

EXTENT AND NATURE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SAUDI ARABIA

Aref Alsehaimi*

Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts, University of Hail, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Background. Human trafficking, an act that degrades and seriously harms people— children, adults, women and men— is a worldwide problem. Its victims may suffer sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or organ removal. In developing countries, there are still gaps in what is known about the nature and extent of human trafficking. **Objective.** The aim of this study is to examine the extent and nature of human trafficking specifically as it relates to the Saudi Arabia. **Methods.** A thematic analysis was conducted on data collected from interviews with employees of human rights organizations and law enforcement agencies engaged in the problem of trafficking. **Results.** The study found that the commonest form of trafficking in Saudi Arabia was related to labour, followed by trafficking for the purposes of sex and illegal drugs transportation. The majority of traffickers were non-Saudis. Where Saudis were involved it was almost exclusively in regard to trafficking for labour purposes. **Conclusions.** Although the results of the interviews indicated that the Saudi government was largely unaware of the extent of human trafficking activities, the latter is clearly a significant problem within the Kingdom. This study concludes that Saudi authorities should increase their efforts to curtail trafficking.

Keywords

Saudi Arabia, human trafficking, law enforcement officials, non-Saudis and victims.

1. Introduction

One of the most heinous and treacherous crimes, of international concern, is human trafficking. This menace has influenced millions of people, taking away their dignity. All over the world, men, women and children face deception at the hands of the traffickers, who coerce them into manipulative circumstances (Sharma, 2005). Though human trafficking is mostly carried out with the intention of sexually abusing the victims, the intentions behind the trafficking of a large number of victims also include coerced labor, domestic enslavement, child labor and begging or organ removal (Belser, 2005).

There has been a substantial increase in the number of trafficking cases in the preceding decade; however, since it is carried out covertly, it is difficult to obtain accurate estimates of its extent (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007). In 2005, the International Labor Organization put a figure of approximately 2.4 million human trafficking victims worldwide. A more recent study on forced labor, however, indicated that the issue has a much larger scope (Ollus, 2015). More than 140,000 victims become entrapped in a situation of violence and humiliation for sexual exploitation in Europe. In addition, one in seven prostitutes in this region may have been forced to become sex workers after becoming victims of trafficking (Farrell *et al.*, 2010).

*Corresponding Author: Aref Alsehaimi, e-mail: ao.alsehaimi@uoh.edu.sa

The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons presented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2009 offered statistics on human trafficking on the basis of data obtained from 155 countries (Farrell *et al.*, 2010). In this report, it was stated that 79% of human trafficking is carried out for sexual exploitation, with girls and women being the principal victims. Regarding gender, women constitute the greatest percentage of traffickers in 30% countries from which information is available. The practice of women trafficked by women is quite common in certain parts of the globe (Farrell *et al.*, 2010).

Forced labor is the second most prevalent kind of human trafficking and constitutes 18% of the total trafficking across the world. However, this percentage may be an underestimate since the rates of detecting and reporting forced labor are low in comparison to those related to trafficking for sexual purposes. It was stated in the UNODC report, on a worldwide basis, children constitute nearly 20% of the trafficking victims. In some areas of Africa and the Mekong region, however, the proportion of children trafficking victims is much higher, reaching almost 100% in the case of some regions of Western Africa (Aronowitz, 2009). People are considered as commodities by human traffickers, who can be used and transferred for monetary gains. Most traffickers who have been convicted in Europe are men; however, there is a over-representation of women traffickers in comparison to other crimes because it is believed by some gangs that women are able to gain the trust of victims more easily and hence trap them (Cheah, 2007).

Organized criminal groups mislead victims or force them into an abusive context, from which it is nearly impossible for them to escape. Victims may be physically or sexually assaulted or told that their families will be punished if they try to escape. The traffickers frequently confiscate the passports of victims so that they do not have any proof of identity. When trafficking takes place between two countries, victims are typically not aware of the language of the other country (Shelley, 2010). Much effort has been made by the international community, including international organizations, national governments and regional bodies, to develop laws and regulations to stop this practice. There has been a positive response towards the steps taken for preventing trafficking, at the regional as well as global level. In the early part of the 1980s, human trafficking was confined to females. However, it has now turned into a significant issue involving both genders all over the world. It has become a high-priority concern in international politics, demanding new laws and urgent action by bodies such as the UN, ILO and EU. Organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, which offer services to victims, have emerged (Shelley, 2010).

Following the signing of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons in December 2000, trafficking was defined in more extensive, globally accepted terms. The Palermo Convention Protocol stated that: "Trafficking in persons will refer to the capturing, transfer, transport, sheltering or acceptance of individuals, by threatening them or using other kinds of force or coercion, fraud, deception, abduction, misuse of power or a position of authority or providing or acquiring payments or benefits to obtain the agreement of a person that has authority over another person, with the intention of exploitation. Exploitation includes, at the least, exploiting for sexual purposes, forced labor, enslavement or other similar kinds of slavery or organ removal" (Nicole, 2017).

