

STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH OF THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS OF FAISALABAD, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Background: Human trafficking is a grave human rights violation with profound psychological and emotional consequences for its victims. This study explores the impact of human trafficking on the mental health and overall well-being of victims in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

Methods: Using a qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted with trafficking survivors to gain insights into their personal experiences, emotional trauma, and psychological struggles.

Findings: The findings reveal that victims suffer from a wide range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, and a deep sense of helplessness and social isolation. Many reported facing long-term emotional scars due to physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, and the constant threat of violence. In addition to psychological impacts, the study also identifies challenges to victims' overall well-being, such as disrupted family relationships, loss of educational and employment opportunities, and difficulty reintegrating into society.

Conclusion: Victims experience a range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation, and social isolation. Long-term emotional scars result from physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, and constant threats of violence. Challenges to overall well-being include disrupted family relationships, loss of opportunities, and difficulty reintegrating into society. The research highlights the urgent need for trauma-informed care, mental health services, legal protection, and socio-economic rehabilitation for survivors. It emphasizes the importance of a multidisciplinary approach involving government institutions, NGOs, and community support systems to address the complex aftermath of trafficking and facilitate victim recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking represents a severe violation of human rights and a worldwide public health issue which impacts millions of people across the globe

including those in Pakistan and Faisalabad specifically. The major industrial and agricultural center of Faisalabad contains substantial trafficking

activities which primarily affect women and children. The criminal enterprise of human trafficking through coercion and fraud and force for sexual exploitation and labor and other servitude operates as one of the world's fastest-growing criminal enterprises according to the UNODC (2022).

Victims who experience human trafficking suffer from severe physical and emotional and psychological damage which includes depression and anxiety and PTSD and substance abuse because of extended violence and exploitation and abuse (Zimmerman et al., 2008). The victims of Faisalabad encounter more difficulties because of social discrimination and social exclusion and insufficient mental health resources in their community. Survivors encounter social exclusion after returning from their experiences which intensifies their psychological distress and results in social detachment (Khan & Raza, 2019). The traumatic experience of trafficking makes it difficult for victims to establish trust relationships and maintain social connections and reintegrate into their communities (Oram et al., 2012). The majority of survivors do not receive treatment because public hospitals and shelters lack sufficient mental health services and trauma-informed care which results in persistent mental health conditions (Amir, 2021). The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2018) serves as Pakistan's legal framework but its implementation remains weak and rehabilitation programs seldom include mental health support according to UNODC Pakistan (2021). Human trafficking exists in multiple forms including sex trafficking and labor and child trafficking and organ trafficking and forced marriage which stem from poverty and education deficits and gender inequality and political instability and displacement (Oram et al., 2012). Migration together with insufficient safe mobility channels creates additional risks which trap victims in perpetual cycles of exploitation. The

3. RESULTS

3.1 Case I: In case I, A young girl victims was interview and found following feedback from her...

Demographic Data of Case I

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Address
Sara	22	Female	12 th	Rural Faisalabad, Punjab

solution to address trafficking and mental health connections in Faisalabad demands integrated trauma-sensitive interventions backed by robust governance systems and community reintegration strategies.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

- The research aims to study how human trafficking affects victims psychologically and emotionally through its impact on their self-esteem and personality development and their overall self-worth while analyzing different abuse types and trafficking durations and control methods.
- The research explores how social support networks including family members and peers and community members help reduce human trafficking's negative mental health effects while supporting victims during their recovery process.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, a qualitative research design is adopted. This study adopts a cross-sectional descriptive design to capture data at a specific point in time, providing a snapshot of the mental health status and well-being of trafficking victims. The research was conducted in multiple areas across the city of Faisalabad, focus mainly on DAR UL AMAN, some NGOs where we captured socio-economic conditions. A qualitative method approach will be used to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Purposive sampling will be used to select participants who have experienced human trafficking and are willing to share their experiences. This study design consists of approximately 04 case studies to ensure data saturation.

Family Background:

Sara belongs to a family that earns less income while having five siblings. She has two parents who work as a farmer and housewife.

Story and Background:

The trafficking event occurred when Sara was nineteen years old after fraudsters promised her a Middle Eastern domestic position. A well-paid employment opportunity was used to lure her because it promised enough money to sustain her family. The day she reached the destination she discovered that she was imprisoned in a house while working many hours in disheartening environments. She received physical acts of violence combined with emotional

Mental Health Impact:

The long-lasting abuse together with captivity devastated Sara's mental well-being. When she came back to Pakistan, she displayed extreme symptoms of depression and PTSD together with severe anxiety. The traumatic memories often returned to her mind in the form of flashbacks and her emotions became withdrawn.

