

NGO Personnel's Involvement in Anti-Human Trafficking Initiatives: A Study in North and South 24 Parganas of West Bengal

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Abstract

Human Trafficking is prevalent in West Bengal. The Government initiatives are not enough to contain the activities of the traffickers. Many NGOs especially at the community level are engaged in creating awareness regarding this social problem in different parts of the state. The NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) act through their personnel. NGO personnel are involved in number of activities to protect the vulnerable sections of the society. This article is the result of a study conducted by the researcher in North and South 24 Parganas of West Bengal. The aim was to understand the profile of those personnel, their understanding of different aspects of human trafficking, about their level of expertise, associated risks and challenges that they face while working. The researcher followed purposive sampling to obtain quantitative data from 73 NGO personnel working in 20 different NGOs working in two districts and simultaneously taken in-depth interviews of 6 NGO personnel for obtaining qualitative data. These data have been merged and the results obtained. The findings of the study reveal that majority of the personnel are women having professional qualification. The major factors behind trafficking incidents like poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, lack of job opportunities, unsafe migration for search of livelihood, peer influence, lack of parental control, chatting over mobile phone, desire for a better life etc. have been identified by the personnel. Regarding expertise, majority of them feel that they are capable of doing activities. The findings reveal that they are involved in spreading awareness, rescue the victims. The findings also highlights that threat from traffickers is a common component in the field and the personnel's efforts get delayed in achieving success because of the laid back attitudes of some police men and lack of interstate coordination as well as weak Government mechanism especially at block and district level.

Keywords-Human Trafficking, NGOs, Vulnerable, Expertise, Risk, Challenges

Introduction-

In the modern time, thousands of NGOs are working in the field of addressing the problem of human trafficking which has become a real challenge before the policy

makers and the law enforcement authorities of the nation states. NGOs role is perceived as very vital as the personnel are working at the community level. Since last two decades, there is phenomenal increase in the NGO

activities in India. These organizations are engaged in different sectors spanning from health sector to community development including anti-human trafficking initiatives. The NGOs is seen as the eyes and ears of the law enforcement agencies in the field. These organizations may involve in ensuring the access to the services provided by the government for the survivors of trafficking (Nair, 2010). These NGOs try to protect the inalienable rights which are often delineated as the human rights in common parlance. The NGOs through their personnels endeavour to safeguard the rights which allow a human being to live with human dignity. Basically the NGOs in the field take initiatives to fulfill the basic human rights. It reminds us what Mahatma Gandhi says “ Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use of him” (Abraham, 2015). In the Indian context, millions born with curse of poverty which left them with the challenges of facing disadvantages since birth. Majority of them fail to come out of the vicious circle of poverty in their life time. Poverty excludes them from having access to the services. One exclusion in life may lead to thousand exclusions in life time. Even after seventy years of Indian independence, many citizens are left to languish in utmost poverty and victims of marginalization. The human history shows that it is the disadvantaged who suffer most in society at any given point of time. They are exploited, violated and brutalised by the unscrupulous elements who wait to jump over them like a fox. It is true that Government of India has created number of

opportunities through the introduction of schemes for victims of marginalization for an inclusive society. But it is not expected that all will be able to bulldoze the odds in their lives. The vulnerable sections of the society need symbol of hope to shrug off the shackles of disadvantages and come out of marginalized existence. The NGOs are evolving as a new sign of hope as their very presence at the community level and their innovative timely intervention.

