



Working together  
[www.asistentasociala.ro](http://www.asistentasociala.ro)

## **Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială**

Review of research and social intervention

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

Selected by coverage in Social Sciences Citation Index, ISI databases

---

### **Feminization of Migration and Trafficking of Women in Mexico**

*Arun Kumar ACHARYA*

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2010, vol. 30, pp. 19-38

The online version of this article can be found at:

[www.cceol.com](http://www.cceol.com)

[www.asistentasociala.ro](http://www.asistentasociala.ro)

[www.expertprojects.ro](http://www.expertprojects.ro)

---

Published by:

Lumen Publishing House

On behalf of:

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

Additional services and information about Social Work in Romania  
can be found at:

Virtual Ressources Center in Social Work

[www.asistentasociala.ro](http://www.asistentasociala.ro)



# Feminization of Migration and Trafficking of women in Mexico<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Arun Kumar ACHARYA<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*Young women from rural areas in Mexico are encouraged to migrate to urban areas to help their families and are then exposed to highly vulnerable situations of sexual exploitation. Every year 10,000 women trafficked internally in Mexico to meet the demand of sex market. This process results a greater health risk in particular to their sexual health, which explored in this research. Seventy three trafficked women were interviewed in La Merced red-light area of Mexico City. Trafficked women in Mexico were basically young women, little educated and unmarried. They were working as prostitutes in hotels and living with pimp. The suffered a wide range of physical and sexual violence. Unwanted pregnancy and forced abortion were common; 65% had had at least one time abortion. All most all women had been infected by sexually transmitted diseases due to their sexual behavior and violence which they confront in their daily life.*

## Introduction

Migratory movements were as old as humankind, as people leave their place of origin in search of a better life or livelihood. Recent global trend of migration has emerged as feminization of migration. The percentage of women in the migrant population in both internal as well as international has been increasing during the last few decades. Thus, today globalization, feminization, trafficking and migration evolved as intertwined issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> This article has been made possible through the financial support from PAICYT 2007-2008, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey, Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Av. Lázaro Cárdenas Ote. y Paseo de la Reforma S/N, Campus Mederos U.A.N.L., C.P. 64930, Monterrey, N.L. Mexico Monterrey, N.L, Phone/Fax: (0052) 81 8329 4237, Email: acharya\_77@yahoo.com

Nowadays, women were increasingly migrating as the main economic providers, or “breadwinners” for their households. The growing number of female in migration process is an inevitable outcome of feminization of poverty and feminization of employment in world labor market. The contributing factors to feminization of employment are female labor in cheap, flexible, unorganized, also women can be employed as piece rate, part time, home based work and female migrants can be forced to accept low waged, undervalued job in the informal sector. The “feminization of migration” had also produced specifically female forms of migration, such as the commercialized migration of domestic workers and caregivers, the migration and trafficking of women for the sex industry, and the organized migration of women for marriage. Today, women constituted 49.6 per cent of global migratory flows, though the proportion varied significantly by country and could be as high as 70 to 80 per cent in some cases (UNDP, 2005).

Women migration in Mexico has become increasingly feminized since 1960 and early 70s basically to Mexico City. Changes are evident not only in the increased volume, but also in the diversified patterns of migration. In recent decades, migration trends have seen an increasing feminization with the numbers of unskilled female migrants in some streams surpassing that of men. Most of the Mexican women work in city as house maids, vegetable/fruit sellers, road side stall (*ambulantes*), handicraft, labor in construction, entertainers and sex workers.

The feminization of migration in Mexico reflecting the fact that today, more than 50 per cent of migrant workers in informal sector in Mexico city are women. However, as the number of migrant women increased, the number of the abuse and exploitation has also risen. Since most migrants work at the bottom rung of the occupational hierarchy, they are extremely vulnerable. The problem includes sexual harassment, rape, non-payment or underpayment of wages, verbal/physical abuse, and so on.

The accelerated pace of globalization with sex tourism has contributed to feminization and trafficking of women who are most vulnerable. Proportion of women who are involved in migration process (internal/international) is increasing rapidly. Lack of employment, poverty in the place of origin represents the major factors leading to female migration. Specific gender related issues become evident when female migrants suffer human abuse because of their dual vulnerability as migrant as well as woman, trafficking cannot be separated from globalization and livelihood issue.

Today, many international organizations started addressing the issue of female migration. For instance, the UN Population Conference in Cairo, UN Women’s Conference in Beijing, General Assembly, and other international conferences and meeting have been addressing the problems that migrant women are facing. The UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution on Violence Against Migrant Women workers in 1994 and the Resolution was also adopted by the UN

Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights, both of which have started taking initiatives in encouraging member States to adopt and implement effective measures to protect migrant women. However, despite these growing attention and problems, there has not been any systematic research to explain the mechanism and the patterns of female migration with relation to trafficking. Most studies simply compile descriptive country cases without systematic analysis or without providing empirical evidence. Very little research has been done to analyze the national patterns of women's movement with trafficking and their health status. This research aims to fill this gap.

### **The Scope of Research**

The principal aim of this paper is to examine the temporary female labor migration and trafficking of women to Mexico City. The paper has two sections. Section one is concerned with volume of migrant women to Mexico City and their occupation in informal sector and the section two deals with trafficking of Mexican women to Mexico City.

