

SWiFT RESEARCH BRIEFING NOTE

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Emerging findings from STUDY ON WORK IN FREEDOM TRANSNATIONAL (SWiFT) Evaluation

Human trafficking and modern slavery: New insights for policy and programmes

Over the past decade, modern slavery and forced labour have become prominent on the policy agenda of many governments and organisations. Current UK Prime Minister Theresa May has been vocal in her critique, stating at the 2017 UN General Assembly, “We will not tolerate these crimes in our societies”¹. Millions of pounds have been invested globally in community-based awareness-raising campaigns and knowledge-building activities with the goal of preventing modern slavery² but, unfortunately, little evidence exists on how to effectively prevent these abuses.

Asia and the Pacific regions account for over half of the people in forced labour globally, according to estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO)³. When South Asian women and girls migrate for work in the domestic sector, many end up in forced labour, exploited by employers and sometimes also local labour recruiters. The South Asia Work in Freedom Transnational Evaluation (SWiFT) is a five-year programme of research and evaluation that seeks to answer the fundamental and pressing question: How can the trafficking of women and girls in this region be prevented? This brief describes emerging thinking based on preliminary findings.

THE RESEARCH

SWiFT is the first comprehensive evaluation to follow a large-scale, multi-country trafficking intervention from conception to implementation, using mixed methods approaches. SWiFT assesses and informs the Work in Freedom Programme (WiF), an initiative by the International Labour Organization that is funded by the UK Department for International Development. WiF has a pre-departure strategy across three countries (Bangladesh, India and Nepal) based on:

- female empowerment
- training on safe and rights-based migration
- financial literacy
- rights at work
- work skills

1. Prime Minister’s Office. (Sept 20 2017) PM speech to UNGA on modern slavery: ‘behind these numbers are real people’.
 2. Dottridge M. How is the money to combat human trafficking spent? *Anti-trafficking Review*. No 3. 2014. DOI: 10.14197/atr.20121431.
 3. www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/policy-areas/statistics/lang--en/index.htm



FIGURE 1: What is modern-day slavery?

Source: UK government. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/640349/UK_slavery_infographic_v3.pdf

KEY MESSAGES

- Women who reported that financial necessity was their primary reason for migrating were not necessarily more likely to experience aspects of forced labour than those who did not.
- Women value practical knowledge gained from pre-departure interventions, but this alone is unlikely to prevent trafficking and exploitation.
- Awareness and knowledge have limited impact, if recruiters and employers are not held accountable.
- Empowerment can protect women from forced labour by helping them to have more control over their migration plans and outcomes.
- Written contracts can help prevent deception in migration.
- Knowing other migrants at destination may protect women from forced labour.
- Interventions should consider the role of social, recruitment and migrant networks in women’s decisions, plans and associated risks in migration.
- In order to attract and retain participants, interventions need to be tailored to the context of implementation, and take into account local migration, cultural and gender dynamics.



SWiFT conducted policy analyses to identify potential impact from policies on preventing labour exploitation. Analysis of SWiFT data is ongoing as of early 2018, but this briefing note discusses results emerging from the research and analyses to date.

In Nepal, SWiFT worked with local partner **Social Sciences Baha** to:

- conduct surveys with 521 returned and 340 prospective migrants in three of the five WiF districts: Chitwan, Rupandehi, and Morang
- conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews with 55 survey respondents who were prospective migrants
- base formative research on a survey on migration and forced labour of 1,257 households and 5,984 individuals in the district of Dolakha

In India, SWiFT worked with local partner, the **Centre for Women's Development Studies** to:

- conduct surveys with 1,255 households, 1,218 women, and 1,156 men in 20 villages across the Ganjam District of Odisha, of whom 117 women and 429 men were migrants
- interview 50 women who had migrated or intended to at four time points during WiF
- interview respondents' husbands or fathers in parallel

In Bangladesh, SWiFT worked with local partners Drishti Research Centre and Sanem to:

- conduct qualitative research in three research sites in the district of Narayangani
- interview 30 migrant women at three separate points over WiF's duration
- interview respondents' husbands or fathers separately but in parallel
- interview 10 WiF programme staff at two different times

The empowerment and skills-building components of the programme aim to foster informed economic choices, either by ensuring that women can migrate as well-informed, skilled workers with higher income opportunities, or by increasing their access to local livelihoods.

WHO MIGRATES AND WHY?

SWiFT findings are consistent with previous research that indicates that the 'poorest of the poor' more frequently migrate in circumstances of economic crisis, natural disasters,⁴ conflicts, or forced evictions⁵. Where poverty, unemployment, and family crisis are intolerable, women (and their families) may feel compelled to migrate despite gender norms and cultural restrictions on female mobility. This seems to be the case in some parts of India, where 'distress migration' among women is prevalent because of the South Asian agrarian crisis which left the vulnerable poor with few livelihood options and decreased access to basic services.