The NGOs intervention in the field of human trafficking is not so closely monitored in the public domain because of the lack of awareness in the public. The menace of human trafficking is rapidly increasing even if the intervention of the Government as well as by the NGOs. The mere recognition of the human trafficking as a social problem and introducing stringent laws for the prevention have been proved to be ineffective in many countries. The challenges associated with the human trafficking are far more deeper than anticipated. The life depicted in the media and the invasion of technology have changed the way we analyse and interpret our actions. Even responding to a unknown call can bring one on the verge of a cliff. One wrong step in life and endanger the freedom for lifetime. The victims of trafficking desperately seek freedom but less likely to be regained because of the well organised rackets of the traffickers, Even if they are rescued, getting back to normalcy is not an easy process because of the existence of the stigma in the society. The concept of stigma often dictates the actions of normal human beings towards the victim and these actions most likely to reduce the

life chances of the victims (Goffman, 1963). Rebuilding life means fighting with social stigma and lot more obstacles which are often unseen, unexplained and often invisible. The intervention at community level needs relentless efforts by the personnels. This study focuses on the profile of the NGO personnels, their perceptions on their effectivity as well as their opinions on the various aspects of anti- human trafficking initiatives alongwith the risks and challenges faces at the field level.

The current study is conducted on the 73 NGO personnels who are serving twenty organizations spreading across North and South 24 Parganas of West Bengal. The personnels are involved in anti- human trafficking activities in different capacities. The Objectives of the study can be mentioned as follows:

- i. To know the profile of the NGO personnels
- ii. To understand their perceptions on the different aspects of human trafficking
- iii. To elicit information about the services provided by the organizations
- iv. To identify the nature of risks and challenges faced by NGO personnel from their perspectives
- v. To accommodate their voices for future policy making