### **Research Methodology**

For the present research data has been obtained from secondary and primary sources. To analyze the feminization of migration to informal sector, the data has been taken from 1995-1999 ENEU data base and 2000-2004 ENE data set of INEGI, whereas data for trafficking of women obtained from the primary sources.

Trafficked women are treated as a hidden population, thus an appropriate and flexible methodology was pursued during field-work. To locate the trafficked women in Mexico City, first, we identified a client through a regular visit to the brothel area 'La Merced' and later, developed a friendly relation by inviting him to our house, cinema and for lunch and dinner. Once we gained his confidence, we informed him of our research project and asked him to find a brothel owner (pimp) who could help us in our research. At the beginning he declined to help as this would be very dangerous but after one month of regular interaction he agreed and arranged an appointment with a brothel owner. After discussing our research with the brothel owner, we told her that we needed to identify some trafficked women for interviews. We explained the meaning of women trafficking and how it differs from other women who are in prostitution. She agreed to co-operate but would charge 50 pesos (US\$ 5) per information and whenever she found a trafficked woman she would call us for the interview.

Once we arrived at the brothel to collect the information about a trafficked woman, we would go to the indicated woman, produce our identity, and ask her

about the interview. Most of these women solicit their clients at the roadside in front of the hotel where they worked; however, it was not possible to interview there since they were in constant vigilance of the pimp. So, when the woman did not have a client we were paying the solicited amount and take her to the hotel room as a “client.” We adopted this method to keep our identity hidden from the pimp and traffickers, and once getting into the hotel room, we would take the interview.

At the beginning of the interview we offered the women to come to our house, to another hotel or a restaurant, but they always responded with a “no.” They would say “...this is our area; it is not possible for us to go out from these place, because *madrina* (madam) do not permit us to work in other places...”. Often they questioned us: “...all kind of services are available in this hotel, so why do you want to go to other places?” Since these women were not allowed to leave the hotel, we acted as a client. In the hotel room, we would take the interview, which lasted around 30 minutes. After completion of the interview, we would invite the woman to help us to find other trafficked women like her. Using this snowball method, 60 interviews through a semi-structured questionnaire and 13 in-depth interviews conducted during 2004 and 2005 among the women who were trafficked from the countryside as well as from different urban centers of Mexico to Mexico City. All these interviews were conducted in Spanish.

## Section I

In the year 1994, there were 39.4 per cent of country’s internal migrants concentrated in only Mexico City, and this increased to 41.9 per cent by 1995. By 1970, Mexico City (which by then included the Federal District and 11 municipalities in the State of Mexico) had observed 47.8 per cent of the total inter state movements in the country. Between 1965 and 1970, in-migration involved 825,000 individuals, and between 1975 and 1980 in-migration peaked at about 1 million. During 1985-90, in-migration decreased to 559,000 (CONAPO, 1997).

In-migration to the nation’s capital was explained on the basis of the attraction to migrants, who were mainly of rural origin, of the concentration of economic opportunities, and as a result of the industrialization model based on the substitution of imported goods, adopted since the Second World War Underpinning such explanations were a variety of theoretical perspectives, including modernization, historical structural, social reproduction and family survival strategy approaches.

Till 1970, Mexico City was a pole of attraction for the male migrants but there after a steady growth in migration of women observed and it is continuing, where more than 70 per cent observed in informal sector of the city. The table 1 and

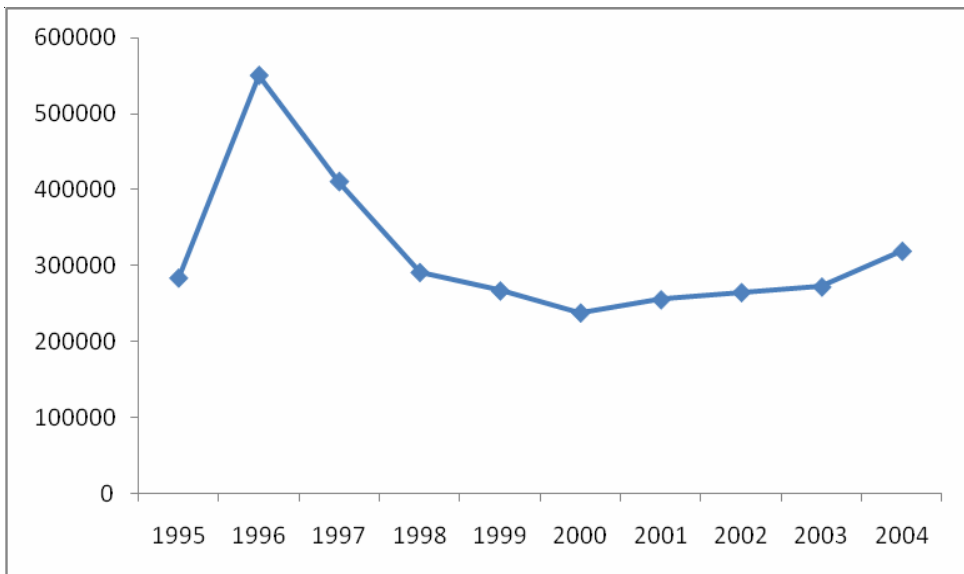
figure 1 presents the total number of migrant women in informal sector during 1995-2004 in Mexico City.

