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The Harmful Sexual and Non-Sexual Behaviors of Trafficked Women and Children in Mexico: A Study of Victims of Sexual Exploitation

Arun Kumar Acharya

Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, arun.kumara@uanl.mx

Lilia Susana Padilla y Sotelo

Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, padilla@igg.unam.mx

Jose Juan Cervantes Niño

*Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, jose.cervantesn@uanl.mx*Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity>

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Abstract

During the last 17 years, since the adoption of the Palermo Protocol, authorities at international and national levels have investigated and prosecuted trafficking cases, and aided victims. Nevertheless, every day thousands of people around the world are sold, lured with false promises and exploited. In Mexico, 10,000 young girls and women are said to be trafficked into cities for sexual exploitation every year. Trafficked victims suffer a wide range of sexual exploitation, physical and psychological violence, human rights violations including their right to dignity, and cruel and inhumane treatment, creating vulnerability and isolation. To cope, many victims adopt harmful sexual and non-sexual behaviors, which we discuss in this paper. For this study, we gathered information from 70 trafficked victims in Monterrey, Mexico. We found that trafficked women and children are forced into high-risk sexual and non-sexual behaviors. Many of them use drugs, alcohol, and marijuana. Their sexual behaviors indicate that many victims are coerced into high-risk sexual practices including having multiple sexual partners.

Keywords

Mexico, trafficking of women and children, harmful sexual behaviors, non-sexual behaviors, drug consumption

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**THE HARMFUL SEXUAL AND NON-SEXUAL BEHAVIORS OF
TRAFFICKED WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN MEXICO:
A STUDY OF VICTIMS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Arun Kumar Acharya

Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon

Lilia Susana Padilla y Sotelo

Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico

Jose Juan Cervantes Niño

Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon

ABSTRACT

During the last 17 years, since the adoption of the Palermo Protocol, authorities at international and national levels have investigated and prosecuted trafficking cases, and aided victims. Nevertheless, every day thousands of people around the world are sold, lured with false promises and exploited. In Mexico, 10,000 young girls and women are said to be trafficked into cities for sexual exploitation every year. Trafficked victims suffer a wide range of sexual exploitation, physical and psychological violence, human rights violations including their right to dignity, and cruel and inhumane treatment, creating vulnerability and isolation. To cope, many victims adopt harmful sexual and non-sexual behaviors, which we discuss in this paper. For this study, we gathered information from 70 trafficked victims in Monterrey, Mexico. We found that trafficked women and children are forced into high-risk sexual and non-sexual behaviors. Many of them use drugs, alcohol, and marijuana. Their sexual behaviors indicate that many victims are coerced into high-risk sexual practices including having multiple sexual partners.

KEYWORDS

Mexico, trafficking of women and children, harmful sexual behaviors, non-sexual behaviors, drug consumption

Ending modern-day slavery has been on the global agenda since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Walk Free Foundation, 2015). Since then several United Nations treaties, protocols, and conventions have shaped the international response to human trafficking. Eradicating slavery was not included in the United Nations 2000 millennium development goals. However, in 2015, the United Nations approved the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, which 180 countries signed and ratified. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) set goals, targets, and indicators that states will be expected to use to frame

their agendas and political policies on the practices of forced labor, exploitation, modern-day slavery, and human trafficking¹ (United Nations, 2015).

In the 17 years since the adoption of the Palermo Protocol, authorities at international and national levels have investigated and prosecuted trafficking cases² and aided victims. Even so, every day thousands of people are sold, lured with false promises and exploited. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that nearly 20.9 million people are victims of forced labor. They were coerced or deceived into taking jobs they cannot leave. Out of these, 4.5 million (22%) are victims of forced sexual exploitation (ILO, 2012). The 2014 Global report on Trafficking in Persons indicates women and girls account for around 70% of victims of trafficking worldwide, with 53% used for sexual exploitation and 40% exploited for forced labor (UNODC, 2014).