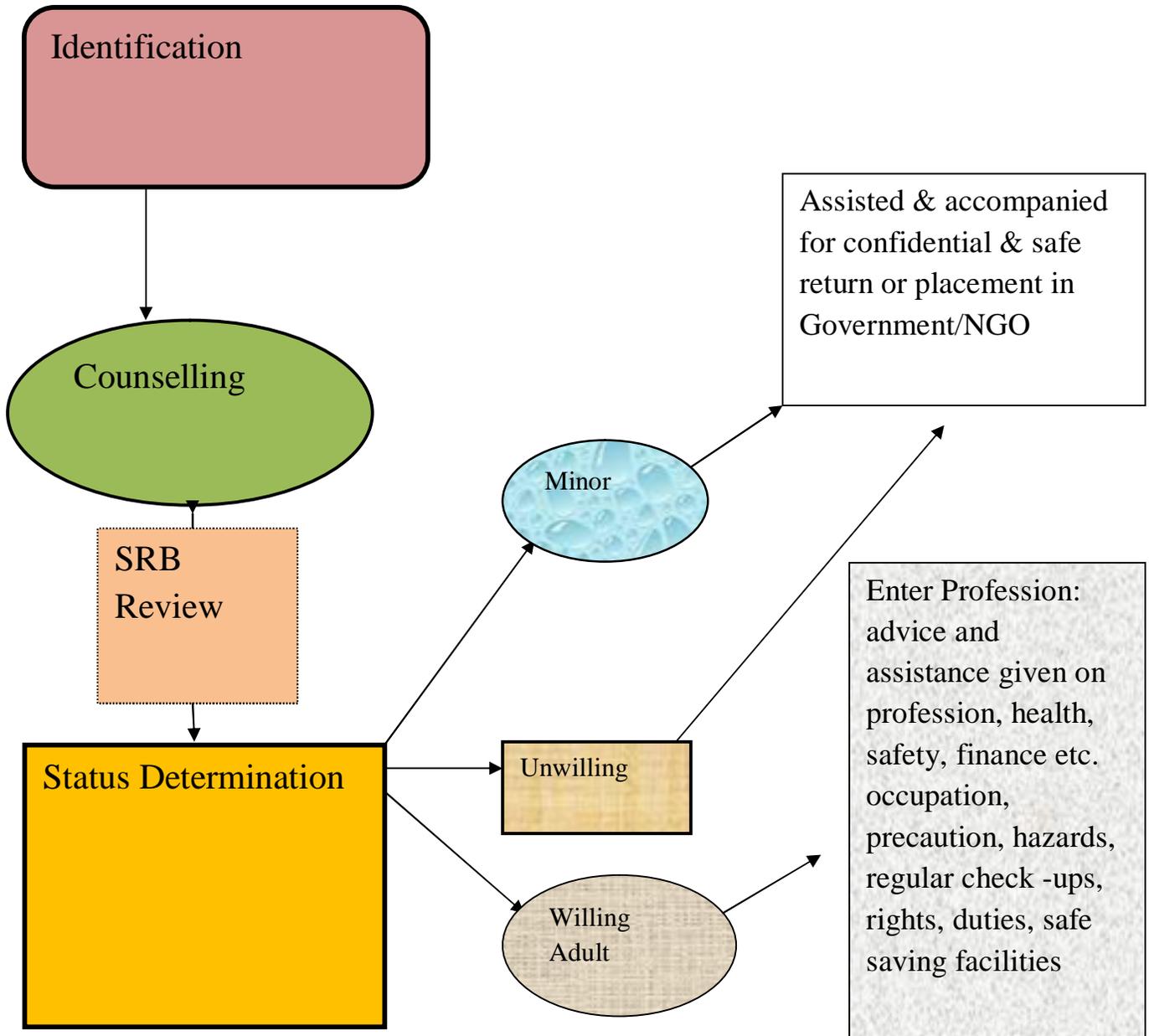
Review of Literature-

Different studies around the world have highlighted the role performed by the NGOs in the field of anti-human trafficking initiatives. A study shows that NGOs are

involved in providing health care facilities, accommodation and shelter to the victims. They also take active part in the repatriation and reintegration of the survivors (Nong Thi Thuy Ha, 2011) The success of these NGOs is attributed towards the close cooperation from their local partners as well as running of the successful vocational programmes for the victims. The organizational capacity, qualified staffmembers alongwith the contribution made by the technical advisors are termed as the recipe of success at the grass root level by the NGOs. Among the constraints faced by the organizations, two aspects come out in their research. One points out to the policy or legal related issues and the other emanates while executing the program implementation. Lack of resources proved to be a stumbling block in the anti- human trafficking activities. Other factors that jeopardise the efforts of NGOs can be summed up as the lack of awareness and hesitation on part of the victims to come forward to seek help from the organizations. The study also highlights the loose border patrol and porous border also contribute to the problem in Vietnam.

In India, one of the leading NGO based at Kolkata,¹ published a booklet titled Community Led Anti Trafficking and Child Protection Program. The booklet shows the approach of the NGO while identifying and regulate coercive entry in the flesh trade. The model that they developed can be shown as follows-

¹ See Community Led Anti Trafficking And Child Protection Program, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, especially pp.17-21



An article “Sovereign Silence: Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act and Sex Work in Sonagachhi” has dealt with the existence of the quasi legal surveillance device which is known as Regulatory Board and the experiences of women while dealing with it (Dasgupta, 2014) The dispassionate look at the article raise number of ethical questions especuially considering the circumstances under which a woman or girl child is

trafficked and foprced to join the prostitution or sex work. The operation of such board has the potentiality of dividing the NGOs working in the field of anit-humna trafficking. The opinions of the NGOs personel remained an area of unexplored issue. The Ngo personnels need to work under the legal framewoork of the country and hence the researcher tried to look through the special legislation that

deals with the human trafficking in India. *The Immoral Traffic(Prevention) Act, 1956*² does not define human trafficking under the definitions part. But it makes provisions for the punishment relating to procuring, inducing or taking (person) for the sake of prostitution. The Act did not go beyond prostitution and implies that women are procured only for the purpose of prostitution. Critical look at the ground reality in indian society will show that women and children are trafficked not only for the prostitution purpose but there are other reasons like organ trafficking, bonded labour, child domestic workers etc. These issues can be hardly dealt by using this legislation thus may jeopardize the efforts of the NGOs personnels.