Table 1 Number of migrant women in informal sector in Mexico City, 1995-2004

| Year | Number of women |
|------|-----------------|
| 1995 | 283984          |
| 1996 | 550061          |
| 1997 | 410521          |
| 1998 | 291351          |
| 1999 | 267095          |
| 2000 | 238150          |
| 2001 | 255504          |
| 2002 | 264956          |
| 2003 | 272229          |
| 2004 | 319271          |

Sources: 1995-99 ENEU data base and 2000-2004 ENE, INEGI data base

Figure 1. Female labor migrants to informal sector in Mexico City



Sources: 1995-99 ENEU data base and 2000-2004 ENE, INEGI data base

The above table and figure indicates that during 1995 and 1997 there was a steady growth of female migrant to informal sectors, due to economic crisis and pesos devaluation in Mexico. Though, a down fall observe in total female migrant to informal sector after 1997 to 2000, but after that the flow increases again due to failure in the Mexican economic reform. It is important to note here that most

migrant women who are employed in informal sectors basically are from central and southern states of Mexico. Nearly 91 per cent of women migrate from the states of Chiapas, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Estado de Mexico, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Puebla and Veracruz (see table 2 and map 1).

Table 2: Total female migrants in informal sector in Mexico City during 1995-2004

| States           | 1995  | 1996  | 1997  | 1998   | 1999   | 2000  | 2001  | 2002  | 2003   | 2004   |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Chiapas          | 10703 | 4412  | 3912  | 2413   | 4230   | 5781  | 2426  | 3377  | 5934   | 8620   |
| Guanajuato       | 18887 | 12699 | 18148 | 19255  | 21163  | 13167 | 11025 | 12517 | 15173  | 18156  |
| Guerrero         | 14481 | 14017 | 10745 | 14495  | 14732  | 8275  | 12786 | 10418 | 14038  | 22640  |
| Hidalgo          | 21838 | 14505 | 20563 | 24050  | 16703  | 14123 | 11876 | 18626 | 12771  | 17307  |
| Estado de México | 89633 | 82167 | 87955 | 103235 | 106828 | 75744 | 91880 | 91130 | 100414 | 136787 |
| Michoacán        | 23205 | 13488 | 16896 | 23446  | 16569  | 15279 | 18328 | 20518 | 20015  | 15952  |
| Oaxaca           | 26443 | 26045 | 26562 | 28829  | 16942  | 32075 | 27651 | 29485 | 23759  | 22384  |
| Puebla           | 23160 | 23169 | 22383 | 28654  | 33461  | 27387 | 33740 | 32346 | 23744  | 28078  |
| Veracruz         | 17108 | 11421 | 20193 | 14221  | 15750  | 14434 | 13416 | 17547 | 23744  | 19605  |

Sources: 1995-99 ENEU data base and 2000-2004 ENE, INEGI data base.

Map 2: Political map of Mexico



Source: [www.tatfoundation.org/mexico.htm](http://www.tatfoundation.org/mexico.htm)

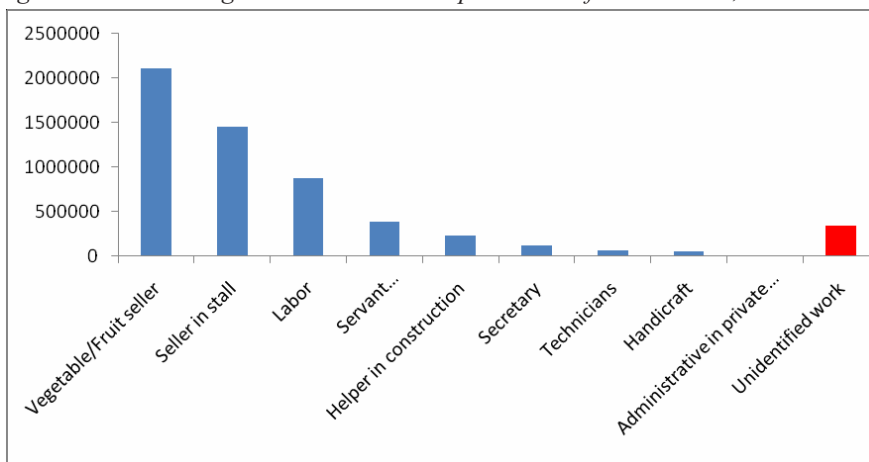
Economically active in informal sectors migrant women occupied as vegetable and fruits sellers, seller in stall, labor, as well as domestic or restaurant servant, helper in construction sector, secretary, technicians, handicraft and administrative job in private sector. Whereas a large number of women are engaged in unidentified work, which includes like prostitution, bar girl etc. (see table 3 and figure 2). Most of these women are forced enters to sex market through an organized trafficking net-work. The above data support to my hypothesis of feminization of migration to informal sectors has a strong relation to trafficking and prostitution. Though, the process of globalization coupled with displacement and increasing poverty has caused a massive increase and influx in the numbers of women and girls migrating and often trafficked from various part of Mexico to the capital city.