2. Groups at Greatest Risk of Human Trafficking

At the international level, children constitute one out of five victims of human trafficking, while in certain poorer areas, the majority of the victims of trafficking are children. These children are exposed to begging, sex or child pornography. Often, they are forced to perform labor as it is believed that their small hands are suitable for certain tasks such as sewing luxury items and picking cocoa. There is also enslavement of children as child soldiers in war zones (Belser, 2005). Two-thirds of human trafficking victims all over the world are women. Most of these female victims are young and are tempted with fake employment opportunities. They may be subsequently drugged, raped, detained, beaten or threatened with violence, blackmailed, have debt enforced on them or have their passports seized (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007).

Boys and men are also victims of human trafficking and may be made to carry out forced labor and begging or be sexually abused and used as child soldiers. Several factors lie behind the significantly lower percentage of male victims in comparison with women. One of these is that, for several years, anti-trafficking laws all over the world concentrated on human trafficking for sexual exploitation, the victims of which are mostly females (Laczko, 2005). As human trafficking comes in different forms, a definitive, standard victim profile can not be developed. Trafficking cases occur all over the world and gender, background or ages are not considered when victims are targeted. Trafficking of children may be carried out from all over Europe to make them beg or pickpocket; young girls from Africa are deceived with false promises of modeling or jobs, after which they are sexually exploited and forced to enter pornography; Asian women may be fooled by promising them legal work, which may ultimately cause them to enter into virtual imprisonment and abuse; and both males and females from South to North America may be forced to work in farms in difficult conditions (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007).

3. Different Definitions of Human Trafficking

A key problem faced at the beginning of the study was obtaining a precise definition of human trafficking. Trafficking is conceptually defined in the dictionary as trading something that should not be traded. In human trafficking, people are criminally exploited in such a way that they are considered to be commodities and are sold to make a profit. Once they have been trafficked, they may face exploitation over a long period of time (Bellows, 1919).

In human trafficking, a person's rights are violated, and their lives are endangered; it is a crime carried out against an individual and not against the state. Definitions of the term vary, most notably between different countries (Laczko & Gozdzia, 2005). Different countries may also disagree on how they differentiate between activities such as smuggling, trafficking and unlawful migration.

Though all over the world, human trafficking is condemned and shunned, an effective and cohesive response is still not evident because of insufficient comprehension of the complicated issues inherent in the crime. Consequently, the speed with which the processes of law enforcement are carried out and the way support is offered to victims has often been quite slow (Allain, 2014). An internationally accepted meaning of human trafficking was presented by the UN in 2000 that has now turned into the standard reference. There are two sets of definitions of human trafficking: first are those that were presented before the UN Protocol and adopted at the Palermo Convention in 2000 and the

second are those that were put forward following the Palermo Convention (Jansson, 2014).

3.1. Prior to the 2000 Palermo Convention

At the end of nineteenth century, trafficking was characterized by a panel of ministers to the representatives of States of the Council of Europe (CoE) as sexual harassment or misuse of a human with or without his willingness by a superior individual or a firm either through assaults or their migration for molestation, harassment or maltreatment of victims by taking advantage of their helplessness, regardless of whether this was legal and consensual or not (Ollus, 2015). Until 1900, trafficking was interpreted primarily as the trade of white women captives. During the nineteenth century, the western world was alarmed by the rise in the trafficking of European women to Middle Eastern and Arab countries with the intention to serve as prostitutes. In order to address this issue, an international agreement for prevention of oppression of women was passed in 1904. This agreement deemed human trafficking across the boundaries of a country to be unethical. In 1910 the agreement was advanced and trade of women even within a country was also considered illegal (Nicole, 2017).

ILO was formed to control human trafficking and forced employment in 1919. It passed various important legislations, including the Forced Labor Convention in 1930, designed to empower different global movements against forced employment. The Convention on the Worst Form of Child Labor was also formulated to stop child labor (Nicole, 2017).

3.2. The 2000 Palermo Convention

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, often referred to as the Palermo Convention, passed in 2000, introduced legislation to address the increasing number of assaults and problems caused by human trafficking, especially involving women. It also provided a mutually agreed-upon definition of this phenomenon (Ollus, 2015). Among the protocols adopted were the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. Article 3 of the UN convention. Participating nations agreed to revise their laws to and introduce adequate punishments for those engaged in human trafficking (Nicole, 2017).

In 2005, the Convention on Action against Trafficking of Humans was adopted by the Council of Europe, which included a definition of trafficking very similar to that of the Palermo Convention (Ollus, 2015). It characterized trafficking as obtaining consent of victims forcefully or through coercion and fraud for indecent and inappropriate activities such as harassment. It also specified that the consent of individuals under 18 years of age did not, under any circumstances, did not give traffickers the right to engage in their activities and that their actions who still be deemed wrong and unlawful (Farrell *et al.*, 2013).

Various elements are used in defining and identifying trafficking, including employment status, and the use of intimidation or blackmail, although, in the case of children, any form of exploitation is immediately considered illegal (Farrell *et al.*, 2013). The description of the different activities associated with trafficking of human beings is useful for law enforcement officials as they serve as a standard for the detection of crimes (Jansson, 2014).