In Latin America, Mexico has the highest number of slaves (Walk Free Foundation, 2015) and occupies the first place in the distribution of child pornography and child sexual abuse (Figueroa 2016; Benítez, Cortes, & Guzman, 2014) in the world. The 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report by the U.S. Department of State indicates that Mexico is a source, transit and destination country for sex trafficking and forced labor. According to the report, Mexican women and children, as well as men, are forced to work in agriculture, domestic service, food processing factories, construction, the informal economy, begging, and vending in both the United States and Mexico. The most vulnerable groups to human trafficking in Mexico include women, children, indigenous people, individuals with mental or physical disabilities, migrants, and LGBT Mexicans (USDS, 2016).

Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Mexico has become a public concern, especially the prostitution of children (Esteinou, 2011). Studies (Cacho, 2010; Seelke, 2013; USDS, 2016; López & Van Broeck, 2013) indicate that during the last two decades, sex trafficking in Mexico has changed significantly. First, Mexico is an origin, destination and transit country for international trafficking. Secondly, exponential growth in tourism and sexual tourism in the country has created increased demand for young girls for sexual exploitation. Every year 15,000 to 20,000 women and girls are thought to be trafficked into the United States from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Sex traffickers (coyotes) lure poor women and girls through false promises of jobs in the U.S. (Richard, 2000; Acharya, 2006).

¹ The Sustainable Development Goals draft has list immediate and effective measures by all nations to combat all forms of slavery and human trafficking. The 5th objective involves gender equality and empowerment of women. In target 5.2 it defines the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. Similarly, objectives 8 and 16 emphasized the immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, exploitation, end of modern day slavery and human trafficking as well as all forms of violence and torture against children by 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

²The United Nations defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion or abduction, fraud, deception, through the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or by giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation.” Exploitation includes prostitution, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs (United Nations, 2000).

Trafficking victims suffer a wide range of acts of violence and exploitation with health impacts, such as sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and non-sexual behaviors like frequent use of drugs and alcohol (Silverman, 2011; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; Binh 2006; Farley, Cotton, Lynne, Zumbek, Spiwak, Reyes, Alvarez, & Sezgin, 2004). However, the sexual and non-sexual behaviors of victims of human trafficking in Mexico have not been analyzed in order to understand the consequences of sexual exploitation on their physical, sexual, and mental health.

Our study analyzes the harmful effects of sexual exploitation on sexual and non-sexual behaviors of trafficked women and children in the city of Monterrey, Mexico. This analysis will contribute to the design of effective intervention programs by federal and local governments for these women and children.

Background

A number of research reports indicate that women and children are trafficked for various purposes, such as prostitution, sexual servitude, domestic labor, marriage, agricultural labor, begging, and, in the case of children, for illegal adoptions. Regardless of the form of trafficking, most of these victims suffer sexual exploitation, physical and psychological violence, violation of human rights including their right to dignity, and cruel and inhumane treatment, creating vulnerability and isolation (UNODC, 2014). Zimmerman, Hossain, and Watts (2011) and Greenbaum and Crawford-Jakubiak (2015) found that girls and women, mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, often suffer physical, sexual and psychological violence, which directly affects the sexual behaviors of victims.

Silverman (2011), Kempadoo & Doezema (1998), and Binh (2006) showed that sex trafficking is a complex phenomenon with consequences for the sexual behaviors and health of victims, primarily due to lack of access to services, isolation, and exploitative working conditions. Additionally, Farley et al. (2004) interviewed 854 people in prostitution in nine countries, including Mexico, and found that respondents suffer different types of sexual and physical violence in their day-to-day life that is strongly associated with the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and non-sexual behaviors such as frequent drug use.

Several studies have found that sexually abused and exploited girls are likely to have higher levels of alcohol, drug abuse, and risky sexual behaviors. For example, the research of Goldenberg, Rangel, Patterson, Abramovitz, Silverman, Raj, & Strathdee (2012) interviewed 624 sexually exploited girls and women in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and found that 42% were forced into sexual exploitation as minors and they experienced a higher prevalence of sexual violence and risk of substance abuse, which negatively impacted their health. The study of Lang et al. (2011) on rape victimization and high risk sexual behaviors among African-American adolescents indicates that adolescent females who report higher rates of physical and sexual violence are more associated with high-risk sexual practices including having multiple sexual partners, earlier sexual debut, absence of birth control on their last intercourse, substance abuse, and exchanging sex for money or drugs.

