CHILD TRAFFICKING
IN INDIA

INSIGHTS FROM SITUATIONAL DATA ANALYSIS AND THE NEED FOR TECH-DRIVEN INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

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Any child taken out of his or her protective environment is stripped of the right to a free, happy childhood and deprived of dignity and the opportunity to realise their potential and carve their own future. In India, eight children were trafficked every single day in 2021. Child Trafficking is a major violation of children's rights, and disadvantaged communities are the most vulnerable to it. Children are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, labour, agricultural work, factory work and mining; they are often lured with better prospects of education, work and/or a better life in a new place. The pandemic, bringing with it an increase in poverty, unemployment and closure of schools, unfortunately, has further amplified this issue.

As urgent the need is to address this complex issue, to combat it, we first need to understand fully, the reality we are faced with. This also means that we need to effectively and rather quickly, analyze data and gather insights to bridge knowledge gaps so as to devise immediate and more strategic interventions.

This report by Games24x7 and Kailash Satyarthi Children’s Foundation (KSCF) is the culmination of extensive research, in-depth analysis, collaboration and a shared commitment to combating child trafficking. Games24x7’s data science team has undertaken analytics on the data of trafficked children rescued by KSCF and its partners over the period of 2016 to 2021 across the country, to derive insights and present a comprehensive picture of the issue. This includes source-destination hotspots, evolution trends over the last seven years, age group frequency of rescued children, which industries most employ trafficked children and a co-relation across all these parameters at varied spatial granularities such as district, city and state.

The study attempts to present an opportunity for use of data analytics to intervene and combat child trafficking with a more tactical and focused approach. It provides a critical use-case of data-driven insights and descriptive analytics to identify important patterns and enable holistic diagnosis to empower authorities and law enforcement to be proactively informed for targeted interventions.

Games24x7, a tech pioneer, believes in the potential of technology to improve human experience. This belief fuels the organization’s drive to work towards enabling a better future for children worst impacted by the deepened economic and social disparity in the country. KCSF envisions a world where every child is free, safe, healthy and receives quality education to reach his or her full potential. In addition to undertaking rescue of children from vulnerable situations, it focuses on community-driven, child-centric interventions as well as sensitization programs to create a safety net around children and protect them.

Combining their respective on-ground experience and tech-expertise, KSCF and Games24x7, with this report, hope to ignite discussions and actions to protect our children and create possibilities of tech-led interventions to address the threat posed by child trafficking. They are optimistic that it will lead to systemic changes in the way one can use scalable data analytics frameworks to bring about large-scale, sustainable impact.
Overview

Trafficking is a threat that is faced by millions of children around the world. It threatens the fundamental principles of human rights and dignity. Children account for nearly one third of identified trafficking victims globally. This number is even higher in low-income countries with every second trafficked person being a child. The UN Palermo Protocol defines child trafficking as ‘the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.’ The ILO classifies trafficking among ‘forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery.’

Child trafficking is a complex and dynamic issue with its causes as well as its purpose mostly inter-related. Children may be trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, to provide unpaid or cheap labour – which includes domestic servitude, agricultural work, factory work, mining, forced into marriage, for illegal adoptions, or even to be engaged in armed conflict. Trafficked children are at a risk of facing physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse. It also exposes these children to an alarming level of violence, as well as in many cases health complications such as HIV infections. Children forced into labour are often made to work in hazardous environments that are dangerous to their health and development, and grossly violates human rights. Although both boys and girls face the risk of trafficking, girls can be disproportionately targeted as victims of gender-based violence and inequality.

Disadvantaged communities in India are one of the most vulnerable to trafficking. Poverty is widely seen as a major cause of trafficking. Families with low socio-economic conditions are often times compelled to sell their children or send them away under false promises of a better earning and life. Lack of education and illiteracy also play a huge role here, with families unable to comprehend the possible implications as traffickers deceive them. Children who drop out of school are frequently subjected to exploitation.

Migration and trafficking are also deeply intertwined; refugees and migrants being particularly vulnerable. Desperate need for livelihood, or forced displacement cause people to migrate, often under unsafe circumstances, creating an ideal scenario for traffickers to exploit and gain from. This is especially seen in areas impacted by a natural disaster forcing communities to move from their homes. In many cases, early child marriage is used as a guise for trafficking of children. Many children are also abducted to be trafficked.