Table 3: Number of migrant women according to their occupation in informal sector 1995-2004

| Informal sector                  | Number of women |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Vegetable/Fruit seller           | 2105011         |
| Seller in stall                  | 1456018         |
| Labor                            | 876144          |
| Servant (Domestic/Restaurant)    | 391894          |
| Helper in construction           | 235305          |
| Secretary                        | 119933          |
| Technicians                      | 62227           |
| Handicraft                       | 54784           |
| Administrative in private sector | 8243            |
| Unidentified work                | 338840          |

Sources: 1995-99 ENEU data base and 2000-2004 ENE, INEGI data base

Figure 2: Female migrants and their occupation in informal sector, 1995-2004



Sources: 1995-99 ENEU data base and 2000-2004 ENE, INEGI data base



## Section II

### *Trafficking of women in Mexico*

In the last two decades, research in Mexico has shifted towards an understanding of heterogeneity of those involved in the sex industry and the broader social determinants of their health and well being. To date, it is difficult to tell the exact number of women being trafficked into the prostitution business but some evidence does exist to enable us to analyze how big this figure may be. For example, Teresa Ulloa, President of Regional Coalition Against Trafficking of Women and Children in Latin America and Caribbean stated that every day 400 women enter into prostitution<sup>3</sup> in Mexico City, out of which 80% are against their will (González, 2003). In another study, Acharya and Stevaneto (2005) found nearly 10,000 young girls and women are trafficked annually in Mexico to various cities such as Mexico City, Cancun, Acapulco, Ciudad Juarez, Monterrey, for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The same study underlines that in Chiapas the southern state of Mexico for every 10 trafficked women 7 are trafficked inside the country and 3 are taken outside the country. The same research also indicates that after the 1994 economic crisis and peso devaluation in Mexico, the sexual tourism in the country is booming and one result is the increase of trafficking of women.

### *General characteristics of trafficked women*

It is very difficult to underline a specific cause for trafficking in Mexico, but this study has ascertained that trafficking of women is a result of “multi-causal factors”. During the interviews, women were cited a wide range of factors which motivated them towards the trafficking. The motivations underlined by the Mexican trafficked women were unemployment, poverty, gender-based violence, deserted by husband and ethnic conflict, including other factors like machismo, lack of education, corruption etc. had given the base of trafficking risks to women (see table 4).

Looking into the gravity of women’s socioeconomic situation and necessity, trafficker promises various kinds of employments with high remuneration including food, shelter and travel cost, as well as exotic life in different cities of Mexico and United States, which in reality did not exist. It is important to underline that to earn the confidence of woman including her family members the trafficker presents himself in front of the victim as an employment agent (*agencia de empleo*). To get success on his plan, trafficker plays varieties of tricks like

---

<sup>3</sup> This figure includes trafficked and non-trafficked women.

increase the salary, five days work in a week, etc. and for this he takes various sessions to convince them, and if woman and her family get agree, he arrange the travel. Once their journey start, trafficker many times put the woman in temporary locations and gives diverse training, including: negotiating with clients, kind of clothing to wear, how to perform the sexual relation(s) and rules and regulations of the brothel such as not leaving the brothel without the permission of owner or not to talk or give personal information to anyone about themselves or others.

Table 4: Motivation of trafficking in Mexico

| No. | First reason        | Percentage        | Second reason         | Percentage         | Third reason        | Percentage        |
|-----|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1   | Poverty             | 31.7 (19)         | Unemployment          | <b>46.7 (28)</b>   | Unemployment        | <b>43.2 (16)</b>  |
| 2   | Unemployment        | 20.0 (12)         | Poverty               | <b>35.0 (21)</b>   | Poverty             | <b>18.9 (7)</b>   |
| 3   | Domestic Violence   | 10.0 (6)          | Domestic Violence     | <b>6.7 (4)</b>     | Ambition            | <b>13.6 (5)</b>   |
| 4   | Infertility         | 10.0 (6)          | Gender Discrimination | <b>6.6 (4)</b>     | Others <sup>3</sup> | <b>24.3 (9)</b>   |
| 5   | Ethnic conflict     | 8.3 (5)           | Others <sup>2</sup>   | <b>5.0 (3)</b>     | <b>Total</b>        | <b>100.0 (37)</b> |
| 6   | Others <sup>1</sup> | 20.0 (12)         | <b>Total</b>          | <b>100. 0 (60)</b> |                     |                   |
|     | <b>Total</b>        | <b>100.0 (60)</b> |                       |                    |                     |                   |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

<sup>1</sup> Other includes deserted by husband, engagement, gender discrimination, Coercion y widow.

<sup>2</sup> Others includes deserted by husband and ambition.

<sup>3</sup> Others include domestic violence, deserted by husband, tradition practices of prostitution, Ethnic conflict and gender discrimination.

Information gathered during the field work indicates that false promises of employment as well as exotic life in cities and foreign countries (basically to USA) is a common tactic for traffickers to trafficked the women in Mexico. When the women reached their destination and realized what they would have to do, they would not accept the job, after which both pimps and traffickers used various kinds of violence to force the women to stay and work in the brothel. Many women cited that after leaving home, their life was converted into a life of violence. This kind of violence has lots of impact on the health of women (see table 5).

Table 5: Promises made by traffickers prior to trafficking.

| Kind of promises  | Mexico       |           |
|---|--------------|-----------|
|   | Percentage   | Number    |
| Permanent employment with habitation and high remuneration in Mexico City | 11.7         | 7         |
| Marriage  | 21.7         | 13        |
| Domestic servant  | 11.7         | 7         |
| Employment in United States   | 48.3         | 29        |
| Others <sup>1</sup>   | 6.6          | 4         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>100.0</b> | <b>60</b> |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

<sup>1</sup>Others includes promises like making a model and employment in industry.