In SWiFT's survey in Odisha, chronic and seasonal distress was reported as a reason for migration by 74% of women compared to 43% of men. Many women considered that not having enough food to eat or being able to find local income opportunities were the main drivers behind migration, while women in land-owning households were less likely to migrate for work. Nonetheless, taking male and female migration together, the poorest and wealthiest households were less likely to have a history of migration when

compared to mid-level households. This could be due to an inability of the poorest families to cover the initial costs of migration and restrictions on human capital associated with poverty.

Global data show that international migration tends to soar when the wealth of poor countries increases. As income levels increase (as measured by GDP per capita), more people migrate, possibly because higher levels of economic and human development allow people to access opportunities abroad⁶. It is only when countries reach mid-income level that migration declines again, as education and skills levels increase and local opportunities become more attractive⁷.

Research in Bangladesh indicates that inequalities between individuals and villages tend to increase with improved access to international migration opportunities. This is visible in some locations in Nepal, where families who receive remittances build houses with cement and mortar – which are more resilient to the effects of earthquakes – while most non-migrant families live in traditional mud huts. Conversely, research in rural India shows that internal seasonal migration is rarely associated with improvement of a migrant's economic situation – the vast majority of these households were using their remittances to buy food and repay loans⁸. Compared to international migration, internal migration involves 'poorer people from poorer regions'⁹. Internal migration may be more accessible because it does not involve as many 'bureaucratic hurdles to be overcome', or require high levels of skills and abilities, or substantial initial investments¹⁰.

4. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.453.6545&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

5. www.migrationdrc.org/publications/other_publications/Moving_Out_of_Poverty.pdf

6. Martin, Maxmillan, et al. Climate-related migration in rural Bangladesh: a behavioural model. *Population and Environment* 36.1 (2014): 85-110.

7. Dao TH, Docquier F, Parsons C, Peri G. Migration and development: Dissecting the anatomy of the mobility transition. *Journal of Development Economics*. 2017 Dec 30.

8. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2006/Resources/477383-1118673432908/Migration_and_Inequality.pdf

9. Deshingkar P. Internal migration, poverty and development in Asia. ODI Briefing Paper. 2006 Mar;11.



FIGURE 2: 21 million people are victims of forced labour

Source: ILO, 2017. www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/policy-areas/statistics/lang-en/index.htm

Despite the high prevalence of women who migrate because of economic difficulties, many women also migrate to seek better socio-economic opportunities elsewhere, improve their families' standard of living, and achieve upward social mobility when local opportunities do not match their aspirations. In Nepal, over half of prospective migrants interviewed were currently employed and a third contributed to at least half of the household expenses. A third also reported that someone in the household had cash savings, a small business, or a property. However, emerging findings from the SWiFT research with Nepalese migrant women suggest that migration 'by choice' (versus economic necessity) was not associated with lower risk of forced labour.

WHAT INFLUENCES RISKS?

A great many of the interventions launched to prevent modern slavery and exploitation assume that people would be less vulnerable to forced labour if they were more aware of trafficking risks and of existing regulations and their rights. However, very limited evidence supports the assumption that vulnerability is driven by a lack of knowledge among prospective workers. Rather, findings from SWiFT in Nepal indicate that awareness of migration risks very rarely changes any aspect of a woman's migration plans, and does not influence her risk of forced labour either.

Overall, SWiFT data from Nepal suggests a woman's individual pre-departure characteristics have limited influence on her risk of being trafficked. For example, among Nepalese returnees, a woman's literacy and educational level did not influence her risk of forced labour. This finding resonates with previous research, which found that access to 'job-selling' migrant networks abroad may be more important to migration outcomes than education¹⁰.

Although migration by choice rather than necessity may result in a more positive experience for migrants, data suggest that choosing to migrate does not imply a reduced risk of forced labour. Data from SWiFT's survey in Nepal indicate that women who migrated exclusively because they wanted to travel abroad or because they knew other migrants at their destination face a similar risk of forced labour to that of women migrating because of economic difficulties or aspirations.