A research study mentioned the role of NGOs in providing health care services in the red light areas of kolkata and Mumbai (Timothy P. Williams, 2013) Their efforts ranges from offering health education to brothel onwers to coordiante with the NGOs offering shelter for the rescued victims. The study also found that brothel owners did not object to their access to the adult prostitututes but reluctant to give access to the NGO personnels to approach the children involved in the flesh trade because of the fear of reporting to the police. As long as the NGOs can maintain trust of not supplying information to the police, their personnels are allowed to cater the health care needs of the prosittutes. The limited resources of the NGOs in meeting the needs of the rescued trafficked girls also

highlighted through the narratives mentioned in the study. The NGOs activities in the health sector was shown to be desirable as there is inhibition on part of the trafficking victims because of the discriminatory attitudes in the medical colleges run by the Governments.

The NGOs are not free from problems. While analysing the problems faced by the Voluntary Organizations, it has been stated that they only have small resources which hardly meets the needs alongwith the resource crunch, they suffer from lack of qualified staff who could not perform satisfactorily (Bhatia, 2000).

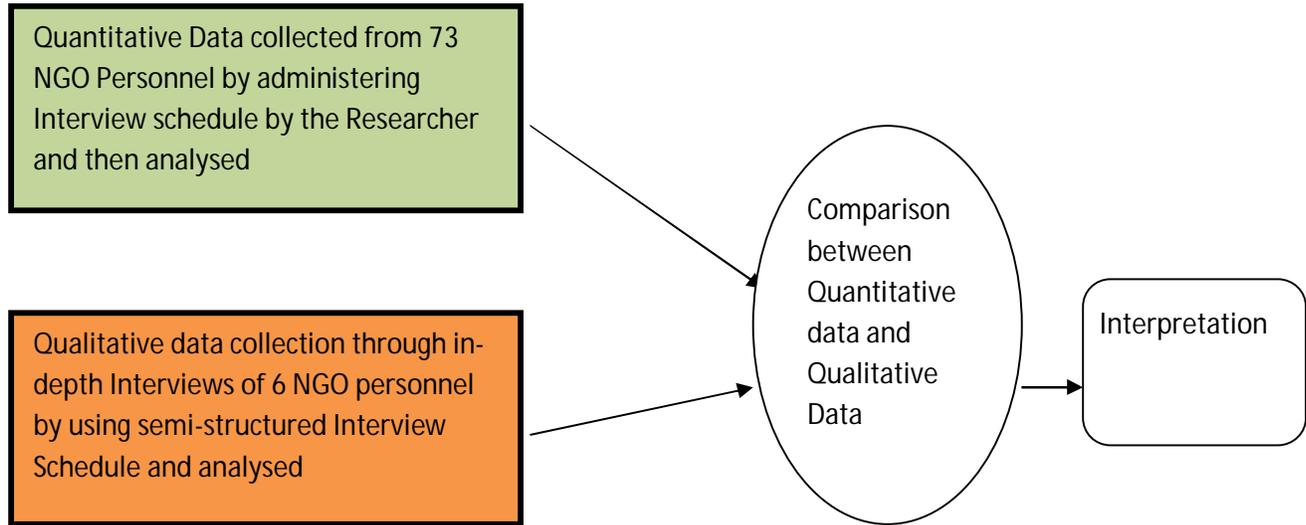
Methodology-

The researcher did not start with any assumptions and kept an open mind for the exploration of the field. It is an exploratory study. The researcher neither want to prove nor establish any relationship between variables. The mixed method has been used to collect data. Mixed method was deliberately adopted by the researcher in response to the research objectives as it involves collection of both quantitative and qualitative data(Creswell,2014) This study was conducted on 73 NGO Personnels . Survey design was used to collect the quantitative data and Indepth interviews of 6 NGO Personnels holding different positions were taken to get the qualitative data. The researcher approached 20 NGOs mainly operating in North and South 24 Parganas of West Bengal. The researcher has applied purposive sampling and snowball sampling for data collection. The NGO personnels serving the twenty organizations form the sampling frame. The interview schedule was prepared and pre-tested before the data