Psychological Symptoms:

The victim was detained and suffer from following situation and show different symptoms as:

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Sara developed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms which caused nightmares and breaking through defensive walls while displaying an absence of feelings.
- **Anxiety:** The traumatic experience made it difficult for her to handle her pain which created both extreme panic attacks and severe anxiety.
- **Depression:** Sara's nervous condition along with her feelings of anxiousness made her fear being around different places or numerous people. The trafficking experience made her fear that she could find herself being followed by those who had previously controlled her life.

The depressive symptoms in Sara included a prolonged state of emotional despair along with a perception of her own self-worth as zero and considerable feelings of humiliation. She did not accept the traumatic events that happened to her so she frequently felt guilty about what happened.

Education:

The education level reached by Sara included intermediate studies (12th grade) while financial struggles restricted her career opportunities cruelty and sexual mistreatment while being held captive because traffickers kept her travel documents from her.

The international organization which deals with victims of trafficking saved Sara from her forced situation after spending two years under captivity. She came back to Pakistan yet her mental condition deteriorated to a severe emotional and psychological state.

Recovery and Support:

Sara received therapy treatment at her nearby mental health facility for PTSD alongside her anxiety diagnosis. She received individual and group therapy sessions because they enabled her to process trauma while rebuilding her identity.

Support from NGO's:

An NGO specializing in trafficking victim rehabilitation provided helpful programs for Sara. The organization connected Sara to social workers who assisted her with legal aid in addition to vocational training programs that helped her transition back to society.

Social and Family Reintegration:

Through her family's support Sara managed to get out but she struggled while attempting reintegration into her community. Being a trafficking victim caused her to face social discrimination that prevented her from forming deep relationships and created feelings of loneliness.

Mental Health Outcome:

Sara experienced healing in her mental state however she needs further support to overcome persistent anxiety symptoms and restore faith in human relationships. The recovery journey for her persists as she learned different emotional management techniques that include meditation alongside journaling to address her psychological pain.

The therapy has continued to empower Sara while she fights her nightmares and maintains situations which trigger memories of her traumatic experience.

Findings:

Human trafficking causes extensive mental health damage to victims which establishes itself as a long-term medical condition according to Sara's studied case. The severe psychological trauma suffered by victims needed continual care for months afterward. Research conducted in this case indicates:

- The victims displayed familiar PTSD indicators which manifested through persistent anxious feelings together with depressive states and blackouts of emotions. Psychological distress diminished both their routine functions and left them unable to establish trust in different people.
- Society stigmatized Sara because of their experience with trafficking. Their ability to

recover as well as successfully connect with society became more difficult because of this additional shame and isolation.

- Their recovery needed full support through therapy sessions combined with counseling. Victims encountered ongoing issues when trying to establish stable employment connections along with achieving social acceptance.

Survivors need sustained help since their recovery journey unfolds non-linearly. Sara made advancement in her recovery although she continues to experience mental health challenges which reveal the persistent physical effects of trafficking.

3.2 Case II

In case II, A young boy victims was interview and found following feedback from him...

Demographic Data of Case II

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Address
Ibrahim	28	Male	10 th	Urban Area Faisalabad

Family Background:

The family includes four children where Ibrahim holds the position of second eldest. Both Ibrahim's father drives taxis and his mother teaches in a school. When he finished his 10th grade education Ibrahim chose to quit school because it would bring better financial stability to his family.

private records. The camp held him prisoner while he endured both physical violence together with routine verbal attacks. Through an escape attempt Ibrahim found a nearby embassy that assisted his departure back to Pakistan after spending about one year in captivity.

Education:

The educational opportunity available to Ibrahim was limited because he worked at several low-paying jobs before his human trafficking experience began.

Mental Health Impact:

The experience of labour trafficking left Ibrahim with severe mental health conditions because he fell victim to labour trafficking. The person demonstrated serious symptoms of depression and anxiety when he came back to Pakistan. Ibrahim experienced extreme difficulty adapting to his life before traffickers kidnapped him because he developed emotional detachment toward his relatives.