Out of the total sample of 60 trafficked women respondents, 12 were from urban and 48 from rural areas and mostly trafficked from central and southern states of Mexico. Trafficked women in Mexico City were significantly younger; nearly 72% were aged less than 24 years (see map 2). One of the important characteristics of this illicit market is only young women are taken into consideration. Basically, pimps do not prefer women who are older in age. According to one brothel owner: “...woman after the 25 years old is considered as older and aged for this industry and also clients do not prefer this kind of woman...”. She explained most of the time clients used to tell her: “...The aged women do not have the same passion as a 15 years have....”.

Map 2: Mexican states have high incidence of trafficking of women



Source: Information obtained from field work.

When it came to educational attainment of trafficked women, more than half of them have primary and above primary level education. In terms of their marital status, 63% were unmarried, 15% were married, 6.7% were divorced and 15% were single mothers. This reflects the majority of the trafficked women were single and unmarried women. As one pimp cited: “....*I do not want to buy a married woman even a divorced, because for me she is just like a used cloth, where she does not have the same smell like a new one....*”.

It is important to point out that the brothel is treated as a market, where prostitutes are treated as a commodity, and in this place each aspect depends on the loss and gain. For example, if a pimp buys a 20-year-old married or divorced woman who is less preferred by clients, the pimp is not obtaining the optimum earning from the woman. This woman can work in the brothel a maximum of 4 to 5 years (as women more than 25 years old are considered aged in this business). Whereas, if a pimp buys a young woman 15 years old or less, she can easily work for a minimum of 7 to 8 years. This young woman is highly preferred by clients and generates a high profit for the pimp. Thus, a brothel owner is gaining more money when she is buying an unmarried-young woman than an elder married woman.

Looking at the other demographic characteristics of the trafficked women, 65% interviewed were mestizo ethnic group (Spanish mixed race) and 35% were indigenous. The question is: *why were more women mestizo?* After a conversation with several pimps and traffickers, we determined that mestizo women are highly preferred by the clients because of their white skin color. One pimp said: “....*clients do not want to have the sex with dark skin girl, they do not prefer indigenous women, though I can buy an indigenous woman for a cheaper price than a mestizo, but on her my (economic) gain is very marginal...*”. In general, the Spanish mixed people in Mexico have fair skin, whereas, the indigenous have dark skin. This indicates another characteristic of this market. However, it was also found that nearly 62% of the women never worked prior to their trafficking while others were working as a domestic servant or in their own agricultural field.

### ***Exposure to Violence***

Much of the available empirical research on trafficked women and commercial sex indicates that women experience high levels of violence, including, but not limited to, physical and sexual assaults, verbal threats or abuse, psychological abuse (Lowman, 2000, Raymond, 2004, Acharya, 2006). However, some researchers analyzed that violence is ubiquitous in all forms of prostitution (Barry, 1995) while others believed the incidence of violence varies enormously in different prostitution venues. Also, it may vary from one brothel owner and trafficker to another.

Table 7: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

| Demographic characteristics           | Percentage | Number |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--------|
| <b>Age (years completed)</b>          |            |        |
| Less than 20                          | 41.7       | 25     |
| 20 to 24                              | 30.0       | 18     |
| More than 24                          | 28.3       | 17     |
| <b>Educational status</b>             |            |        |
| Illiterate                            | 20.0       | 12     |
| Literate up to primary                | 53.3       | 32     |
| More than primary                     | 26.7       | 16     |
| <b>Marital status</b>                 |            |        |
| Unmarried                             | 63.3       | 38     |
| Married                               | 15.0       | 9      |
| Divorced/Deserted by husband          | 6.7        | 4      |
| Unmarried mother                      | 15.0       | 9      |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>                      |            |        |
| Mestizo (Spanish origin)              | 65.0       | 39     |
| Indigenous                            | 35.0       | 21     |
| <b>Employment before trafficking</b>  |            |        |
| Never worked                          | 61.7       | 37     |
| Domestic servant                      | 11.7       | 7      |
| Working in the own agricultural field | 26.6       | 16     |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

This new emphasis on the domination of power and suppression in trafficking of women is long overdue. This study suggests that we need to proceed cautiously when assessing claims about the frequency and nature of the violence perpetrated by pimps and traffickers. During the interviews and analysis, it was clearly found that the incidence of both physical and sexual violence at the hand of traffickers and pimps is common in the life cycle of these trafficked women, which do not have any limit. Here, I have analyzed the women who were exposed to physical and sexual violence during one week and again after one month at the time of interview. The results show that after one week: 70% of the women were beaten with an object, 100% were abused verbally, 30% were locked in the house without food, 15% were intended to be burned by traffickers or madam, 28.3% drugged by cigarette, 38.3% were threatened to be killed by the madam, 10% and 1.6% women reported that madam put chili powder in their eyes and vagina, whereas 21.7% were raped by clients and traffickers and 45% were forced by the madam to have sex with more than one client at a time (see table 8).