4. Saudi Arabia's Position on Human Trafficking

All the laws enforced in Saudi Arabia are typically based on Islamic regulations that imply fairness and equity, which include the right to work, family security, equality and involvement in cultural, civic and other side activities (Ansary, 2015). The ordinances of Saudi Arabia also ensure the freedom of expression, the freedom to form associations and the freedom to publish and distribute any content that does not promote hatred and discrimination. The laws also do not forbid any genuine and nonviolent act (Ansary, 2015).

Saudi Arabia marked the initiation of the first legal body for human rights protection in 2004, namely, the National Society for Human Rights. It was founded on the basis of the report forwarded by the Council of Shura and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Ministry of the Interior (NSHR, 2020). In 2008, the Arab Declaration on Human Rights was adopted by the Saudi Shura Council. Ten years later, in December 2018, the United Nations praised the efforts of the Kingdom for the protection and organization of human rights on the occasion of celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Maxwell, 2018).

Saudi Arabia is currently looked upon by GCC states as a pioneer in the stimulation of economic development in the region. The main factors at play behind the rapid development in the Saudi region are the presence of an efficient business environment, rapid development and media-friendly and positive universal objectives (Wright, 2016). This success has also become the gateway to many major unlawful acts. Some citizens were drawn to Saudi Arabia because of the job extension and some of those who came to work suffered injustice (Algahtany *et al.*, 2016). This injustice has increased over the past few years as a result of illegal migrant trafficking and smuggling (Shah, 2014).

In Saudi Arabia is leading most of the developed states of the world with respect to economic development (Samargandi *et al.*, 2014). A similar advancement to that made by most developed nations in almost 200 years was achieved by Saudi Arabia in half a century. The Saudi region was able to be in line with industrialized nations in terms of financial position due to its enormous oil reserves (Alshahrani & Alsadiq, 2014). Luckily, the Saudi government's economic growth has been accomplished without prolonged or challenging periods of investment and capital accumulation (El Mallakh, 2015). However, many human traffickers misused this rapid economic growth and traded large numbers of people by deceiving them and promising jobs and a high quality of life (Zimmerman, 2016).

Saudi Arabia has introduced several laws in response to the threat of human trafficking, designed to protect otherwise helpless persons. The nation has actively participated lately in various international meetings held for the protection of women, children and others who are at risk of forced labor and other forms of trafficking (Zimmerman, 2016). Due to Islamic laws and commands, alcohol trade, public sex and trafficking are strictly discouraged in Saudi Arabia. For this and other reasons, Saudi Arabia and its society are considered orthodox and traditionalist. Arab culture includes many tribes that have followed the Islamic religion and other customs and traditions for a long time. Other practices cover education, women's care and non-Saudis accommodation. Yet, still, human trafficking is endemic in the region. Studies published in 2018 and 2019 concluded that Saudi Arabia was not fulfilling the criteria for the prohibition of trafficking and it thus was demoted to a third-tier position with regard to this issue (Mirei, 2016).

In Saudi Arabia, human trafficking is a serious social problem. Hence, government has made great efforts and framed laws against it (Johnson & Wilcke, 2015). This study will highlight the impact of human trafficking in the Kingdom and provide data that may be useful when dealing with the problem.

5. Aims

The general aim of this study is to examine the scope and nature of trafficking of human beings in Saudi Arabia. It will also discuss the responsibility of the government of Saudi Arabia and the prevention efforts against the exploitation of both men and women.

6. Methodology

6.1. Research Design

A qualitative design was employed for the purpose of this research to concentrate on relevant assertions made by respondents and the identified themes and explanations. Interview is an effective approach in collecting data if the latter is of a personal nature, pertaining to individual beliefs, perspectives and ideas (Bryman, 2012), especially if the interviewer and the interviewee are face to face (Opdenakker, 2006). Interviews offer flexibility, which implies that they can be adapted quickly to examine interesting issues that arise during the questioning process and that may be particularly relevant to an individual (Weathington *et al.*, 2010). The interviewer can rapidly determine and clarify the subject's queries and record spontaneous responses to the questions (Gideon, 2012). Face-to-face interviews enable researchers also to examine and record the actions of the respondent so as to obtain additional useful information (Weathington *et al.*, 2010).

6.2. Sampling and Sample Size

In the qualitative study interviews, a total of 20 people participated. The research required the interviewees to be individuals who have been through the situation discussed by the researcher so that they can share their personal experiences (Neuman, 2009). For this study, the sample was selected from among workers of human rights organizations and law enforcement agencies working on human trafficking in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, the categories of interviewees were as follows:

1. Workers in human rights organizations;
2. Workers in the labour courts;
3. Police personnel;
4. Lawyers;

6.3. Data Collection

Each person was questioned at a different time. The time duration of the interview was 45 minutes. Riyadh, Medina and Jeddah were selected as locations for the interview. The purpose was to collect different ideas from the respondents through semi-structured interviews (Berg, 2004). A voice modulating program was employed to record all of the interviews. Names and other identification materials were kept confidential to maintain secrecy of the respondents.