Story and Background:

Ibrahim discovered at his age of 24 that a neighboring country had hired him for construction labour but failed to explain that his promise of pay did not exist. His first action upon reaching the destination revealed the dishonest practice that had occurred in his recruitment process. During his trafficking situation Ibrahim suffered through intense labor under poor conditions without being paid while losing control over his passport together with all his

Psychological Symptoms:

The victim was detained and suffer from following situation and show different symptoms as

- **Depression:** The patient Ibrahim demonstrated ongoing feelings of sadness together with a deep despair which

overwhelmed him. He experienced a strong feeling of failure as well as deep guilt because he believed he had abandoned his family through his experience of human trafficking.

- **Anxiety:** The negative impact of anxiety caused Ibrahim to have frequent panic attacks which made him nervous around people. The victim felt insufficient while doubting his worth.
- **Eager and irritability:** The abuse made Ibrahim show greater irritability and avoid controlling his anger when he thought about the mistreatment he endured.

Recovery and Support:

As part of his therapy Ibrahim participated in regular sessions which treated his depression together with anxiety and anger management issues. Through cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) Ibrahim learned to challenge offensive thoughts and he recovered his personal value.

Family Support:

Ibrahim received family backing although his family members did not fully understand how severe his emotional wounds were. His family members pressed for him to forget the past making him feel isolated and frustrated.

Vocational Support:

Ibrahim took advantage of vocational training offered by NGOs through which he learned new talents for finding employment opportunities. His mental health problems prevented his successful re-entry into the workforce.

Mental Health Outcome:

The development of Ibrahim moved slowly through stages of getting better before reverting to regression.

His emotional pain remained severe when he needed to recall memories of his trafficking experiences.

Ibrahim demonstrates persistent determination as he fights to take control back in his life even through his continuous battles. The patient stays in therapy sessions as he makes continuous strides to develop effective mental health coping strategies.

Analysis of Findings:

Research on Ibrahim shows that trafficking victimization produces extensive mental health problems that persevere within affected individuals. People who experienced this psychological trauma needed long-term assistance to recover because the extent of their injury was severe. This case produced several important points which indicate:

- PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks and anxiety together with depression and emotional detachment appeared in the victims. The daily activities of these victims along with their interpersonal trust suffered from these symptoms.
- Society categorized Ibrahim with stigmas that resulted from when they were trafficked. The additional stigma wounded recovery as well as cut off their ability to integrate back into society.
- Patients needed complete care through therapeutic activities along with counselling services to help them recover. The process of recovery included sustained difficulties for victims when it came to securing steady employment and achieving social integration.
- The recovery process extends beyond a straight line because victims need constant support to achieve through their healing journey. The trafficking experience continued to affect Sara's mental health after she improved although she showed progress.
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3.3 Case Study III

In case III, A young girl victims was interview and found following feedback from her...

Demographic Data of Case III

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation before trafficking	Marital Status	Current Status	Type of trafficking
Saira Bibi	28	Female	Primary	Domestic worker	Unmarried	Residing in rehabilitation centre	Force labour and sexual exploitation

Personal Story:

Saira was born into a poor family in a rural area near Faisalabad. She was the eldest of five siblings, and due to financial hardships, she started working as a domestic helper at the age of 12. At 18, a neighbour offered her a "better job" in a textile factory in Lahore. Trusting him, she agreed and was taken away, only to realize she had been deceived.

Upon arrival, Saira was locked in a room with several other young girls. She was physically and emotionally abused and forced into sex work. Repeated attempts to escape resulted in brutal beatings. Over time, she suffered severe depression, PTSD, and anxiety. After three years, a police raid on the brothel led to her rescue. She was transferred to a rehabilitation centre in Faisalabad, where she is currently undergoing therapy and vocational training.

- **Fear and Anxiety:** Even in a safe environment, she remains hypervigilant and has a persistent fear of being taken away again.
- **Recovery Efforts:** Psychological counselling has helped her speak about her trauma, but she still faces difficulties reintegrating into society.
- **Conclusion:** Both Saira story highlight the devastating impact of human trafficking on mental health. Victim suffer from extreme psychological distress, including PTSD, depression, and severe anxiety. Social reintegration remains a challenge due to trust issue and emotional trauma. Rehabilitation efforts, including psychological counselling and economic support, are crucial for their recovery. This case study emphasizes the urgent need for stronger legal frameworks, community awareness, and support systems for trafficking survivors in Faisalabad and beyond.

Mental Health Impact and Well-being

- **Depression and PTSD:** Saira experiences intense nightmares and frequent panic attacks. She struggles with severe trust issues and avoids social interactions.
- **Low Self-esteem:** She often expresses feelings of worthlessness and guilt, blaming herself for what happened.