Similarly, Jessor (1991) argues that sexual or non-sexual behavior of an individual is directly related to his or her social surroundings and socially organized opportunities that an individual learns and practices. These studies indicate that non-sexual behaviors, such as drinking alcohol, smoking, substance abuse, and

gambling, and sexual behaviors, such as the number of sexual partners, use of condoms during sexual relations, etc., are directly related to health (Jessor & Jessor, 1997).

Moreover, Farley et al. (2004) found that women in prostitution regularly suffer sexual harassment, verbal abuse, physical violence, stalking, rape, battering, and torture, which directly influences their non-sexual behaviors and the likelihood of suffering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For example, across the nine countries, there is high reporting of alcohol and drug use. The authors found that there is a positive correlation between violence experience and severity of PTSD, where respondents answered at least eight of the 17 items on the post-traumatic disorder check list.

Gupta, Raj, Decker, Reed, and Silverman (2009) studied 61 sex trafficking victims in India and found that victims were forced into harmful sexual activities. They were unable to negotiate condom use because they are treated as a “property” by the *gharwali* (madam). Many times, the trafficker or *gharwali* arranged forceful sexual activities and raped the victim. They also forced victims to consume alcohol to facilitate rape or as a means of socializing with male clients. Also, many victims used local substances such as Pan Parag, betel nuts, to cope with chronic violence and exploitation. A recent study on human trafficking, mental illness, and addiction (Stoklosa, 2017) indicates that the sexual and non-sexual behavior of victims of human trafficking results in many complications, such as pregnancy, mental illness, higher dependence on alcohol, marijuana, heroin, and cocaine, and infection by sexually transmitted diseases.

METHODS

Trafficked women are a hidden population, for whom it is extremely difficult to establish a reliable sampling frame. This tends to make randomized sampling strategies unsuitable. Therefore, we used a snowball sampling technique during fieldwork. We conducted interviews of trafficked women in two steps: first, establishing contact with key informants, and second, interviewing women victims of trafficking. According to Zheng (2013,), if the researcher is local and knows people working in the establishment personally, the mutual trust between them could make it far easier for the researcher to access the prostitution venue.. Taking this into consideration, in the City of Monterrey, we first reached out to a graduate student named “Olaf” from our Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon), seeking his collaboration. Olaf was also working as a part-time barman in a brothel and had good quality knowledge of the area and business in downtown Monterrey. Olaf said he would try to help, but because it is difficult for him to move from one place to another, he might not be able to locate many women victims of trafficking. After a few months, Olaf called us with information on a woman and the name of the brothel where she worked.

The researchers, along with Francisco Ontiveros, a post-graduate student at the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (Social Science Research Institute) for the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon) visited the brothel and contacted the victim. We described to her our study and mentioned that Olaf had given us her name and location. After a few minutes of conversation, we paid the requested amount of 200 pesos for 30 minutes, and to hide our identity in front of the brothel owner and traffickers; we went to a private

room to talk more freely. Only the woman knew we were researchers. After concluding the interview, we asked her to help us find more victims of trafficking who are working in the same brothel or others nearby. In the beginning, she declined to help, but after a while, she agreed to help locate other victims. We also offered to pay her 100 pesos per respondent every time she located a victim, arranged an interview and called us. Therefore, by applying the snowball technique, we were able to find and interview trafficking victims in Monterrey.

Before and during the interviews, we followed the World Health Organization (WHO) ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing women victims of trafficking, written by Zimmerman and Watts (2003), including the ethical and methodology procedures such as safeguarding participants' confidentiality, anonymity, and safety. Although participants agreed to the interview through their friend, we still obtained their consent and always explained to them the purpose of our study, the subject to be discussed, and its risks as well as benefits. Moreover, we never asked any questions that we thought could cause an emotional reaction, nor did we question their sentiments or judge their decision or character. Some women became very emotional and preferred not to continue the interview, so we respected their decision and stopped at that point.

Also, at the beginning of the interview, we invited victims to come to our house or any other location of their preference, but they always responded with a "no." They would tell us, "...this is our area; it is not possible for us to leave this place because our *madrina* (pimp) does not allow us to work in other places..." Since women were not allowed to leave the brothel, we acted as "clients" because it was the only way to gain access to the brothel. Interviews lasted around 30 minutes and using the snowball method we interviewed a total of 70 women and children from 2007 to 2014, with a semi-structured questionnaire, to learn the causes and consequences of trafficking. All interviews followed the same topics in Spanish and were also recorded, and later transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy.