6.4. *Qualitative Analysis of Data*

A qualitative analysis was carried out on the textual data collected. In such an analysis, unwritten details of an event are shared by the participants (Guest, 2012). The Nvivo software package was used by the investigators to collect and categorize the data collected from the interviews. This software helps in the classification and arrangement of textual data and also helps in establishing relationships among various constructs in the data.

Various strategies are used for the data analysis in qualitative research. These include narrative analysis, thematic analysis, or semiotic, which provides better comprehension of the event and also helps in making conclusions (Turner, 2010). Thematic analysis was used for conducting this research and a subsequent part of the paper will throw light on the fundamental concepts of thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2013). After interviewing the participants, five themes were generated to facilitate further comprehension of the topic of human trafficking. These themes are:

- The degree of law enforcement in Saudi Arabia in context of human trafficking.
- Categories of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia.
- Identification of the more common culprits: Saudis or foreigners.
- Identification of the more common victims: Saudis or foreigners.
- Victims are considered and treated as criminals.

6.5. *Administration of the Interviews*

The interviews were conducted with individuals who work for the government departments to prevent and address the problems of human trafficking. The researcher discussed the basic purpose of the interview and research with the participant before conducting the interview. The investigator also explained that the participants' private details would be kept confidential. The interviews were conducted for about 45 minutes and the language of interview was Arabic. An audio tape recorder was used for recording the content of the interviews. There are two main reasons for this: first it offers ease of use and second, this method is legally allowed in Saudi Arabia. The law prevailing in Saudi Arabia forbids the use of video recording. Transcripts were made in English from the Arabic audio recordings.

6.6. *Thematic Analysis*

In this type of analysis, the researcher looks for significant patterns or 'themes' in the qualitative data. The process begins after the researcher gathers the necessary data, in this case through recorded interviews. The most significant features of the data are coded systematically. This is followed by identification of relevant themes by studying the coded features. To generate an analytic narrative, the potential themes are studied and refined (Howitt & Cramer, 2007).

In this study, the investigator first wrote down the interviews, recorded in Arabic and carefully read the answers. The transcripts were subsequently translated into English and checked. The investigator then interpreted the codes and phrases quoted by the participants and sorted them on the basis of their relevance to the research topic. Themes were identified for each question that was posed. Finally, a framework for discussion was developed on the basis of the identified themes and phrases.

7. Results

Five different themes were used to estimate the level of comprehension of the participants regarding human trafficking in Saudi Arabia. These were:

- The degree of law enforcement in Saudi Arabia in context of human trafficking;
- Categories of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia;
- Identification of the more common culprits: Saudis or foreigners;
- Identification of the more common victims: Saudis or foreigners;
- Victims are considered and treated as criminals.

7.1. The Extent of Enforcement in Law of Human Trafficking in Saudi Arabia

All of the respondents had reasonable comprehension and awareness about human trafficking in Saudi Arabia. The respondents acknowledged that all of the rules and laws enforced in the country are in compliance with Islamic teachings, which stress the protection of human rights and condemn all forms of human trafficking. The respondents were aware of the compliance of human trafficking laws with the teachings of Islam and the norms of Saudi society and the penalties imposed by the Saudi government on those found guilty of being involved in any form of trafficking. The punishment includes 15 years of imprisonment or payment of one million Saudi riyals as a fine or both.

The provisions about the human trafficking included in Article 2 of the law of Anti-Trafficking in Persons by the Saudi government states that “Any form of human trafficking through force, intimidation, deception, cheating, kidnapping, misuse of powers, mistreatment of their helplessness for sexual attack, compulsion to do hard work, begging, slavery or removal of organ for trade”.

Certain correspondents additionally gave reference of the column 3 of the same obligation, which insists upon the issue likewise that whoever commits the offence of illegal trade will be sentenced to imprisonment for a period of 15 years with or without forfeit of one million riyals and will not be forgiven under any circumstances according to declaration. The members reacted towards the query in terms of defence regarding workers privilege in Saudi Arabia by referring to the labor law that has been specified within 245 columns via 16 sections and which is flexible and maintains good will and privilege of laborers with equality. They also praised this law in the sense for that it respects the requisitions and ensures equality for all and has shown the true meaning of organizing unity among management and its staff members whether they are citizens of Saudi Arabia or not.

It was asserted by the respondents that the Saudi government has provided a detailed specification of Saudi Workers’ Rights Law under Article 6. The provision has clearly stated the maximum working hours, time reserved for workers’ rest on daily and weekly basis, overtime, essential safety checks, professional fitness, injury sustained while working work and recompense, declared public holidays and wages.

Moreover, the respondents were aware of the provisions in Article 54, which suggests that an employer is not allowed to keep a worker multiple times on probation. The article also suggests that in case of termination of a contract while the worker is on probation, the employer will not be responsible to pay and the worker will not be responsible to work for the time agreed before.