3.4 Case Study IV

In case IV, A young boy victims was interview and found following feedback from him...

Demographic Data of Case IV

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation before trafficking	Duration of trafficking	Type of trafficking	Current status
Ahsan Ali	32	Male	10 TH	Daily wages labourer	4 years	Force labour in middle East	Working in Rehabilitation program, Faisalabad

Personal Story:

Ahsan was the sole breadwinner for his family. He struggled to make ends meet, earning barely enough to provide food and shelter. In 2016, a local agent offered him a job in Dubai, promising a high salary. Desperate for a better future, Ahsan took the opportunity, borrowing money for travel expenses. Upon arrival, his passport was confiscated, and he was forced to work under inhumane conditions at a construction site. He endured long hours, lack of food, and physical abuse. Any protest led to severe beatings. He was not paid for months and lived in a crowded, unsanitary labour camp. After four years of suffering, he managed to escape with the help of a fellow worker and returned to Pakistan with the support of a humanitarian organization.

Mental Health Impact and Well-being: The revealed health impact and status of well-being in the following perspective:

- **Severe Anxiety and Depression:** Ahsan struggles with insomnia and frequent panic episodes.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Loud noises remind him of the abuse he faced, triggering anxiety attacks.
- **Family Struggles:** He finds it difficult to reconnect with his wife and children, feeling like a stranger in his own home.
- **Financial Insecurity:** Despite escaping, he faces economic instability, worsening his mental distress.
- **Therapeutic Intervention:** He is receiving psychological counselling and financial aid to reintegrate into society. However, his self-esteem and emotional well-being remain fragile.

Conclusion:

Ahsan story highlight the devastating impact of human trafficking on mental health. Victims suffer from extreme psychological distress, including PTSD, depression, and severe anxiety. Social reintegration remains a challenge due to trust issues and emotional trauma. Rehabilitation efforts, including psychological counselling and economic support, are crucial for their recovery. This case study emphasizes the urgent need for stronger legal frameworks,

community awareness, and support systems for trafficking survivors in Faisalabad and beyond.

Discussion

The severe mental health effects of human trafficking become evident through the case studies of Sara, Ibrahim, Saira and Ahsan. The traumatic experiences of PTSD led survivors to develop flashbacks and panic attacks and depression and emotional detachment which interfered with their daily activities and destroyed their ability to form trust with others. The evidence shows that survivors of trafficking frequently experience PTSD along with depression and anxiety because they were forced to endure violent and coercive experiences (Hossain, 2010; Oram et al., 2012).

The cases show how social stigma combined with social isolation continued to affect the survivors. The survivors experienced dual trauma because they faced exploitation and received no welcome back from their communities which resulted in worsening their emotional state and blocking their recovery process. Research conducted in Pakistan during 2025 shows that victims experience greater shame and worthlessness because of both community exclusion and stigma according to Khan (2025). Research worldwide demonstrates that when victims experience community rejection their trauma worsens and their recovery process becomes more challenging (The Exodus Road, 2025).

The exploitation of technology has become a major factor in Pakistani trafficking cases. Digital abuse methods have led to psychological effects which include fear alongside memory problems and suicidal thoughts according to Khan (2025). These traumatic events worsen the long-term mental health problems which also make recovery more challenging. The research findings emphasize the need for intervention designers to understand how trafficking methods are evolving.

The importance of long-term trauma-informed care becomes the final essential factor. Survivors in Faisalabad received counseling and therapy but their ongoing difficulties with self-esteem and reintegration show that brief interventions fall short of providing lasting support. Research indicates that advocacy-based survivor-centered programs which unite psychological help with empowerment methods lead

to better mental health results (Bhavsar & Oram, 2024). The trauma-coercive bonding theory explains why victims maintain emotional bonds with their exploiters after release and struggle with trust and autonomy issues (Wikipedia Contributors, 2025).

The recovery process from trafficking remains complex because survivors need ongoing support with stigma reduction and strengthened victim-focused rehabilitation programs. The current evidence supports legal changes alongside improved trauma-focused services and integrated social support systems to achieve long-term psychological well-being for survivors (Altun et al., 2025; UNODC, 2022).

Conclusion

A complete solution to human trafficking in Faisalabad needs extended trauma-sensitive mental health care and robust social reintegration systems which fight discrimination and rebuild survivors' self-esteem. The recovery process will be sustainable and re-victimization will be prevented through the combination of legal framework enhancement and community awareness and survivor-centered rehabilitation.

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