In this study, we analyzed the information in two ways. The first was by using SPSS software, which systematized the demographic and socio-cultural data from the trafficked women. For example, in each interview, we obtained information on age, place of origin, physical characteristics, religion, type of family, age at which they were trafficked, abortions and violence suffered, among other information. For sexual behaviors, we asked about condom use, the daily number of clients, type of sexual relations practiced by the women. Regarding non-sexual behaviors, we asked about smoking cigarettes, drug and marijuana use and alcohol consumption. Secondly, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we analyzed the words (discourses) of trafficking victims, which revealed how the traffickers or pimps used their power to maintain an exploitive situation. For example, from the discourses of trafficked women and children we analyzed how traffickers or madams treat or control victims, how they coerced women and children into trafficking situations, what kind of sexual and non-sexual behaviors persist among victims, etc. This qualitative information was analyzed together with the quantitative information to understand the magnitude and seriousness of the trafficking problem in Mexico and its future implications.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of trafficked women and children

Our research found that the majority of trafficked victims were under 25 years of age. Out of 70 trafficked women and children we interviewed, 77% (54 victims) were minors under the age of 18.³ A majority (80%) said they were trafficked before age 15, and three said they were trafficked between ages 10 and 11.

A majority of these victims (n=43) were lured into the trafficking network through false promises, such as offers of employment at certain companies in Monterrey and migration to the U.S. However, some victims (n=27) said traffickers promised them domestic employment with high remuneration (nearly 30 dollars per day) including food, shelter, social security and two days off per week. Once traffickers trapped them with these promises, they never traveled to the U.S. but transferred the victims to Monterrey and forced them to work in prostitution. Many of them became aware of the situation during transit or at their destination.

Furthermore, the study found that women and children accepted offers from traffickers for various reasons. Some gave multiple reasons, such as unemployment, poverty, and desertion by a spouse. However, the majority of them (n=52) said the first cause was the family's unhealthy environment or disintegration.

Such was the case of Lucia, a 15-year-old girl working in a massage parlor in Monterrey, who reported:

I have two brothers and one sister; I was born in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. [Guerrero is one of the poorest states in the country.] My father was working in a construction center in Acapulco. After returning from work, every day he used to drink two to three bottles of cerveza (beer), and at night, my father and mother would fight over money. There was always the argument that my father was wasting his money on beer. Since my childhood, I have observed their fighting, and sometimes my father would beat her also. When I was eight years old, my mother separated from my father, and after that, he never came back. My mother got married to another guy, and although my stepfather tried to maintain a good relationship with us, by this time my mother started neglecting us. She even claimed that she needed privacy in the house and asked us to find another place to live. I was totally fed up with these kinds of problems, so one day I contacted a *capataz*⁴ who usually offered people jobs in the U.S. and Monterrey. After a few weeks he offered me a job in Monterrey and said it was domestic servant work, where I would earn nearly 30 to 40 dollars per day including food and shelter, and he also gave me 100 dollars in advance. I immediately accepted his offer. Two days later I traveled with him to Monterrey, and once we reached Monterrey he brought me to this place, and I was forced to accept this job.

³ According Palermo Protocol under Article 3 (c) and (d) trafficking victims under the age of 18 categorize as a child.

⁴ *Capataz* mean foreman, who offer jobs and employment.

Harmful sexual behavior of trafficked women and children

According to Farley et al. (2004), the sexual behavior of trafficked women and children is closely related to their health. It also encompasses the problems of sexually transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancy and abortion, infertility, and sexual dysfunction. To get a complete picture on sexual behaviors of trafficked women and children, we included three primary questions: (1) daily average number of clients received, (2) types of sexual and physical relations victims are coerced to practice with clients, and (3) do they or their clients use any protection (condoms) during intercourse. Analysis of the results indicates that a majority of women and children (n=38) saw more than 10 clients per day, although some victims saw fewer than five clients a day (see Table 1). So, to find out more about this differential characteristic, we did a bi-variate analysis, which indicated an inverse relationship between the age of the women and children and the number of clients. As the age of the victims increases, the number of clients per day decreases and this happened due to sexual preferences of clients on young and teenage girls.