The respondents asserted the strict policies framed by the mutual agreement of the Saudi government and the Council of Ministers for those found guilty of violating the children rights. Moreover, the respondents confirmed the Saudi government’s adherence

to Islamic laws and regulations and the international laws that stress the importance of child rights and those that condemn involvement of children in the heinous acts.

Under the provisions of Article 8, child labor and employment is strictly condemned prior to their attainment of age of 15 years since such a job may probably be disastrous to the child's mental and physical wellbeing. The article also ensures that no child is recruited into the armed forces.

Under Article 9, children's sexual abuse and their involvement in begging are strictly forbidden. There are about 25 articles emphasizing children rights and condemning children's misuse and trafficking. Besides incorporation of child rights in laws, the Saudi government has taken a social step for their betterment by setting up childcare centres in each city for providing shelter and protection to orphan children.

Since Saudi Arabia is purely an Islamic state and Islam has declared equal respect and privilege for females, Saudi citizens also condemn disrespect of women and involving them in extremist behaviour will not be forgiven in any case. They are protected from all the crimes mentioned before, such as swapping, narcotics supply activities or forced intercourse. They must be given facilities to educate themselves, freedom of marriage, ability to take an active part in social activities, professionalism and to work independently for achieving a good name and worthwhile respect in the society. They must take part and contribute in Shura Council and become ambassadors nationally as well as internationally. Punishment for confinement and dues await anyone who is involved in violation of human rights.

7.2. The Most Common Kinds of Human Trafficking in Saudi Arabia

It was asserted by the respondents that human trafficking could not be absolutely prevented and controlled in spite of the dedicated efforts of the Saudi government to protect humanity from the menace of human trafficking. The responses of the participants were very similar. It was held by most participants that human trafficking is usually done to exploit the victims for labor purposes which may be attributed to the illegal stay of foreign workers in the country. Consequently, these workers willingly accept the offers of human traffickers and are forced to work for lower or even no salaries mostly for grazing livestock and in the fields of farming and building and illegal domestic work. The government is mostly unaware of these activities.

The respondents also highlighted other types of human trafficking such as sexual abuse and drugs, usually involving children. Children are also compelled to beg, commit theft, smuggle drugs. This prevents them from acquiring proper health and education.

7.3. The Most Frequent Perpetrators, Saudis or Non-Saudis

Out of 20, seven interviewees responded that Saudis are the criminals, specifically those who do the business of main force as they smuggle the weak, who are later forced to complete tedious work like grazing live stocks, cultivation, building and digging in wells along with different difficult and hazardous chores. The remaining 13 responded that crimes like sex trading, drugs, robberies, cybercrimes and child abuse are led by non-Saudis. All respondents agreed that non-Saudis culprits make money by exploiting children through kidnapping, beseeching and other corrupted acts.

7.4. The Most Frequent Victims, Saudis or Non-Saudis

All the respondents agreed that non-Saudis are mainly the suppressed ones as people, mostly from Africa and East Asia are made to do difficult and risky physical chores and are misused for prostitution, and their children are used by the wicked people from among themselves for many illegal and immoral activities. Very few Arab residents are subject to the same tyranny.

7.5. The Treatment of Victims as Criminals

The interviewees drew attention to Article 5 of the law, which states that “Approval of the suppressed must not be taken into account in case of any of the corruptions stated in this Statute”. They stated that the sufferers are looked upon with sympathy and kindness and that Saudi Courts have introduced a law safeguarding them, to operate effectively as they are prone to sex trade by criminals because of their deprived state. In the case of sabotage and killing within Saudi territory, the culprit has to face Saudi law, which is different for men, women and children elaborately. In particular, adult male victims are sent to secret areas which are not in range of the corrupted till the time the corrupt are punished in accordance with the Saudi law, whereas when the victim is a woman or a child they are safely kept in shelters till the time the case is closed. Non-Saudi culprits can be expelled with no permission to revisit the country while the Saudi culprits will have to face very strict punishment.

8. Discussion

The degree and nature of sex trading in Saudi Arabia were analysed in this research through five questions using a qualitative approach in combination with a sample drawn from trafficking cases in Saudi Arabia. In conclusion, Saudi Arabia is being targeted for human rights violations as indicated by the research participants.

All the researchers had this belief in common: that Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state and follows Shariah. Islam, being a religion of peace, strongly condemns any inhumane act and orders strict actions against the culprit. In this way, Islam allows humans to lead a blissful and pleasant life (Alsheha, 2012). Besides praising the qualities of Islam and its teaching, researchers praised the dedication shown by the King to strictly enforce the sex trafficking rules and regulations all over the kingdom and steps taken by him for safeguarding human rights. Articles in statute confirming protection of workers right and safeguarding women and children from sex trading were also stated along with the list of human rights organizations actively playing their role in Saudi Arabia. For instance, special courts are present in Saudi Arabia, which take strong actions in case of oppression of a worker and penalize the guilty with large fines and sentences (Vogel, 1999).