The issue significantly worsened during the pandemic as it exacerbated the disparity between the privileged and the underprivileged. A 2020 survey by Kailash Satyarthi Children’s Foundation in rural areas of five poor states in India, found that 21 percent of respondents were potentially ready to send their children under 18 to urban areas for work due to increased economic vulnerability.

The mental, emotional and psychological impact of trafficking is immense. Traffickers often use physical, emotional and sexual abuse as a means of control. Children, away from their homes and families, may feel distressed and alienated. They have no access to their fundamental right of education, nor any opportunity for social or emotional development. Trafficked children are often denied medical assistance and those who face acute or regular illness are inevitably replaced by exploiters and left to fend for themselves. For the families, the impact of losing a child to traffickers can have a life-long bearing especially if they willingly let the child go for better prospects.


The Current Situation and Policy Framework

India is a country of source, transit as well as destination for child trafficking. There is a significant degree of trafficking internally as well as from India to countries in the Gulf and South East Asia.

According to the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data released last year, eight children were trafficked every day in 2021. A total of 2189 cases of human trafficking were registered in 2021 as opposed to 1714 cases in 2020, an increase of almost 28 percent. A total of 6533 victims of trafficking have been reported in 2021 of which 2877 are children, a whopping 44 percent.

The report accounts for only the cases that have been registered by the Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs). These figures, experts believe, are gross misrepresentation of the actual cases of trafficking in India, a majority of which often go unreported. Even out of the cases reported, the conviction rate is only 16 percent.⁵

Missing children’s cases are also not always accounted as trafficking. In India, a child goes missing every six minutes. Millions of missing children may have been trafficked and ended up in forced labour or sex work. In 2021, 77,165 children were reported missing, a 30 percent surge from 59,262 missing children in 2020.⁶

The numbers warrant an urgent need for a composite, strong anti-trafficking law. Even today, India does not have a comprehensive legal framework for protection of children against trafficking. Yet, over the past decade, significant strides have been made by the government and law enforcement agencies to address this issue and protect the children. Currently, trafficking in India is covered under multiple laws.

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956, is the foremost legislation which aims to prevent trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. The Criminal Law (amendment) Act 2013 was enforced wherein Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was substituted with Section 370 and 370A IPC which provides for measures to counter human trafficking including trafficking of children in any form including physical exploitation, or any form of sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude or forced removal of organs. Another law which protects children from sexual abuse and exploitation is the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012. It provides for specific definitions for different forms of sexual abuse including penetrative and non-penetrative assault and sexual harassment.

Other legislations that can be enacted when dealing with child trafficking are the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, Transplantation of Human Organs Act, 1994, apart from specific Sections in the IPC, e.g. Sections 372 and 373 dealing with selling and buying of girls for the purpose of prostitution. Some state governments have also enacted specific laws which address trafficking, case in point being the Punjab Prevention of Human Smuggling Act 2012 by the Punjab government.

The government’s most recent Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill was passed by parliament in 2018 but it could not be approved by the upper house. The Bill, which is currently under consideration and being revised further, will hopefully bring in a new era of legislation against trafficking by implementing a comprehensive law framework to address the issue of child trafficking.

Another aspect that majorly hinders the interventions against child trafficking is the lack of data. Having accurate and integrated data collection on an issue of such gravitas is critical to evolution of effective strategies. It also stems from the fact that trafficking victims often find it difficult to report because of their socio-economic standing and marginalized status. Use of advanced data collection systems and creation of real-time databases would lead to accurate reporting of crimes as well as timely intervention.

It would be evident from this report that data can lead to a more profound understanding and help with insights that can be generated fast and automatically. These insights can enable extremely targeted action plans. The more granular the data can be captured, more fine-grained insights and subsequent intervention plans can be generated.

Child Trafficking in India

Insights and Trends from KSCF Rescue Data

KSCF undertakes rescue operations to free children from exploitative conditions across places and industries in India. The data is collected based on KSCF intervention across 262 districts and 21 states in India between the year 2016 and 2022. The numbers have been analysed by Games24x7 using data analytics to derive key insights across various identified parameters.