Table 1: Number of Clients of Trafficked Women and Children in Monterrey

Number of clients	Number (N=70)	Percent
1 to 5 clients per day	9	12.8
5 to 10 clients per day	23	32.9
More than 10 clients per day	38	54.3

Source: *fieldwork*

Also, clients avoided victims who had worked in the brothel for many years, assuming they might be carriers of sexually transmitted diseases. In this context Lucy a 14-year-old girl said:

On the day when they brought me to this place, *madrina* said: You will live here and work for me...after few days she asked me to have sexual relations with two men, when I said no, she beat me and forced to have sexual relations with them.... the next day she asked me to serve five clients and days after that she asked to serve more than 10 clients... when I said, I feel pain in my body; she said she doesn't care...One day I asked her why other girls don't serve so many clients, she said: "Clients like you and they want to pay big money for you and are keen to spend more time with you... you are a lucky hen for me..."

Lucy's testimony indicates that there is a clear preference from clients for young girls, and pimps earn more from these girls than others. For example, we have observed that for a girl younger than 15, a pimp charges clients nearly 1,000 pesos and for a girl older than 20, a pimp charges clients around 300 to 500 pesos, and sometimes even less.

On the harmful sexual behavior of trafficked women and children, we asked whether their clients use condoms or any gel during the sexual relations, and if so, how frequently. We also asked what types of sexual and physical relations victims were coerced to practice with clients. A majority of women and children said (nearly 73%) their clients did not use any protection (condoms) during sex.

Twenty-three percent of victims reported that their clients used a condom occasionally, and only three victims (4%) said they asked their clients regularly used condoms (see Table 2). Victims are vulnerable to different types of infections via sexual intercourse. While examining the reasons for unsafe sex, we found that pimps force women and children to have sex without condoms to earn more money. When a client has sex without a condom, he pays more.

We asked women and children whether they used any contraceptive pills to avoid pregnancy. Thirty-seven (53%) of 70 trafficked victims said they took these pills regularly. Twenty-six women and children (37% reported that they take contraceptives occasionally, and seven (10%) victims said they never used any contraceptive pill (see Table 2). In this regard, Fanny, a 16-year-old girl said:

Every day, madrina gives us instructions to receive as many clients we can... she also instructed us never to say “no” to any client...she used to say clients are money and we have to treat them very well, and also offer them all that we have. All girls of my age have sexual relations with at least 10 to 15 clients every day. Most of the clients pay double and ask us to have sex without a condom...I try to be careful and not get pregnant and also ask clients to be careful... But never trust the client’s intention... so, I prefer to take the pill before having sex. Each day I take three to four pills to be sure I will not get pregnant... Madrina gives us these pills and orders us to be careful while having relations... she also says she will not allow us to get pregnant...and in case any of us gets pregnant, she will ask for an abortion.

Table 2: Use of Contraceptives by Trafficked Women and Children in Monterrey

	Regularly		Occasionally		Never	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Client uses condom	3	4.3	16	22.9	51	72.8
Contraceptive pill use	37	52.9	26	37.1	7	10.0

Source: *fieldwork*

Along with the use of contraceptives and the number of clients received by victims, the sexual practices of trafficked women and children are also an important element to assess their sexual behaviors. Results indicate that 54% of trafficked victims regularly practiced vaginal, oral, and anal sex; nearly 13% said they practice all three forms occasionally. When it comes to anal and vaginal sex, nearly 19% said they practice them regularly, and only 4% said occasionally. In the case of anal sex, 8.6% of trafficked victims said they practice this form occasionally and one girl (1.4%) reported she had never done it. However, she used to do masturbation with clients (see Table 3). Thus, victims are forced by pimps to practice different types sexual relations, and they comply due to fear of violence and further inhumane treatment. For example, Lucy, a 14-year-old girl said:

Since the first day, madrina told us that her client's happiness is very much important, and she will never compromise on their demands. Every day there are clients asking for all three, vaginal, anal and oral sex, they also pay three to four times more money, but I cannot say "no" to them because they have negotiated it with madrina. I always ask them not to have oral sex because it disgusts me, but they never listen to me. Many of them go directly to madrina and complain to her that I am not cooperating. Almost every day I practice these types of relations; it's only during my period (menstruation) that madrina asks them to have anal or oral sex. During this time, I want to rest, but they never allow me to do so... although I feel lots of pain, madrina forces me to take some painkillers and asks me to go with the client. For the last two years, I have no control over my body, they are using me as an object, my feelings, my sentiments are not important to them.