Saudi Arabia, being a Muslim state with 100% Muslim population, strictly follows Islamic laws in all aspects of life, including matters related to people. Saudi Arabia allows unrestricted access of all Muslims to Holy places and applies Islamic teachings as they are widely accepted by its government and people (Commins, 2015). It also comprises of Arab tribes that totally comply with Islamic culture and ethnicity (Samin, 2012). The compliance of the Saudi government and people with the Islamic rules and their efforts aimed at prevention of human rights violation is evident from the responses of the research respondents (Mayer, 2018).

Saudi Arabia abides by international human trafficking laws in accordance with Islamic practices (Zimmerman, 2016). This is evident from the fact that Saudi Arabia

always shows willingness to follow national as well as international laws aimed at the protection of human rights and extends support to human rights organizations all around the world (An-Na'im, 2001). International organizations operating in Saudi Arabia were also found to follow both the international and local laws, thereby practicing the international regulations in agreement with the Islamic and Arab culture and ethnicity (Gause, 2014). The same was asserted by the research participants.

In analysing the answers to the survey, it was determined that the most general sort of human trafficking was related to the labor force. This conclusion was based on the observations that labor was found at a very low rate in Saudi Arabia. Mostly non-Saudis were in the labor force with the slip of few from the Saudi families who were there without any legality. A portion of the workforce in Saudi Arabia resides in the country illegally and faces a harsh working environment due to the traffickers. The workers are forced to work on projects requiring under extremely hard conditions. Since these events are kept secret, the government, despite all the efforts it makes, faces limitations in providing complete protection to the labor force (Sherry, 2004).

Researchers believed that labor trafficking is more prevalent than drug and sex trafficking, which is because of strict Islamic rules and regulations that prohibit the use of drugs and illegal sex and orders severe punishments when done. Since the matter is so sensitive, the government punishes the culprit with a death sentence or lifetime imprisonment (Peiffer, 2004; Simons, 2016).

The participants answered differently to the question regarding the most frequent criminals of human trafficking. According to seven of them, the most common perpetrators were Saudis, particularly with reference to human exploitation for labor purposes. The point highlighted by these respondents was that non-Saudis are exploited by Saudis for hard labor like digging wells, farming, grazing sheep and construction without offering sufficient salary or safety. The respondents added that the reason for this is the illegal stay of the victim in Saudi Arabia which prevents them from reporting the abuse and to seek help from local organizations, Saudi government and human rights organizations.

Thirteen participants believed that the major perpetrators in trafficking were non-Saudis particularly in ethical crimes like cybercrime, sex and drugs trafficking. Women and children were considered to be the most common victims of these crimes. It was concluded from the responses of the participants that non-Saudis were involved in crimes like sex and drugs while Saudis were believed to be the most common human trafficking perpetrators with reference to hard labor and employment. Few of the participants were of the view that non-Saudi criminals indulged in any type of human trafficking just for the sake of money whereas cheap labor that is ready to work for long hours is the main target of Saudi offenders. Non-Saudis appeared to be the most common victims as per the respondents. This included both males and females: the former suffered exploitation for hard labor, women were mostly exploited while for domestic work.

For the purpose of this case, the Saudi regime refers to the clause in the law that states: "in any such crimes mentioned in this law, there will be no consideration to the victim's consent" (Zimmerman, 2016). It means that the victim will not be treated by the government the way it treats the criminals. According to some respondents, victims are treated sympathetically and provided a protected place, far away from the offenders and in an environment that provides them the required care until the revelation of the conditions of the case under investigation are carried out in police stations and until a suitable verdict is announced by judge. The victims who are non-Saudis are immediately

expelled from the land and sent back to their home country while Islamic standards were followed by the judiciary to punish the national criminals.

The Saudi government appears to be dedicated towards preserving human rights and maintaining a life of well-being according to the results and discussion of the responses from the participants regarding human trafficking. The exploitation issue gets intensified due to numerous migrants and foreigners residing in Saudi Arabia and their illegal job hunt in the country. Some Saudis contribute to this exploitation by hiring cheap labor whereas non-Saudis are involved in this illegal activity with the aim of making money; women and children are particularly exploited.

The Saudi government, local organizations and human rights organizations are unaware of all that is going on. The Saudi government follows very strict laws and is dedicated to applying these laws and regulations, which are made to shield human beings. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia stands to be politically and economically significant in the world specifically in the Muslim countries which has garnered it many rivals particularly in the media, who leave no chance to mislead the public and intensify the image of Saudi Arabia in terms of human rights violation (Heinz & Freedman, 2010).

Naturally, Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country, and no one can criticize on the rights given to Muslims by Islam, which are abided by the Kingdom representing as the largest modern Islamic state. Human rights are acknowledged by Saudi Arabia in its entire governmental and civil systems and institutions adhering to the criteria set by humanity, states and organizations (Mayer, 2018). Similar to other modern nations, Saudi Arabia adheres to the international system of laws and agreements and acts according to the international as well as local standards (Al-Rodiman, 2013). Despite the efforts of Saudi Arabia to act as per the national and international laws and regulations, it has been the target of criticism. Saudi Arabia has faced such situations in the past as well which ended without hurting Saudi image since the criticism was not constructive in nature (Heinz, 2010).

