enforce strict measures, maintain vigilant oversight along trafficking routes, and ensure social accountability. Keeping the above mentioned socio-economic driving forces of human trafficking in mind, the following policy recommendations can be made:

- t. Implementing strategies to enhance social protection and generate job opportunities.
- ..
11. Implementing necessary actions to eradicate gender-based discrimination in the workplace, thereby guaranteeing equal pay for equal work and equal employment opportunities based on gender equality.
111. Creating initiatives that provide livelihood alternatives and encompass essential education, literacy, communication, and skill-building, while also diminishing obstacles to entrepreneurship.
- 1v. Promoting gender awareness and education to foster equal and respectful relationships between genders, thereby preventing

violence against women.

- v. Guaranteeing the implementation of policies that enable women to have equitable access to and authority over economic and financial resources.

Along with these the legislative and awareness measures stand equally important in controlling this atrocious crime to some extent. Making use of the assistance of NGOs and law enforcement agencies, advertising through mainstream media in targeted areas, and organizing awareness campaigns in villages, local schools, and among underprivileged children to alert the public about the risks of victimization may prove to be useful. Besides these, enacting penal legislation, as well as fostering bilateral and multilateral cooperation is needed to be implemented in no time to discourage the demand that fuels various forms of exploitation, particularly against women and children, and eventually contributes to trafficking.

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We have to consistently shift our efforts from mere firefighting with a formal executable framework to protect, prevent, and prosecute effectively. Moving to our next chapter to take Regional viewpoints, especially those of our neighbours, warrant thoughtful consideration. A broader perspective includes listening to what they have to say. The focus of this chapter is the BRICS nations and their regional dynamics.