Table 3: Harmful Sexual Practices of Trafficked Women and Children in Monterrey

Sexual Practices	Regularly		Occasionally		Never	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Vaginal, Oral & Anal	38	54.3	9	12.8	0	0
Anal & Vaginal	13	18.6	3	4.3	0	0
Only Anal	0	0	8.6	6	1.4	1

Source: *fieldwork*

Non-sexual behaviors of trafficked women and children

Research on trafficked women and children indicates that victims are coerced into different types of non-sexual behaviors, such as using alcohol and drugs, and smoking cigarettes (WHO, 2012; Silverman, Decker, Gupta, Maheshwari, Willis, & Raj, 2007; Fong, 2006; Young, Boyd, & Hubbell, 2000). We found that trafficked women and children in Monterrey also had different types of non-sexual behaviors (see table 4). According to Farley et al. (2004), Deissa, Lozada, Remedios, Burgos, Strathdee, Gallardo, Cuevas and Garfein (2012), and Zimmerman et al. (2011), trafficked victims engage in risky non-sexual behavior, where they frequently consume different kinds of substances, such as drugs, alcohol, and smoking. Many of them also exchange sex for drugs.

During the interviews and analysis, we found that that trafficked women and children in Monterrey also frequently consume substances like drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. We asked: *What kinds of substances have you consumed during last month and how frequently?* We found that victims frequently consumed alcohol, smoked cigarettes, and used synthetic drugs and marijuana. On the consumption of alcohol, during the past month, 49 out of 70 (70%) victims reported drinking at least once a day. As Berenice, a 20-year-old victim said:

I cannot sleep without drinking six or seven cups of tequila. Before I go to bed, I drink it because I want to sleep without pain. The everyday owner asks me to see at least 10 to 15 clients and having sexual relations with so many clients is very painful. I cannot tell others about my pain or desires, so the only way to escape is by drinking alcohol. I feel very relaxed when I drink it. It has been a way of life for me, for the past three years. However, many of my friends call me alcoholic (drunk), but it doesn't matter what they say, I only need to be pain- and stress-free.

Some women and children reported drinking less alcohol, as the table shows. On smoking cigarettes, the results of the study indicate that all victims (100%) smoke more than once a day. Alicia, a 16-year-old girl, said:

Before being trafficked, I had never smoked. But, in this place, clients are used to smoking three to four packets of cigarettes before they leave. Many times, they force us to smoke with them, if I say no, they force me or complain to Padrino for not obeying. Though I don't like smoking, I have to do it, because it is the wish of the clients. The instruction of Padrino is to make all clients happy at all costs so that they will return to the establishment. In the beginning, it was very difficult for me to smoke one cigarette, but now I am smoking 20 to 30 cigarettes per day. I also drink alcohol with my friends and clients. I do not like cerveza (beer) because of its bitter taste, and so I always drink three to four cups of tequila when they invite me.

Table 4: Non-sexual behaviors of trafficked women and children in Monterrey

Non-sexual practices	Number	Percent
Alcohol (N=70)		
Once a day or more	70	49
1 to 3 times a week	25.7	18
Less than weekly	4.3	3
Smoking cigarettes (N=70)		
Once a day or more	100	70
1 to 3 times a week	0	0
Less than weekly	0	0

Source: *fieldwork*

On the use of drugs, results indicate that consumption of synthetic drugs is less frequent as compared to other substances. However, 35 percent of victims said they consume synthetic drugs (heroin, crack, cocaine, etc.) (see table 5). The quantitative information and accounts of victims on drug use indicate that most of them are coerced into consumption during the initial days of exploitation; however, later it becomes a coping mechanism for victims. Lety, a 23-year-old trafficked woman, said:

Before coming to this place, I had never tried any of these substances. I have seen that other girls consume every day, sometimes alone or with clients or with other girls. Many often they offered me, but I said no. I told them it would harm my health. At that time one girl said: Reyna pruébaló, te va a gustar... si no ahora... algún día definitivamente necesitarás... (sweet heart try it, you'll like it ... if not now ... someday you will definitely need it....). I resisted one or one and half years, but after that, I could not resist. It is not that I like those things, but it is the way they are exploiting me every day, I have to work 13 to 14 hours and have sex with at least 8 to 9 clients. My body cannot take it. Sometimes, if I do not fulfill the demand of clients or *madrina*⁵ they beat me. So, to relieve all these pressures first, I started consuming alcohol and cigarettes frequently (daily). However, now I take *tacha* [Ecstasy] also. I feel very relaxed when I take it, and once you take it, there is no need to worry about anything. It is very expensive, but I always ask *madrina* to give me a little, sometimes I also ask clients to invite me for a *tacha*. If I don't take it, I cannot work or sleep. For last few weeks, I have been taking it three times a day. I know it is going to hurt me... but one has to take it to survive here ... otherwise, they will kill me.

Similarly, 17% of victims said they smoke marijuana at least once a week, and when asked who paid for this, they replied that sometimes clients offer them marijuana before having sexual relations, and sometimes they buy it from *madrina*. Nancy, a 21-year-old woman, said:

Two years ago, a client invited me to smoke marijuana... I said no... he insisted and said I would feel relaxed and enjoy the sex... I repeatedly said no... then he complained to *madrina*. After that, she threatens me, saying that if I didn't please the clients, my consequences would be fatal. I smoked once and coughed too much... he offered again, and I took three or four hits and fell asleep immediately. When I woke up after two or three hours, I was nude. I do not like to smoke marijuana, but it's the clients or *madrina* who insist. Nowadays, I am little used to it, and when clients invite, I take it.

Like the studies of Zimmerman, Hossain, and Watts (2011) and Farley et al. (2004), our results demonstrate that trafficked women and children are coerced into hazardous non-sexual behaviors, where victims are obligated by pimps or clients or by circumstances to consume drugs or alcohol. This later becomes their coping mechanism and may lead to serious physical and mental health issues.

⁵Pimp

Table 5: Drugs Consumption by Trafficked Women and Children in Monterrey

Non-Sexual Practices	Number	Percent
Consumption of synthetic drugs (N=49)		
Once a day or more	9	18.4
1 to 3 times a week	26	53.0
Less than weekly	14	28.6
Smoking marihuana (N=49)		
Once a day or more	3	6.1
1 to 3 times a week	14	28.6
Less than weekly	32	65.3

Source: *fieldwork*

Government policies on human trafficking in Mexico

In 2012, the Government of Mexico introduced and approved a new anti-trafficking law, replacing the 2007 law. This General Law to prevent, punish, and eradicate human trafficking and to protect and assist victims defined trafficking as an organized crime activity, which made its prosecution the responsibility of federal agencies and left the protection of victims in the hands of local governments. Both local and federal governments are responsible for preventive actions. The law also prohibits all forms of human trafficking, prescribing penalties of five to 60 years' imprisonment, depending on the form of trafficking. These penalties equal those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.⁶ Two years later in 2014, Congress made a few changes in the Anti-Trafficking Law⁷ for example, prosecution is a local task which should be investigated by local police and other local authorities only if organized crime is not involved; assistance for the victims in their own language is provided; penalties ranging from five 5 to 60 years imprisonment are prescribed; a national awareness campaign in airports and bus terminals is promoted; and anti-trafficking training and awareness sessions for a range of audiences are conducted; and implementation of secured 692 signatures to its "code of conduct" by the Secretary of Tourism to prevent trafficking in the travel and tourism sector.

One objective of the law is to provide safe, dignified and sustained focus on victims. This focus can include a wide range of services like assistance for housing and medical care; psychological, social and legal counseling; enrollment in school and professional training. Section 6, Article 2 of the anti-trafficking law requires

⁶ Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, *Ley General Para Prevenir, Sancionar y Erradicar los Delitos en Materia de Trata de Personas y Para la Protección y Asistencia a las Víctimas de estos Delitos*. Nueva Ley DOF 14-06-2012, (Government of Mexico, 2012).