Saudi Arabia has a judicial nature and is dedicated to enforcing justice and truthfulness in all walks of life and its people have bestowed their trust in its judicial system and independence. Every type of judgment depicts apparent criteria that can be easily comprehended by followers, defendants and lawyers and are based on the legitimacy and legality that everyone can interpret. The inhumane attempts by media, countries and some organizations to offend a state and society as a whole are unacceptable (Alshamsi, 2012).

Ultimately, unacceptable moral downfall may emerge as a consequence of exploitation and distortion of different cases and misrepresenting it to the world. However, all this can not influence Saudi Arabia and it will continue to enforce the current judicial and legal structure. Saudi Arabia is a sovereign state that abides by the laws and has a trustworthy system of judiciary that treats everyone equally and does not favour anybody on the basis of personal associations, individual cases or trends which are used for exploitation to spread negativity (Kéichichian, 2012). Fair justice and respect for citizens are ensured by the system while solving internal issues and specifically while implementing suitable punishments or releasing the accused when proven innocent (Al-Subaie, 2013).

9. Conclusion

This study showed all 20 participants equally had the knowledge regarding the political and ruling system in Saudi Arabia and the state's regulations against the crime of human trafficking. Majority of respondents held the view that the most common type of trafficking was related to labor and then comes sex and drugs trafficking. Moreover, generally they believed that the government is unaware of most of these activities.

The answers were different when inquired about the main offenders of trafficking. Very few (seven) were of the opinion that Saudis were the main culprits however; they are confined to trafficking for labor only. Non-Saudis were regarded to be the most frequent traffickers by the majority and that they were involved in sex and drugs trafficking.

10. Contributions and Limitations of the study

The study is the first to specifically target human trafficking for investigation – its incidence and forms in Saudi Arabia. The study breaks new ground in a number of areas and contributes results that may be of use in helping shape future KSA government policy in protection from and prevention of trafficking. It is unique in the depth and detail of questions that it presented to a cross section of workers of human rights organizations and law enforcement agencies working on human trafficking. It presents results obtained from analysing first-hand information from these sources.

There were a number of limitations to the study, some of which were inevitable and unavoidable, given the time and resources available. The complexity and ethical sensitivity of the subject matter, too, meant that the researcher had to limit the extent to which he could explore individual cases or look in detail at such the extent and nature of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia.

The study was focused exclusively on five themes generated to facilitate further comprehension of the topic of human trafficking. These themes are:

- The degree of law enforcement in Saudi Arabia in context of human trafficking;
- Categories of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia;
- Identification of the more common culprits: Saudis or foreigners;
- Identification of the more common victims: Saudis or foreigners;
- Victims are considered and treated as criminals.

Geographically, for this study, the sample was selected from among the workers in the areas mentioned above drawn from the three cities of Riyadh, Medina and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. Interviews were confined to workers of human rights organizations and law enforcement agencies dealing with human trafficking.

References

- Al-Rodiman, A. (2013). *The application of Shari'ah and International Human Rights Law in Saudi Arabia*. (Doctoral dissertation), School of Law, Brunel University.
- Al-Subaie, S.M. (2013). *The Right to a Fair Trial under Saudi Law of Criminal Procedure: A Human Rights Critique*. (Doctoral dissertation), Brunel University, London.
- Algahtany, M., Kumar, L. & Khormi, H. (2016). Are Immigrants More Likely to Be Involved in Criminal Activity in Saudi Arabia?. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(03), 170.
- Allain, J. (2014). No effective trafficking definition exists domestic implementation of the Palermo Protocol. *Albany Government Law Review*, 7, 111–142.