² The immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956. (Act No 104 of 1956). Bare Act. Ahmedabad, India: Current Publications

collection. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to conduct indepth interviews of the NGO personnel. The researcher opted for the convergent parallel Mixed Methods design and analysed quantitative data and qualitative data

emerged from the indepth interviews and subsequently compares to see whether the findings confirm or disconfirm (Creswell, 2014). The data collection methods can be shown as follows-



The quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics showing frequency and percent where as the collected qualitative data were edited properly and then codes were developed. Subsequently the themes emerged from codes. This part was conducted manually by the researcher and then the results are interpreted.

Ethical Issues-The nature of the research is undoubtedly sensitive one. The NGO personnel are very busy in the field. So, utmost care has been taken not to disturb them during working hours. They were approached during their convenient time. The researcher explained the purpose of the study in person and as they were about to share their thoughts on many sensitive issues relating to trafficking, the researcher assured them of the maintenance of confidentiality. A consent form was given to each respondents and participation was

completely voluntary and without any benefits attached to it.

Results-

The Personnel- The personnel is the main driving force behind any organization. The utilization of the resources invariably depends on the skill of the human resources. It is a well known fact that the NGOs have limited resources to carry out their activities. Hence the success or failure largely depends on the motivated, knowledgeable staff members. The researcher calculated the average age of the NGO personnel that shows 36.0274 years with maximum age of 62 years and minimum age of 20 years. It is also relevant to mention the average number of years spent at the field. The Personnel have on an average spent 7.6247 years in the anti-human trafficking initiatives. It should be noted that NGO sector in India is still

open to any individual who wants to join as there is no bar like in developed countries where only individuals with professional qualifications and having license can only engage in the social service sector. This creates job openings for many individuals and also creates an opportunity to move to

other sectors. The growth of social work and social work education draws many younger talents to the field of social service. Even the women are joining the NGO sector in large number. So, the researcher attempted to find out education and gender wise profile of the respondents.

Table 1 Profile of NGO Personnel-

Gender	NGO Personnel					Total
	Educational Qualification					
	MSW	Post Graduation	Graduation (B.A/B.Sc/B.Com)	Higher Secondary	Secondary	
Male	9	4	14	3	1	31
Female	20	5	7	9	1	42
Total	29 (39.7%)	9 (12.3)	21 (28.8%)	12 (16.45%)	2 (2.7)	73 (100.0)

The above table is the indication of the fact that majority of the personnel are women and majority of them have MSW qualification. More than one third (39.7%) personnel have MSW which is indicative of the growing professionalization of the social service.

Out of six personnel who gave in-depth interviews, two of them don't have MSW qualification. NP1 (NGO Personnel 1) stated that they carry on activities banking on the experiences. The use of common sense is very prevalent while working. NP1 told that "I do feel that the nature of human trafficking is changing in South 24 Parganas. It is becoming more complex. The

rescued victims also need services which can be provided by professionally qualified people. I depend on training sessions organized by funding agencies to remain updated. But, It is not enough. I badly want to enrol in MSW course but cannot leave this present employment for family obligation. After passing graduation, I came to this field to do something for society but I also need money to survive" whereas NP5 who is a secretary of an NGO, said that "when we started their organization, any graduate could become the Project Coordinator. But the situation has changed off late. The funding agencies are insisting on recruiting project Coordinators who

have MSW (Master of Social Work) qualification. This is true that quality has improved after the professionally qualified people joined our organization. They have better understanding and apply skills and techniques which are unknown to us “Other respondents also opined that in future only personnel with MSW degree can serve the beneficiaries as intervention in the anti-human trafficking field is gradually becoming the domain of professionals.

The NGO sector is not thoroughly controlled by the Government. They enjoy freedom to create their own hierarchy in their organizations. The designations vary according to the nature of the job performed by the personnel. The present study also attempted to show the designations of the respondents. This will highlight that interviews were conducted without giving any preference to the junior level or senior level staff members.