Forced labour risks seem to be driven by inequalities of economic development across countries and regions, alongside deeply embedded power imbalances between migrant workers and the agents and mechanisms that promote migration. The latter include labour intermediaries, employers, business models, and state structures that promote business to the disadvantage of workers. Ethnic and religious discrimination and gender power imbalances can reduce negotiation opportunities with intermediaries, hinder employment relations and protection mechanisms, and ultimately reduce the opportunities for women to choose and control their migration. The odds of being empowered during a migratory journey is further limited by economic difficulties, gender power imbalances in families, social norms that restrict women's mobility, and/or ethnic and national origin discrimination. Nonetheless, SWiFT findings suggest that female empowerment may be important in preventing trafficking. For example, a woman's lack of autonomy in planning her migration is one of the few pre-departure factors significantly associated with forced labour in the Nepal data. However, empowerment and awareness-raising initiatives need to be based on evidence, including findings emerging from SWiFT.

The notion that migrants make independent rational choices to maximise their economic gains, based on individually conceived goals and strategies, is unrealistic. Women's migratory choices and plans are conditioned by their social context. Family or friends may participate in decision-making, fund migration, lend money, receive remittances, and/or help with repatriation costs.

- Recruiters may be particularly central to their decisions, leaving women dependent on their network to be able to migrate.
- Access to health and education may prevent shocks or crises that push women into unwanted migration.
- Legislation promoting migration can motivate women to go to specific destinations, as is the case of the MoU between the Bangladesh and Saudi governments¹¹.

Pre-departure training and advice help women identify and navigate risks in the migration path, but many of these are beyond their individual control.

10. Barбора S, Thieme S, Siegmann KA, Menon V, Gurung G. Migration Matters in south Asia: commonalities and critiques. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2008 Jun 14:57-65.

11. www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/08/17/government-fix-migration-cost-regarding-saudi-manpower-market/

WHAT ARE THE PROGRAMMING IMPLICATIONS?

Emerging findings from SWiFT have implications for the kinds of policy and programming that are likely to achieve effective change.

Programmes need well-defined target groups and effective strategies to recruit these groups. Safe migration trainings seem to be more effective when directed at people who actually intend to migrate (versus the whole community). In South Asia, where there is a particular stigma associated with female migration, participants may feel uncomfortable asking questions and disclosing migration plans and experiences in front of larger groups. Trainings on safe migration for women should be delivered to prospective migrants only.

Interventions can assist women to obtain information on their migration. Women seem to have limited information on the migration process (e.g. documents and procedures) and arrangements (e.g. employment, destination, living arrangements, salary). In Nepal, approximately half of women planning to migrate within three months of the survey had no information about the clauses of their contract, such as living arrangements, salaries, working hours, overtime, penalties for ending their contract early, time off, leave, or contract duration. Most lacked information on their rights and responsibilities as foreign workers. SWiFT research in Nepal suggests that women without a written contract could be at higher risk of deception about employment conditions, even if they were not identified as survivors of forced labour.

Pre-migration activities commonly offer information about necessary documents, avenues for legal migration, vocational skills-building components, and empowerment. SWiFT findings suggest that prospective migrants value this information, especially on practical aspects of migration such as contact information for assistance services and helplines. Based on the level of interest, interventions can be improved if knowledge-building programmes can be delivered in accessible, useful, and sustainable ways.

Pre-migration guidance needs to be realistic and customised. Given the complexity of relationships and processes involved in labour migration, information for prospective migrants must be feasible and relevant to their social and cultural environments, and to local migration opportunities, patterns and dynamics, as advice can be well intentioned but unrealistic or difficult to follow. For example, some guidelines advise people to avoid local, informal labour intermediaries, but rural residents may not be able to contact formal recruitment agencies who tend to be based in urban areas. They may instead trust informal recruiters in their social network whom they feel can be held accountable or offer assistance if they face problems. Almost half of the migrant women interviewed in India reported that their recruiters were relatives or belonged to their caste network.

Programme designs that depend on volunteers or poorly paid staff are rarely sustainable and may inadvertently promote local, for-profit, and possibly exploitative agents. Donor and government budget allocations for these programmes should focus on building and sharing information within local networks instead of recruiting external trainers. It is not cost-effective to invest in the development of a curriculum and training staff if sessions are infrequent and unpredictably available, leaving potential migrants without access to guidance when they need it. The migrant community could potentially answer these needs in private, respectful environments through existing community-based organisations, consultations, social media, or interactive chats. For example, more than half of prospective migrants interviewed in Nepal were members of a community group, especially microfinance (41%) and women's groups (26%).

Cross-linkages with government, civil society, and private initiatives may also help in achieving sustainability of interventions. However, key people in these networks need up-to-date information and training on migration in order to be able to provide this advice. SWiFT results suggest that having experienced migration does not guarantee high levels of knowledge about risks and safety in migration. For example, only half of repeat-migrants in Nepal knew they needed a work visa to migrate, and only 15% knew about the need to obtain a pre-departure training certificate.