Table 8: Exposure to Physical and Sexual Violence

| Exposure to Violence                                   | In past one week |        | In past one month |        |
|--|------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|
|  | Percentage       | Number | Percentage        | Number |
| Beaten with objects                                    | 70.0             | 42     | 100.0             | 60     |
| Abused verbally  | 100.0            | 60     | 100.0             | 60     |
| Locked in the house/hotel/lodge without food           | 30.0             | 18     | 65.0              | 39     |
| Intended to burn                                       | 15.0             | 9      | 51.7              | 31     |
| Drugged by cigarette                                   | 28.3             | 17     | 95.0              | 57     |
| Threaten to kill                                       | 38.3             | 23     | 100.0             | 60     |
| Put chili powder in the eyes                           | 10.0             | 6      | 81.7              | 49     |
| Put chili powder in vagina                             | 1.6              | 1      | 81.7              | 49     |
| Raped by clients and traffickers                       | 21.7             | 13     | 93.3              | 56     |
| Forced to have sex with more than one client at a time | 45.0             | 27     | 98.3              | 59     |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

This clearly indicates the incidence of violence against women during one week is extremely inhuman and cruel, whereas in one month period the intensity of aggression was increased. A woman indicated during the interview: “...for us violence is common, it is nothing new, we are habituated on this, here we do not have the right of our body, here we treated just like an animal, it is madrina (madam) who decide all for us, when we have to work, with whom we have to work, what to do or not, when we have to eat, sleep etc., all these depend on her, we do not have right to tell a ‘no’, if we do not follow her words she just use her power in many ways, for her our life is nothing, in this place her dog has more respect than us....”. Thus, once the woman obligates herself to enter into this profession she is subject to exploitation and a victim of ill health.

### ***Sexual Behavior of Trafficked Women***

The sexual behavior of trafficked women is very important as it is closely related to their sexual health. It also encompasses the problems of HIV and STIs/RTIs, unintended pregnancy and abortion, infertility, cancer resulting from STIs, and sexual dysfunction. The sexual behavior of women in commercial sex can be assessed through the number of clients they receive in a day and according to their typical sexual relation. To get a more complete idea of the sexual behavior of trafficked women, the following information was collected during the interviews:

Ten percent of the women had one to four clients in a day, 47% of the women received 5 to 8 clients and 43% of the women had physical relations with more than 8 clients per day (see table 9). This indicated that there was a differential characteristic on receiving of clients by women. To find out this differentiation, a bi-variate analysis was done among the age of women and their total residential time<sup>4</sup> in the brothel with the number of clients received in a day. The result indicated an inverse relationship between the age of the women and number of clients. As the age of the women increased, the number of clients per day decreased due to client preference as cited earlier. Also, the clients' chose women who had not worked many years in the brothel because the client thought that the older woman might have been infected by diseases. A customer confessed "...if I want to eat a fruit, I should eat it before it ripens....".

Table 9: Number of Clients Received in a Day

| Number of clients | Percentage | Number |
|-------------------|------------|--------|
| 1-4               | 10.0       | 6      |
| 5-8               | 46.7       | 28     |
| More than 8       | 43.3       | 26     |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

In order to understand the sexual behavior of trafficked women, I asked if they used condoms during their sexual relations, and if used, how frequently? Including, how many types of physical relations did they practice with their clients? On the basis of these questions, it was observed that 31.7% women never used condoms, 46.7% used sometimes and 21.6% always used the condom at the time of sex. This information shows how vulnerable this population would be for infections transmitted via sexual intercourse (see table 10) as little protection is used during sex. The reason for the negligence of safe sex is not that women do not want to use the condom, but it is the pimp who forces the women to have sex without a condom with the intention to earn more money. When a woman has sex without a condom, the client pays more money. Trafficked women are ordered not to use the condom so it is impossible to negotiate with the client.

The sex practices by the women indicated they were practicing a wide range of sexual activity at a time as per the demand of clients. Only one woman conveyed during the interview that she only used vaginal sex with her clients, whereas, 25% practiced both vaginal and oral sex and 73.3% had vaginal, oral and anal sex (see table 10).

<sup>4</sup> I have divided the residential period of trafficked women into three categories, i.e. less than one year, one to two years and more than two years.

Table 10: Typical Sexual Behavior of Women

| Sexual behavior                   | Percentage | Number |
|-----------------------------------|------------|--------|
| <b>Use of condom</b>              |            |        |
| Never                             | 31.7       | 19     |
| Sometimes                         | 46.7       | 28     |
| Always                            | 21.6       | 13     |
| <b>Sex practices with clients</b> |            |        |
| Only vaginal                      | 1.7        | 1      |
| Vaginal and Oral                  | 25.0       | 15     |
| Vaginal, Anal and Oral            | 73.3       | 44     |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

### Proximate health risks

The environment where these women are living with their sexual behavior and the severity of violence can be evaluated by the unwanted pregnancies and forced abortions. Of the total 60 women interviewed, 40% were exposed to an unwanted pregnancy, of which, 38.31% had an abortion (see table 11). Among them (38.31%), 65.2% reported that they had at least one abortion after their trafficking, 30.4% had two and 4.3% women had more than two abortions. During our conversation with the women, we found that in very few cases was the abortion performed on the women in a clinic; it happened only when the madam came to know about the pregnancy in a very late stage. In the other cases, women reported when their madam came to know about their pregnancy after two or three weeks, she gave some medicines and few days later they lost their baby.