- Alshahrani, M.S.A., Alsadiq, M.A.J. (2014). *Economic Growth and Government Spending in Saudi Arabia: An Empirical Investigation*. International Monetary Fund.
- Alshamsi, M.J. (2012). *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform*, 4. Publisher of Humanities, Social Science & STEM Books. Routledge.
- Al-Sheha, A.A., Dabas, M.S. (2001). *Misconceptions on Human Rights in Islam*. Riyadh: Islamic Propagation Office.
- An-Na'im, A.A. (2001). Human rights in the Arab world: A regional perspective. *Hum. Rts. Q.*, 23, 701.
- Ansary, A.F. (2015). A Brief Overview of the Saudi Arabian Legal System. New York University, School of Law: Retrieved from: http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Saudi_Arabia1.html#_Toc424144395.
- Aronowitz, A. (2009). *Human Trafficking, Human Misery: The Global Trade In Human Beings*. Praeger, Westport.
- Bellows, J. (1919). *Dictionary of French and English, English and French*. London Longmans, London.
- Belser, P. (2005). Forced labour and human trafficking: Estimating the profits. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Office. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_081971.pdf
- Berg, B.L. (2004). Methods for the social sciences. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 191. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Bishop, C. (2003). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000: Three years later. *International Migration*, 41(5), 219-231.
- Brinkmann, S. (2014). Interview. In *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, pp.1008–1010. Springer: New York.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cameron, S., Newman, E, (2008). *Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Cheah, Ph. (2007). *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Commins, D. (2015). *Islam in Saudi Arabia*. Book. Cornell University Press.
- El Mallakh, R. (2015). *Saudi Arabia: Rush to Development (RLE Economy of Middle East): Profile of an Energy Economy and Investment*. Routledge.
- Farrell, A., McDevitt, J. & Fahy, S. (2010). Where are all the victims? Understanding the determinants of official identification of human trafficking incidents. *Criminology & Public Policy*.
- Farrell, A., Owens, C. & McDevitt, J. (2013). New laws but few cases: understanding the challenges to the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 61, 139.
- Laczko, F., Gozdziaik, E. (2005). Data and Research on Human Trafficking: A Global Survey. *Offprint of the Special Issue of International Migration*, 43(1/2).
- Gajic-Veljanoski, O., Stewart, D.E. (2007). Women trafficked into prostitution: Determinants, human rights, and health needs. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 44, 338–358.
- Gause, F.G. (2014). *Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East*, 63. Council on Foreign Relations.
- Gideon, L. (2012). *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences*. New York: Springer.
- Guest, G. (2012). *Applied Thematic Analysis. Social Research Solutions*. Sage Journals .
- Heinze, E., Freedman, R. (2010). Public awareness of human rights: distortions in the mass media. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 14(4), 491-523.
- Howitt, D., Cramer, D. (2007). Thematic Analysis. *Research Methods in Psychology*, 2nd ed. Prentice Hall.

- Jansson, D.B. (2014). *Modern Slavery: A Comparative Study of the Definition of Trafficking In Persons*. Brill, Leiden.
- Johnson, M., Wilcke, C. (2015). Caged in and Breaking Loose: Intimate Labor, the State and Migrant Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia and Other Arab Countries. *Migrant Encounters: Intimate Labor, the State and Mobility Across Asia*, pp.135-159. Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London.
- Kéchichian, J. (2012). *Legal and political reforms in Saudi Arabia*. Routledge.
- Laczko, F. (2005). Data and research on human trafficking. *International Migration*, 43(1-2), 5-16.
- Maxwell, S. (2018). *Respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Two Contrasting Middle Eastern Countries: Analyses from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Lebanon*. (Doctoral dissertation), Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.
- Mayer, A.E. (2018). *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics*. Book. Publisher: Routledge, 5 editions.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. & Saldana, J. (2013). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Arizona State University. Sage.
- Mirei, O. (2016). Trafficking in Human Beings for Forced Labour: A Saudi Arabia and UK Comparative Legal Study. In *Proceedings of the Eighth Saudi Students Conference in the UK*, 199-209.
- Natalia, O. (2015). Regulating forced labour and combating human trafficking: the relevance of historical definitions in a contemporary perspective. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 63, 221–246.
- Neuman, W.L. (2009). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. 7th ed. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Nicole, J. (2017). Human Trafficking in International Law Before the Palermo Protocol. *Netherlands International Law Review*, 64, 407–452.
- NSHR. (2020). *The National Society for Human Rights*. <http://nshr.org.sa/en>.
- Opendakker, R. (2006). Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Research*. Retrieved from: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/175/391>
- Peiffer, E. (2004). The death penalty in traditional Islamic law and as interpreted in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. *William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender and Social Justice*, 11(3).
- Samargandi, N., Fidrmuc, J. & Ghosh, S. (2014). Financial development and economic growth in an oil-rich economy: The case of Saudi Arabia. *Economic Modelling*, 43, 267-278.
- Samin, N. (2012). Kafā'a fī l-Nasab in Saudi Arabia: Islamic law, tribal custom and social change. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 2(2), 109-126.
- Shah, N.M. (2014). *Recent Amnesty Programmes for Irregular Migrants in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia: Some Successes and Failures*. Gulf Labour Markets and Migration. Migration Policy Centre. European University Institute.
- Sharma, N. (2005). Anti-trafficking rhetoric and the making of a global apartheid. *NWSA Journal*, 17, pp.88–111. University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.
- Shelley, L. (2010). *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sherry, V.N. (2004). *Bad Dreams: Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia*. Human Rights Watch, 15.
- Simons, G. (2016). *Saudi Arabia: The Shape of a Client Feudalism*. Book. Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Turner III, D.W. (2010). *Qualitative interview design: a practical guide for novice investigators*. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754.
- Vogel, F.E. (2000). *Islamic law and the legal system of Saudi: Studies of Saudi Arabia*, 8. Brill. Leiden; Boston.
- Weathington, B.L., Cunningham, C.J.L. & Pittenger, D.J. (2010). *Research Methods for the Behavioral and Social Sciences*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- Wright Jr, J.W. (Ed.). (2016). *Business and Economic Development in Saudi Arabia*. Book. Publisher, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zimmerman, S. (2016). Mending the protection and prosecution divide: looking at Saudi Arabia human trafficking flaws and possibilities. *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.*, 15, 533.

Received: 18.07.2023

Accepted: 25.09.2023

Published: 30.09.2023