Over 13,000 children rescued in six years (Total Number of Children Rescued)

The total number of children rescued with KSCF interventions from the year 2016 to 2022 stood at 13,549. This includes boys and girls in the age group up to 18 years. The data also takes into account individuals who were trafficked when they were under-18 and rescued later.

Over 80% rescued were adolescents (Age – Group of maximum number of rescued children)

The data has been segregated into three sets based on age-groups – i) 5-8 years, ii) 9-12 years and iii) 13-18 years.

According to the analysis, 10,934 children, i.e. over 80 percent of the children rescued were in the age group of 13 to 18 years. 13 percent of the rescued lot belonged to the age group of 9 to 12 years. The lowest number of rescued children were in the age group less than 5 years old.

Over 25% of the children were rescued from the national capital

Further breakdown by districts:
Child Trafficking in India

Jaipur City emerged to be one of the prominent destinations for trafficked children with the maximum number of trafficked children (1115) rescued from this district, accounting for 9 percent of the total number of rescued children. Rajasthan has had instances of children employed in industries such as brick kilns, stone crushing, mining, agriculture, and gems workshops, many operating from homes.

Next in line were two districts from the capital city, North Delhi with 5.24 percent of total rescues and Northwest Delhi with 5.13 percent of the total number of rescued children.

5 out of top 10 districts from where the maximum number of trafficked children were rescued is in the country’s capital.

Top 5 industries which employ trafficked children

The study analyzed the industries which employed maximum number of children and the tasks assigned to them.

Factory-wise employment of children

The Electricals & Electronics factories employed the maximum number of trafficked children, primarily employed in bulb making. Majority of these were in the age group of 13 to 18 years. Similar trend was seen in the Agriculture-based employment units, where the majority of the children employed were between 13 to 18 years.

Brick kiln and roof tiles units were the only factory employing children below the age of 5 years in their units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of factory</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Less than 5yr</th>
<th>5 to 8yr</th>
<th>9 to 12yr</th>
<th>13 to 18yr</th>
<th>more than 18yr</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garment</td>
<td>Saree Coloring &amp; Polishing, Spinning Mill Helper, Tailoring/ Stitching, Cloth Dye</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical &amp; Electronics</td>
<td>Bulb Making, Wire Packing, Factory Helper</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick Kilns &amp; Roof tiles units</td>
<td>Brick Kiln Labourer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Agriculture Labour</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footwear</td>
<td>Shoe Packing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sector-wise employment of children

Out of all trafficked children rescued from 2016 to 2022, the maximum (over 15 percent) was employed in a hotel or a Dhaba as labour. Most of these children were between the ages of 13 to 18 years.

The mom-and-pop automobile and transport industry was second in the list of industries that employed children.

The least number of rescues were made from the cosmetics industry; however, it employed the maximum number of children in the tender age group of 5 to 8 years.

The majority of children across all industries were in the age group of 13 to 18 years.

Child trafficking increased three and half times post pandemic in India’s most populated state, and 18 folds in Karnataka

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Pre COVID</th>
<th>Post COVID</th>
<th>Avg trafficked children/year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>1214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>703</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>210</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telangana</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pre COVID: average from 2016 to 2020; Post COVID - Average from 2021 and 2022
Uttar Pradesh saw the maximum number of children trafficked on an average per year – 267 in the pre COVID phase between 2016 to 2019 and 1214 in the years post COVID from 2021-2022, an increase of over 350% with the year 2021 reporting 2055 cases. UP was followed by Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, together making up the top three states from where the maximum number of children trafficked on an average per year.

Karnataka showed a staggering increase in the number of children trafficked on an average per year, from 6 cases pre COVID to a whopping 110 cases post COVID, an 18 fold increase.

Delhi saw a 68 percent increase in child trafficking cases from pre to post COVID times.

There is a significant increase in the number of trafficked children pre and post COVID re-affirming the damaging impact that the pandemic had on the trafficking situation in the country.

Surprisingly, Kerala hasn’t shown a single case as source state after COVID.