Programmes should not overpromise or create false expectations. For instance, migrants value emergency contact details for assistance abroad, but should not be misled to believe that it will always be readily available. They should also be informed of common challenges associated with seeking emergency assistance. Interventions help prospective migrants if they manage expectations about the kind of support that can actually be provided.

Promoting contacts within migrant networks could help women obtain information and be less socially isolated after migrating. Preliminary results indicate that knowing other migrants may actually work to protect Nepalese women from forced labour. Previous research in India also suggests that socially isolated people are more vulnerable to exploitation. Migrants who do not have strong kin and social networks are more likely to end up in casual and poorly paid jobs, and may be more vulnerable to intimidation, cheated wages, and loneliness⁸. Fostering information flows across migrant networks could therefore help build networks of shared resources and potentially counteract the isolation some women experience. For example, Nepali migrants have used their social networks to establish informal savings and credit associations¹⁰. Pre-departure groups and social media could also be a way to do this; for example, a third of the migrants interviewed in Nepal used social media apps when they arrived, most commonly Facebook and Viber. However, before investing any resources, more information should be gathered on the potential consequences of these approaches. This includes how interventions

can target diverse patterns of mobility, address the heterogeneity of migrants' motives and the role of gender, age, wealth and caste-related power in South Asia¹⁰. They also need to control possible abuses of these networks that promote unfree or unfair recruitment.

Gender empowerment strategies need a community focus. Power differences relating to gender, age, and caste influence the risk of forced labour among women. They affect relationships in households, communities, and societies, and influence access to resources, possibilities of negotiation, decision-making, and ultimately decisions about who migrates and who does not¹⁰. Women may need to negotiate migration decisions with their partners and male family members, but SWiFT respondents felt that their training on rights-based migration conflicts with gender social norms and could not safely be communicated to male relatives. To foster women's empowerment, it will be necessary to tackle the social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities and control women's mobility. Women themselves can hold views supportive of gender inequality. For example, in Nepal, almost half of the prospective migrants interviewed supported men's use of violence against women. Shifting gender norms is a long-term goal, in which lessons can be learned from other fields and opportunities explored. For example, existing gender-based violence and HIV-prevention initiatives may offer opportunities to integrate female empowerment in migration as a target in interventions for gender equality¹².

“I liked the (NGO) message about men and women's rights, but I will not repeat it at home because it will be understood wrongly. People will say that I have become too clever. Men rule in this country. I have ideas about rights, freedom and power within myself and I value them. The problem is that one cannot exert these rights in this environment.”

– 33-YEAR-OLD BANGLADESHI WOMAN

Female migrant workers experience high levels of violence and need access to assistance so they can recover, be safe, and escape abusive situations. Information about medical resources and other assistance are important, given the high level of violence and injuries that female migrants experience. For example, nearly all migrant women interviewed by SWiFT in Nepal reported being yelled at, insulted, or humiliated (94%) while working overseas. Many were threatened (36%), some reported being slapped, hit with a fist, or having something thrown at them (22%), and a high proportion were pushed, shoved, kicked, dragged, or beaten up (18%). Over one in ten had their personal belongings damaged intentionally (11%). In most of these cases, the perpetrator was the employer (65%) or the employer's relatives (42%). Findings from

Bangladesh also show that migrant women experience severe violence and abuse. Previous research has shown the impact of violence and abuse on the mental health of trafficking survivors¹³.

Specialist and sustained care is needed to address these issues and help survivors recover from trauma and cope with the stigma they often experience when returning home. Access to resources can also help women escape violence into safety. Guidance for health assistance of trafficked persons is available in English, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese¹⁴, and can be useful in preparing local health providers to understand human trafficking, identify survivors, recognise associated health problems, and provide care for trafficked persons. Training for health providers is a low-resource and sustainable intervention that can greatly improve the well-being and safety of victims¹⁵.

“If a woman follows that advice [to avoid a *dalal* (informal recruiter)] she will never go abroad. Without a *dalal*, it is just not possible. To cross a channel or a river, one needs a boat; to go abroad one needs a *dalal*.”

– BANGLADESHI WOMAN

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Protection mechanisms in transit and at the destination are essential and require strong policies, laws and services. Pre-migration, community-based actions are more likely to be effective if they align with such protection strategies. Increased awareness of trafficking risks or knowledge about regulations, documentation, and rights can only help prevent exploitation if women's rights as workers are ensured both in transit and at their destination.