Table 11: Exposure to Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion

| Unwanted pregnancy |         | Abortion   |         | Number of abortion |          |                   |
|--------------------|---------|------------|---------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Percentage         | Number  | Percentage | Number  | 1 time             | 2 time   | More than 2 times |
| 40.0               | 24 (60) | 38.31      | 23 (24) | 65.2 (15)          | 30.4 (7) | 4.3 (1)           |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

The precarious living environment, deficiency in nutrition, insufficient physical rest and intense physical and psychological violence results in illness and suffering among the trafficked women. The most common health problem among the trafficked women is fever (60%), backache (56%), and sleep disorder (55%). Thirty five percent women indicated that they have irregular menstruation, 31.7% have stomach and back pain during menstruation, 43.3% had heavy bleeding during menstruation, 41.7% have pain during intercourse, 46.7% had bleeding after intercourse, 25% had lower abdominal pain, 45% had abnormal vaginal



discharge and 36.7% had burning sensation while urine pass (see table 12). Thus, the results above indicate that trafficked women are facing serious health problems.

In an earlier discussion, we saw the use of the condom was very minimal and the women worked in very subhuman conditions. They also did not have access to good medical facilities. If they had any health problems, the madam was the only indicated person to take them to the clinic located near the brothel. Information obtained during the fieldwork found most of these fake clinics. There are also numerous drug stores located near the brothel where they sell imitation medicines, as well as, medicine with expired dates at a cheaper price. If a woman reports her health problem to the madam, the madam first gives some kind of medicine; and, in an emergency she is taken to the clinic. But, before going to the clinic, the madam would tell her not to give any identification nor mention anything to the doctor. After returning from the clinic, the madam, never showed the woman the bill but would mention to the woman she spent a lot of money and asked her to repay by taking more clients. The poor woman accepted whatever the madam said as she did not have other options.

Table 12: Number of Women Currently Have Health Problems

| Types of health problem                   | Percentage | Number |
|---|------------|--------|
| Fever                                     | 60.0       | 36     |
| Backache                                  | 56.7       | 34     |
| Sleep disorder                            | 55.0       | 33     |
| Irregular menstruation                    | 35.0       | 21     |
| Stomach and back pain during menstruation | 31.7       | 19     |
| Heavy bleeding during menstruation        | 43.3       | 26     |
| Pain during intercourse                   | 41.7       | 25     |
| Bleeding after intercourse                | 46.7       | 28     |
| Lower abdominal pain                      | 25.0       | 15     |
| Abnormal vaginal discharge                | 45.0       | 27     |
| Burning sensation while urine pass        | 36.7       | 22     |
| Itching or irritation                     | 48.3       | 29     |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

Our questions and analysis on the reproductive health problems of each woman during the last six months produced the following results. Nearly 57% of trafficked women have burning sensation, pain or difficulty during urination, whereas, 63.3% cited they had pain on lower abdominal or in vagina during intercourse and nearly 62% identified that during vaginal discharge they had problems of itching or ulcer on both sides of the vagina. 48.3% of the trafficked women had problems of discharging with lower abdominal pain and fever during the discharge (table 13).

Table 13: Number of Women with Reproductive Health Problems during past six months

| <b>Reproductive health problem</b>   | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Number</b> |
|--|-------------------|---------------|
| Burning sensation, pain or difficulty during urinating                           | 56.7              | 34            |
| Pain on lower abdominal pain or vagina during intercourse                        | 63.3              | 38            |
| During vaginal discharge have problem of itching or ulcer on both side of vagina | 61.7              | 37            |
| Problem of discharge with lower abdominal pain                                   | 48.3              | 29            |
| Fever during discharge   | 48.3              | 29            |

Source: Data obtained from field work.

## Discussion

The above discussion gives a vision that no one in Mexico could be more vulnerable to sexual violence than the women forced into trafficking. It has been suggested throughout this study, the health consequences are commonly severe and long lasting among trafficked women. The trauma of sexual coercion and assault at different stages of their life cycle leaves many of these women with severe loss of self-esteem and autonomy. This, in turn, means they do not always make the best sexual and reproductive health decisions for themselves. Many of them accept victimization as ‘part of being female’.

The trafficked women in Mexico are in serious health risk. The women’s ability to protect themselves from STDs and HIV/AIDS is drastically weakened by the threat of madam’s violence, which exposes them to forced and unprotected sex. Their ability to negotiate condom use by their male partners is inversely related to the extent or degree of abuse in their relationship. Not only do they run serious risks of physical and sexual violence, but they are also stigmatized as the main carrier for the spreading of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS.

Today in Mexico, about 102,575 persons are living with the deadly virus of HIV (Secretaria de Salud, 2003). Most of the study conducted on prostitution in Mexico identified the sex workers as “a major reservoir of sexually transmitted diseases” and has resulted in prostitution being seen as the cause of disease rather than the consequence of economic marginalization. Inevitably, it also drew attention away from male sexual behavior and put the onus of disease prevention on the women. While much of the literature has focused on the potential of sex workers to infect others with HIV and to treat them as “diseases carriers,” little has been written about the need to protect sex workers from abuse and disease.

This study provides a clear documentation about the level of sexual and physical violence against the trafficked women and it underlines the need to address safety for sex workers caught up with issues of legality and stigma. Likewise, the economic and social conditions, which create the necessity for trafficking have been neglected, but are vital to address if women are to have other viable options to support themselves and their family.