⁷ Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, *Ley General Para Prevenir, Sancionar y Erradicar los Delitos en Materia de Trata de Personas y Para la Protección y Asistencia a las Víctimas de estos Delitos*. Última Reforma DOF 19-03-2014, (Government of Mexico, 2014).

establishing an integral, adequate, efficient, and effective mechanism to repair damage suffered by the victims. It is the responsibility of the government to implement measures to ensure the total physical, mental/psychological, and social healing of victims of human trafficking. For example, Article 89, Section VII requires the Secretariat of Health (SALUD) to address physical and psychological issues, including addiction for victims in the appropriate shelters; section VIII requires the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare to promote agreements with the private sector aimed at providing labor guidance and job opportunities to victims; section XI appoints the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF) to care for minors; in sections XIII the National Institute of Migration (INM) is responsible for guaranteeing the permanence of foreign victims and providing voluntary repatriation; section XIV designates the National Institute of Women to assist women, victims of trafficking. Article 90 assigns to the federal government the design and management of victims' assistance and protection models that should provide at minimum legal counsel, physical, and psychological attention, and schooling, labor training, and job opportunities.

Our study indicates that trafficked women suffer physical, sexual, and psychological abuses, and violence, deprivation, and torture, and are coerced into harmful sexual and non-sexual behaviors, for which they need special, integral attention for their well-being. However, in the case of Mexico, until now no such steps have been taken to address these issues. Currently, there are 59 short- and long-term shelters in Mexico that provide counseling, family reintegration, medical facilities, family support grants, legal assistance, education, vocational training, and safety, among other services. These shelters provide basic medical assistance and psychological treatment, which is not sufficient. For example, in case of addiction, they provide short-term (two to three weeks) counseling. But psychological or mental health counseling must be long-term to prevent women from committing suicide, to manage depression, to overcome addiction, stop the violence cycle and empower women to achieve autonomy. The medical care, although comprehensive, should be focused on the reproductive and sexual health of victims.

CONCLUSION

This study of the harmful sexual and non-sexual behaviors of trafficked women and children in Mexico found that trafficking of women and children has a substantial negative impact on their physical, sexual, emotional and social health. In their day-to-day life, victims suffer a wide range of violence and are forced to live in inhumane conditions. As our results show, once brought into a brothel or establishment, a victim cannot escape or leave without the consent of *padrino/madrina*. Victims lose control over their bodies and emotions. Their pimp decides what they do and when.

Our analysis of harmful sexual and non-sexual behaviors of trafficked women and children shows that most victims were forced to consume alcohol and drugs, which made them dependent on these substances. Our fieldwork indicates the pimp's strategy is to trap or maintain control over them. Pimps believe that once victims become addicted, they will never escape. On sexual behaviors, it is clear that victims were forced into unhealthy activities, which includes practicing sex with multiple partners. Neither the pimp nor the clients respect victims' bodies. Their bodies are sold, resold, used, and exchanged like an object.

Furthermore, women and children are hardly “*authorized*” to have safe sex, which concludes that many of these victims may have been infected with sexually transmitted diseases. This research suggests that trafficking of women and children in Mexico requires special attention. During the last few years the government of Mexico has implemented several policies to fight human trafficking. However, a comprehensive approach is essential to address the economic, social, and political condition of women and children as well as their participation to combat the human trafficking problem in the country.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Arun Kumar Acharya, Ph.D., is a Professor and Researcher at Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, Monterrey, Mexico. He conducts research on perspectives and implications of internal and international migration with regard to human trafficking. Currently, he is also working as a Professor at Sambalpur University, India. Dr. Acharya has published eight books and several journal articles on human trafficking. He also actively participated in formulation of Mexican anti-trafficking law during 2012 and 2014.

Lilia Susana Padilla y Sotelo, Ph.D., is a Professor and Researcher at National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico. She received her Ph.D. in Geography from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. She conducts research on Health geography.

Jose Juan Cervantes Nino, Ph.D., is a Professor and Researcher at Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, Monterrey, Mexico. He conducts research on social inequalities, migration, violence and gender.

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