SWiFT research indicates that internal-migrant domestic workers being exploited in India have to rely exclusively on their own capacity to manage highly personal relationships with employers while trying to escape exploitation. They cannot count on any support from trade unions, migrant workers' associations, family members or brokers. Neither can these women access welfare entitlements in migration. Easy ways to access information and support options at destination, including contact with consulates and other migrants, could potentially help women escape from exploitative and abusive employment.

Investments in remedy and accountability may help migrants obtain justice and discourage unscrupulous recruiters and employers from illegal and harmful practices. Awareness and knowledge will not help if recruiters and employers are not held accountable. Recruiters may be particularly central to migration decisions, as they often profile,

12. www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/35-global-evidence-reviews-paper-2-interventions-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls-sep-2015/file

13. Kiss L, Pocock NS, Naisanguansri V, Suos S, Dickson B, Thuy D, Koehler J, Sirisup K, Pongrungeee N, Nguyen VA, Borland R. Health of men, women, and children in post-trafficking services in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam: an observational cross-sectional study. *The Lancet Global Health*. 2015 Mar 1;3(3):e154-61.

14. Caring for Trafficked Persons. Guidance for Health Providers Facilitator's Guide. Geneva: International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2012). http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=47&products_id=904

15. Viergever RF, West H, Borland R, Zimmerman C. Health care providers and human trafficking: what do they know, what do they need to know? Findings from the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Central America. *Frontiers in public health*. 2015 Jan 29;3:6.

identify, and persuade women to migrate. They may lend money (sometimes at extortionate rates), arrange travel and employment, or even help rescue women from forced labour. Women can be highly dependent on their local recruiter, who is often their only link to an extended recruitment network.

Findings from Nepal indicate that the participation of informal recruiters in arranging jobs can actually increase the risk of forced labour. In India, SWiFT findings expose fragmentary and unaccountable recruitment pathways. Further, managing the risks in the relationship with recruiters poses its own challenges. For example, most prospective migrants in Nepal reported not knowing whether their recruitment agent was licensed. Bangladeshi women thought it was unrealistic not to use a local broker and arrange their own migration. Indeed, in many countries the migration process is lengthy, bureaucratic and difficult to follow. Interventions to promote codes of conduct and monitor compliance in recruitment agencies may be important, but it is the women who cannot or will not access formal recruitment agencies who are often at the greater risk of exploitation. Similarly, women considered that citing their rights to an employer could be ineffective and dangerous, increasing their risk of violence, early repatriation, and 'failed' migration. Self-defence techniques were considered unreasonable by migrants in Bangladesh.

A thorough understanding of the context is necessary to effect change. **Anti-trafficking programmes** that invest exclusively in awareness raising or empowerment reduce the likelihood of impact if they do not account for the multiple constraints women face when migrating. An 'enabling environment' is a pre-condition for women to exert power in migration.

Because family, social networks, local leaders, informal labour intermediaries, access to health and education, and labour and migration legislation can all influence women's migration decisions, changes should be promoted and incentivised at a higher structural level and within the community to ensure that mechanisms exist to promote and protect the rights of migrant women in exploitative or abusive situations. Women can then use improved understanding about migration and their individual resourcefulness to access their rights.

Poverty alleviation and economic development

are important and necessary strategies to improve the well being of people living in poor countries. However, they may not reduce the risks of human trafficking or forced labour. They may also not work in the short term in reducing the overall number of international migrants from poor countries.

Most returnee women in Nepal reported that they would prefer to stay if there were better opportunities locally. Migration has deep implications for families and communities and ultimately should be a choice, not a necessity¹⁶. Negative consequences – bad work conditions at destination, outstanding debts, split families, increased workloads for those who stay, children and elderly dependents being left behind, and aggravation of the agrarian crisis in South Asia – cannot be ignored. Individual, family, and community well-being and sustainable development can be fostered by interventions that promote attractive and realistic economic livelihoods for those who prefer to stay or want to return home, while striving to promote safer migration for those who want to leave. Feasibility assessments may be needed to check what type of livelihood strategies are viable in different contexts.

Care and recovery services, provided through health systems, are important for returnees. An emphasis on prevention should not distract donors or policy-makers from investing in remedies and responses too. Many of those who experience human trafficking or forced labour emerge severely traumatised and need specialised care to recover.

CONCLUSION

Emerging results from SWiFT's analysis of the Work in Freedom programme highlight a pressing need for comprehensive cross-border intersectoral systems that enable South Asia women interested in migration to access effective resources to ensure their rights and help them escape from exploitative and abusive situations. With human trafficking and modern slavery high on the political agenda in the UK and elsewhere, and the large number of individuals experiencing labour exploitation and worse, this is truly a global issue that requires earnest commitment by the international community, individual nations, and civil society.

16. www.fao.org/migration/en/