Child trafficking most prevalent in Bihar, UP and AP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>D1</th>
<th>D2</th>
<th>D3</th>
<th>D4</th>
<th>D5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>4245</td>
<td>Katihar (390)</td>
<td>Gaya (378)</td>
<td>Sitamarhi (346)</td>
<td>Purnea (313)</td>
<td>Samastipur (308)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>3836</td>
<td>Badaun (207)</td>
<td>Hardoi (164)</td>
<td>Bahraich (160)</td>
<td>Bareilly (149)</td>
<td>Jaunpur (145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>Guntur (208)</td>
<td>Nellore (125)</td>
<td>Srikakulam (96)</td>
<td>Kurnool (74)</td>
<td>Bheemavaram (38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top 5 districts in Bihar from where children were trafficked were Katihar, Gaya, Sitamarhi, Purnea and Samastipur.
In the recent past, technology has played a key role in child protection interventions globally. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) algorithms have been used by investigating agencies to streamline the process of collating, analyzing and reporting evidence of child abuse. Facial recognition software has helped agencies to track down missing children.

In case of child trafficking as well, successful interventions in the future will be dependent on the use of technology to assist in staying abreast of the constantly evolving landscape of trafficking and the modus operandi of traffickers. The insights derived from data analysis such as in this report can equip the authorities to be well informed on a real-time basis. For example, from such data insights, hotspot trails can be interpreted as the likelihood of finding a child in a region if (s)he goes missing from another (or same) region. The spatio-temporal slicing and dicing of such information across age groups and industries can enable strategic decision making and targeted operations for the concerned authorities.

Games24x7 has further created a tool using Python Notebook software that allows generation and visualization of insights gathered automatically based on the date input.

The tool additionally has provisions to extend insights on vulnerable demography of children being trafficked from the source, vulnerability across time-periods and special events (e.g., festivities), and so on. This will enable KSCF and other NGOs to feed data in future to generate the above-mentioned insights automatically.

If additional data (such as timestamp at the source) can be captured, further insights can be generated. Some of the data can be further utilised to create more sophisticated predictive and prescriptive models for better preparedness.
Collaborative Initiatives and Impact

A critical aspect to prevention of trafficking and rehabilitation of children trafficked from vulnerable situations is to create and implement programs that sensitize the children, equip them with quality education opportunities, and nudge them to develop their individual agency and responsibility. This creates an awareness about their rights, the risks of trafficking and labour and the importance of reporting any violation of their rights to the right authorities. Community driven interventions help children to take an active role in discussion of these issues.

Games24x7 in partnership with KSCF has implemented two such programs called the Bal Mitra Gram and Bal Mitra Mandal in the Chamrajnagar district in Karnataka and in Pune, Maharashtra, respectively. The programs are focused on transformation through education and supports children from vulnerable sections with access to quality education and building awareness about their rights. The program directly impacts thousands of children year-on-year through its various activities which include Bal Panchayats, Stakeholder meetings involving Youth-groups’ participation and awareness generation events.

In the first year of its operation, through this program in Chamrajnagar across the 20 villages in the district, KSCF protected 5834 children from exploitation. In the city of Pune across the four identified urban slums, over 4500 children were beneficiaries of the program. The joint efforts of Bal Panchayat and community stakeholders' groups resulted in prevention of child marriages, ensuring retention in schools and development of new school infrastructure.

Conclusion

The clandestine and uncertain nature of child trafficking warrants a robust, yet ‘keeping pace with the times’ intervention that cleverly harps on existing trends and leverages that information to devise strategies that are effective.

For this, we need the integration of tech-based interventions supplementing a comprehensive policy architecture and law. With advanced data analytic models, we are able to build on the existing framework of data collection and take it a notch higher to intervene in real-time, armed with key information on specific trafficking parameters and trends that will further narrow our focus on targets.

This will also significantly reduce the time that the law enforcement spends on analyzing data, while spending more on crackdown of trafficking rings, rescuing and rehabilitation efforts, and prevention strategies.

This is truly a step forward in leveraging innovation and tech to create a world where every child is free, safe, healthy and having an equal opportunity to a bright, successful future.
Acronyms

KSCF Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation
UN United Nations
UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ILO International Labour Organization
HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NCRB National Crime Records Bureau
AHTU Anti Human Trafficking Units
IPC Indian Penal Code
POCSO Protection of Children from Sexual Offences
AI Artificial Intelligence
ML Machine Learning