Designation-

Table 2 Designation assigned to NGO Personnel-

Serial Number	Designation	Number	Percent (%)
1.	Advocacy Officer	1	1.4
2.	Aftercare Associate	1	1.4
3.	Assistant Project Coordinator	1	1.4
4.	Block Coordinator	1	1.4
5.	Community Mobilizer	2	2.7
6.	Coordinator	1	1.4
7.	Counselor	3	4.1
8.	Director	1	1.4
9.	Director(program)	1	1.4
10.	Documentation Officer	1	1.4
11.	Executive Director	2	2.7
12.	Field Coordinator	1	1.4
13.	Field Worker	8	11.0
14.	House Mother	1	1.4
15.	Legal Administration Assistant	1	1.4
16.	Program Manager	1	1.4
17.	Program Officer	1	1.4
18.	Project Coordinator	14	19.1
19.	Project Director	1	1.4
20.	Secretary	3	4.1
21.	Social Worker	21	28.8
22.	State Project Coordinator	1	1.4
23.	Superintendent of Home	1	1.4
24.	Supervisor	2	2.7
	Total	73	100.0

The Table shows the use of multiple designations for the social service providers working in the field of anti-human trafficking. A close look at the table depicts that majority of the personnel are either working as social workers (28.8%) or Project Coordinator (19.1%). While specialized job like counseling is performed by the counselors who consist of 4.1% of the total respondents.

Major Factors Identified for the Human Trafficking incidents-

The findings of this research identify number of major factors which contribute to

Table 3 Major Factors Identified-

the incidents of trafficking in both the districts. These are: Poverty, Lack of Access to education, unemployment, lack of job opportunities in local area, unsafe migration for search of livelihood, lack of support system, lack of parental control, low status of women in society, Objectification and sexualization of women, prostitution, low conviction rate of traffickers, Child Marriage, Peer influence, Open Border, desire for better life, chatting over mobile phone,

Serial Number	Factors	Number	Percent (%)
1.	Poverty	67	91.8
2.	Lack of Access to Education	63	86.3
3.	Unemployment	54	74.0
4.	Lack of Job opportunities in Local Area	62	84.9
5.	Unsafe migration for search of livelihood	53	72.6
6.	Lack of Support System	37	50.7
7.	Lack of Parental Control	42	57.5
8.	Low status of women	44	60.3
9.	Objectification and Sexualization of Women	39	53.4
10.	Prostitution/Sex Work	43	58.9
11.	Low Conviction rate of traffickers	40	54.8
12.	Child Marriage	67	91.8
13.	Peer Influence	48	65.8
14.	Open Border	42	57.5
15.	Chatting over mobile phone	53	72.6
16.	Desire for Better Life	58	79.5

The table shows the major factors behind human trafficking by the NGO personnel. In West Bengal, most of the social problems are fundamentally related to poverty and lack of access to suitable job opportunities. The respondents feel that above mentioned factors are responsible for the continuance of human trafficking.

NP 1 felt that larger number of children also leads to vulnerability of the family. He said” If you have more children, the economic pressure is more upon you. You may take risky decisions like leaving your family behind for search of better economic opportunities. Sometimes it becomes difficult for a mother to look after all the children.” Whereas NP 2 believed that absence of regular income increases the danger. *“You simply go to other places in difficult times of the years when employment is not available.”* NP 3 cited a real incident that he came across while searching for a trafficked victim *“I met a family who sought our help in rescuing a 16 years old girl. I found that the couple is not the parents of the missing girl. When inquired, they told me that they are uncle and aunt. The parents are living in Mumbai. Parents have left behind their daughters under the supervision of uncle. They told me that they didn’t have enough rooms to accommodate both the families so they alternatively go to other cities leaving behind the children. You can imagine about the supervision that the children receive in that house.”* Whereas NP

4 had drawn attention to the low conviction rate of the traffickers. He said “Police does not give attention to the missing cases like murder or rape. They think that girls went on their own. The traffickers hardly get punishment and this encourages them to involve in the illegal trade”. NP5 and NP6 attributed the cause of human trafficking to the desire for better life.