*These days, trafficking of women cuts across social and economic conditions deeply embedded in the cultures around the world, where millions of women consider it a way of life. This kind of violence against women rarely results in finite consequences that can be addressed with a prescriptive or band-aid approach. Trafficking harms women in insidious ways that create messy health problems. The physical and mental health consequences are not a side effect of trafficking but a central theme.*

This study suggests trafficking of women is now an important national issue which requires an urgent and concrete response. Till date the government of Mexico has not done enough to combat and prevent the trafficking of persons especially of women in the country. Though in the month of February, 2007 Mexican senate passed the law of prevention and sanction on trafficking of person under the federal law against the delinquency and the federal code of penal procedures, but the result is yet to analyze. The gravity of the situation has sent shock waves in the Mexican society due to the AIDS pandemic. A comprehensive approach is essential to address the economic, social and political aspects of trafficking in women. It is necessary to deal with the perpetrators, as well as, to assist the victims of trafficking.

## References

- Acharya, A. and A.S. Stevanato (2005). *Violencia y tráfico de mujeres en México: Una perspectiva de Género Estudios Feministas*, 13(3): 507-524, Brazil.
- Acharya, A. (2004). *Explotación sexual y violencia contra mujeres: un estudio de aproximación al tráfico de mujeres en la India*, *Dialogo Antropológicas*, 6(2), Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, UNAM, Mexico City, Mexico.
- Acharya, A. (2006). *International Migration and Trafficking of Mexican Women to United States*, In Karen D. Beeks and Delila Amir, editor. *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*, Lexington Books, ISBN. 0-7391-1313-5, USA, 21-32.
- Barry, K. (1995). *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, New York: New York University Press.
- Binh, V.N. (2006). *Trafficking of Women and Children in Vietnam: Current Issues and Problems*, In Karen D. Beeks and Delila Amir, editor. *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*, Lexington Books, ISBN. 0-7391-1313-5, USA.
- Castillo, D.N., Jenkins EL. (1994) *Industries and occupations at high risk for work-related homicide* *Journal Occupational and Environment Medicine*, 36:125–132.

- CONASIDA. (1999). *Reportes de Actividades de Conasida, 1994-1999*, Mexico.
- Conde G.C. et al. (1993) STD's prevalence studies among different populations in Mexico City, Ninth International Conference on AIDS, June, vol II, abstract PO-C20-3070:729. Berlin, Germany.
- Dirección General de Epidemiología, SSA. (1989). *Mujeres dedicadas a la prostitución, Informe final: evaluación del impacto de la estrategia educativa para la prevención del sida en México-1987-1988*, SSA-Population Council, Mexico.
- Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). (2001). *Human Rights and Trafficking in Persons: A Handbook*. GAATW, Bangkok.
- González, R. (2003). *Violencia contra las mujeres deja un millón de víctimas anuales en México*, CIMAC, Mexico.
- ICWAD Trafficking Facts. (2004). International Commission for Women of African Descent. [www.npcbw.org/newweb/icwad\\_04\\_trafficking\\_facts.htm](http://www.npcbw.org/newweb/icwad_04_trafficking_facts.htm). Accessed 08/02/2007
- Kempadoo, K., Doezema J. (eds.). (1998). *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, New York: Routledge, p.294.
- Lowman, J. (2000). Violence and the outlaw status of (street) prostitution, *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 6, No. 9, p.987-1011.
- Potterat, J.J., Brewer D.D., Muth S.Q., Rothenberg R.B. , Woodhouse D.E., Muth J.B., Stites H.K. and Brody S. (2004). Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women, *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 159 (8), p.778-785.
- Raymond, J. (2004). Prostitution on demand: Legalizing the buyers as sexual consumers. *Violence Against Women* 6(9), p.987-1011.
- Secretaria de Salud. (2003). *Epidemiología del VIH/SIDA en México en el año 2003*, Centro Nacional para la prevención y control del VIH/SIDA, Mexico.
- Secretaria de Salud. (1993). *Informe de labores 1992-1993*, Capítulo 3.31.7. Programa de Prevención y Control del Síndrome de Inmunodeficiencia Adquirida (SIDA). Mexico.
- Secretaria de Salud. (2005). *Programa Epidemiológico del VIH/SIDA e ITS en México*, Centro Nacional para la prevención y control del VIH/SIDA, Mexico.
- Torres M.B. et al. (1990). Natural history of HIV infection in a cohort of female prostitutes in Guadalajara, Mexico, Sixth International Conference on AIDS. June 20-24, abstract FC 594:229, San Francisco.
- Torres M.B. et al. (1988). Prevalence of antibodies to HIV in prostitutes in Guadalajara, Mexico. Fourth International Conference on AIDS. June, abstract 5080:332, Stockholm.
- U.S. Department of State. (2005). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2005*, [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/62736.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/62736.htm), Accessed 08/02/2007
- United Nations General Assembly. (2000) *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Conventions Against Transnational Organized Crime*, Adopted in 15 November, G.A. Res. 25, annex II, U.N. GAOR, 55<sup>TH</sup> Sess., Supp. No. 49, at 60, U.N. Doc. A/45/49 (Vol.I) (2001). entered into force 25 December 2003
- Valdespino, J.L. et al. (1990). Profile of female prostitution in Mexico and HIV Risk factor, Sixth International Conference on AIDS. June 20-24, abstract Th.D.51:146, San Francisco.

Weitzer, R. (ed.). (2000). *Sex For Sale: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry*, New York: Routledge.

Weitzer, Ronald. (2005). New Directions in Research on Prostitution, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, 43(4-5).