Activities undertaken by the Organizations-

The NGO personnel are attached with different organizations. It is hence expected that they participate the activities carried out by these NGOs at regular basis. Since they are involved at the community level, it is relevant to know from them the nature of activities and services provided at the community level.

All the respondents stated that they undertake activities which includes awareness programme at the community level, organizing programmes in schools, formation of the adolescent girls formation of the vigilant groups at the community level , also engaged in specific activities, maintain plan of action, mention the involvement of the community people in their programmes. They told that they receive police assistance as and when required. The rescue part is bit complicated and all the respondents did not participate in the rescue operation. The following table shows the participation of the personnel in rescue mission.

Table 4 Role played in Rescue Mission-

Serial Number	Role Played in Rescue Mission	Number	Percent (%)
1.	Yes	65	89.0
2.	No	8	11.0
	Total	73	100.0

Rescuing victims of human trafficking is considered to be a sensitive job. The police force is involved in rescue. The NGO personnel do perform several activities that often assist the police force to locate the victims and rescue. When asked about their involvement in the rescue related tasks, 89% of the respondents replied in affirmative.

NP 1 said that they contributed often indirectly to locate the trafficked women. They kept vigil on the suspected traffickers at the community level. They passed on information to the local police as well as to the CID officials. They sometimes accompanied the victim's families who need to travel to the other states with police officials for search of their family members. NP 2 talked about another aspect that they

Table-5 Level of Expertise

Serial Number	Level Of Expertise	Number	Percent (%)
1.	Very Advanced	6	8.2
2.	Advanced	39	53.4
3.	Average	22	30.1
4.	Basic	6	8.2
	Total	73	100.0

The above Table highlights the level of expertise as mentioned by the NGO personnel. It shows that 53.4% of the respondents felt that they had advanced expertise to deal with the issues relating to human trafficking whereas 30.1% opined that they had average expertise to deal with the issues.

perform. They acted in the past as the witness while rescue operations were carried out by the police. This witness proved to be an important instrument for prosecution of the traffickers in the court of law. NP 3 told the researcher that he was not interested to divulge the minute details of their role in the rescue related activities on the ground of confidentiality.

Level of Expertise of the NGO Personnel-

Anti- human trafficking activities involve understanding of socio-legal issues, multifarious psychosocial and economic factors. The NGO personnel need to self evaluate their level of expertise only then they can improve upon themselves. The following table indicates the level of expertise as stated by the personnel.

NP 1 stated "human trafficking is really complex issue. You really need to know various things to meet the demands of the beneficiaries. Each case demands different approach. I am involved in this for the last four years. I have gathered experiences but lacking social work knowledge proves to be a barrier while analyzing or documenting the cases". NP 2 found that the personnel were

required to remain updated. “The nature of human trafficking is changing. It is not necessarily that every time the victim is duped or coerced. They are willingly accompanying the traffickers for search of better living. Convincing them not to go is not an easy task. You need knowledge and expertise to pursue the prospective families to rethink on their decisions to send their daughters to unknown cities. NP 3, NP 4, NP 5 and NP 6 argued that they hardly got any opportunity for the improvement of expertise. They felt that the organizations should have thought about arranging training or sending them to other states for exposure visit to other organizations.

Risks and Challenges faced by the NGO Personnel-

The human trafficking has been termed as lucrative illegal trade generating billions of dollars every year worldwide. Innumerable organized gangs are operating all over the world. They have excellent network and huge resources to influence law implementing agencies and the administrative directly or indirectly. Any attempt to curb their activities will surely bring wrath and the NGO personnel are expected to bear the risks while executing their activities. So, it is important to know the experiences of the NGO personnel. NP 1 told the researcher that receiving threats over phone was very common. “I was little bit afraid when I started as a field coordinator. Then I realized that it is part of the job. Their (Human traffickers) profits are affected so they will surely intimidate the people who are against their activities”. NP 2 remarked that during his 15 years involvement in the anti- human trafficking

activities, he had received threats over phone several times. “I tend to ignore these threats. But I remember one incident which rattled me. I was working in the office. It was a summer afternoon where most of the villagers prefer to remain indoor during the afternoon. An unknown man suddenly entered the office. I thought that he needs some assistance. Immediately he drew out a revolver and told me that leave this village otherwise He will send me to hell. Saying this, he hurriedly left the office, rode a bike on the road and raced away” NP 6 faced a road accident. It was deliberate and initiated by the human trafficking agents to eliminate as she busted a trafficking network. NP 3, NP4 and NP 5 had faced resistance in the community where traffickers engage local population to stop their activities.

So far challenges are concerned, it can be best described by the NGO personnel as they face it in real life situations. NP 1 commented “rescue part of their job is really difficult. Restoration in the family is relatively easy but rehabilitation takes longer time than anticipated and it varies case to case” where as NP 2 described that “Police gives assurance of instant action but that is hardly seen. The structure is there in the police station but action depends of the individual sensitivity of the police personnel. They are also reluctant to use sections from Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and apply provisions of The Protection of Children From Sexual Offences Act, 2012. This attitude helps the traffickers to come out on bail even if they are arrested.”NP 3 articulated, “I know that there is AHTU (Anti Human Trafficking Unit) at the state level but I can hardly find

there effective presence at the district level. The local politician are regularly bribed by the traffickers. They act on behalf of them.” NP 4, NP 5 and NP6 felt that well to do sections of the society never participate in the programmes as they felt that they were immune. NP 6 stated “you will not take interest in the initiatives of NGOs and Government relating to human trafficking unless you are affected”. NP 4 mentioned about the weak interstate collaboration as a major challenge in rescuing the victims whereas NP 5 spoke about the existence of stigma associated with human trafficking in mainstreaming the rescued victims.

Discussion-

The research findings show that there is an increasing trend of involvement of the qualified (MSW and other Post Graduation) personnel in the field. Presence of women in good number in different organizations indicates that the needs of the beneficiaries can be met by the women personnel. It is true that majority of the victims of trafficking are women and girls. So involvement of the women as professionals may ease the inhibition on part of the victims and the vulnerable women to approach the agencies with their problems. The research also highlights the possible factors identified by the NGO personnel responsible for trafficking incidents. A close look at the findings will surely give the notion that there are multiple interdependent factors for the continuation of this menace. Majority of the respondents are engaged in creating awareness at the community level. They give emphasis on raising awareness level of the community people. The findings also throws light on the cooperation

especially of the police department for curbing the human trafficking incidents at the community level. The shared life experiences of the NGO personnel also highlights the considerable risks involved in the anti – human trafficking activities. Their task is not free from challenges. There is inadequacy stated by the personnel regarding taking prompt action by the police department. The coordination amongst the states is far from satisfactory and weak presence of the AHTU at the block and district levels cited by the personnel as a stumbling block in their efforts to prevent human trafficking.

Conclusions-

The human trafficking as a social problem continues to thousands of vulnerable women and girls of these two bordering districts of the West Bengal. It is gone beyond the mere law and order issue. The involvement of NGO personnel brought to the light many aspects involved in the anti- human trafficking initiatives. This complex issue demands the convergence of the efforts of the stakeholders. The NGO personnels’ shared experiences suggest that lot more to be done for the protection of the vulnerable sections of the society. The policy makers and law enforcement agencies need to formulate strategies keeping in mind the issues unearthed by the NGO personnel. The goal of making society a risk free zone where freedom can be enjoyed by all, is supplemented through the activities of the NGOs. The NGO personnels’ service as a catalyst of bringing positive changes in the lives of millions draws attention to the inherent altruistic nature of mankind.

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