

VARIATION OF FEMALE SEX TRAFFICKING IN INDIA: A SUBNATIONAL
PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Sex trafficking rates are rampant among young girls and women in India. Annually 800,000 women are trafficked for sex from India to other international destinations while 2 million women in India are currently being trafficked within Indian states and union territories, making sex trafficking one of the largest crimes in India today. While some states such as Maharashtra and Kerala have nearly 300 sex trafficking victims, other regions like Nagaland and Puducherry do not have any. This paper explores why some regions of India have higher rates of sex trafficking than others. Using an original dataset and descriptive maps constructed to account for female socioeconomic and empowerment factors I discuss important themes that emerge in Indian states that traditionally have minimal levels of sex trafficking. More specifically, the maps demonstrate that general education, education on HIV/AIDS and consistent condom use in preventing these diseases, as well as participating in household decisions are characteristics of Indian states with low rates of female sex trafficking victims. I conclude by discussing the theoretical implications this paper has for future research in this arena and practical lessons the Indian government can take to combat sex trafficking within its borders.

Background/Historical Context

Though the world often thinks that slavery is an issue of the past, persistent trends in global human trafficking, a form of slavery, are a reminder that sadly, it is not. The National Human Trafficking Hotline defines sex trafficking as a “form of modern-day slavery in which individuals perform commercial sex through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.” The United Nations (UN) International Labor Organization estimated in 2016 that there were nearly 3.8 million adults and 1 million children who were victims of sex trafficking alone. Though men and boys are included in this measure, 99% of the victims of sex trafficking are women and girls. The same report concluded that global sex trafficking was particularly pertinent in Asia and the Pacific Region, as it accounted for more than 70% of sex trafficking victims (Kelly). It is further revealed through the 2020 UN Global Report on Trafficking in Persons that over 50% of victims trafficked globally are trafficked for sexual exploitation, and the composition of detected sex trafficking victims has changed from affecting primarily adult women to children, with children accounting for over 30% of victims (Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, pg. 35-36).

A major contributor to the global sex trafficking numbers is the South Asian giant of India. India is internationally recognized as “one of the Asian countries with substantial female trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation” (Rai & Rai, pg. 1). Because of its geographical positioning, India acts as a source, destination, and transit country for sex trafficking victims. In other words, once females enter the sex trafficking industry wherever they are in the world, they can either be employed by traffickers within India or transported across country lines to India’s surrounding countries or into the international sex trafficking hub (Sarkar, 7-9). “Nearly 800,000 women and female children are trafficked across international borders yearly, with over 80%

being trafficked for sex work ” (Rai & Rai, pg. 1). Additional estimates indicate that nearly 2 million women are currently trapped in sex-trafficking within India’s “red light districts”, a term used in reference to the red light that is often seen in parlors and brothels where trafficking and prostitution is common (Sarkar, 3). Prostitution of women and girls in India has expanded beyond just traditional brothel settings, however, to include massage parlors, huts, bath establishments on the national highways, and mobile brothels like escort services (Rai & Rai, pg. 4).

Sex trafficking mainly affects women and children, typically young girls, within India, making made this crime the second largest in India, despite being banned under Indian law (Rai & Rai, pg. 4). A growing body of research surrounding this issue points to a greater demand by traffickers for young pre-pubertal girls and virgins who do not pose a risk yet of passing on sexually transmitted diseases when partaking in this work (Rai & Rai, pg. 4 & Naik, pg. 2). Other reasons for the female population being the most vulnerable to trafficking include lack of education, poverty, and unemployment (Naik, 2). This is not to say that males are not trafficked within Indian society; men are often trafficked in other forms such as forced labor (Naik, 2). Women and girls are often lured into this industry because of both their vulnerability as well as the methods used by traffickers to make this work look enticing. Sarkar discusses how a growing body of literature points to coercion, false promises of marriage and employment as domestic servants and in the film industry, as well as false promises of trips often pulls vulnerable women and children into this work (Sarkar, 6). Girls who run away from home or are homeless without a way to provide for themselves are among the most susceptible victims to sex trafficking in India (Sarkar, 6). This discussion of the population with the most vulnerability to sex trafficking indicates a stronger need to understand the female experience within India and how a

combination of various socioeconomic factors could motivate women into sex trafficking in the status quo.

Poverty across the Indian subcontinent is one of the main drivers of sex trafficking in Indian states. Brokers, individuals who lure young girls and women into commercial sexual exploitation, often approach debt-ridden families with false offers to pay off the family's debt or false employment promises in exchange for their daughter or wife. Upon being possessed by the broker, women and girls are sold to brothel owners, who then force victims into prostitution or arranged marriage- the two most common forms of sex trafficking in India. It is important to recognize, though, that poverty as experienced by the victim's family or the victim themselves is a major motivating factor in the acquisition of trafficking victims by brokers, as they are directly appealing to the victim's yearning for economic freedom- something they often lack in the status quo (Sarkar, pg. 4). In other words, sex trafficking is seen as an escape for victims out of the impoverished conditions they were previously living under.

The Indian government has recognized the importance of addressing sex trafficking within its own borders. Through utilizing the criminal justice system, policy responses, and individual states themselves, the Indian government has attempted to combat the various roots of sex trafficking. However, the government's response (or lack thereof) has consistently placed India on the US State Department's Tier 2 for Trafficking, indicating that though a response has been made, it is nowhere near sufficient ("India- United States Department of State"). Moreover, there is significant variation in sex trafficking levels across the 25 Indian states. Some regions like Nagaland and Sikkim report almost no sex trafficking victims while other like Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh report close to 200 cases of trafficking in 2020 alone. Why is sex trafficking so much more prevalent in some parts of India than others? Is the explanation

solely economic or is there variation in the criminal legal system that explains this? By studying sex trafficking at the sub-national level, I can better understand what regional socioeconomic and institutional factors contribute to elevated levels of trafficking. Moreover, because of the federal system that India employs, in which power is shared between both the national and state governments, my study could be foundational in illuminating what direct factors state governments must attempt to address to address the conditions that females face that motivate them into sex trafficking in the first place.

To better explain the variation in sex trafficking across the Indian states, I examine a variety of variables affecting women's sense of empowerment within Indian society and their relationship to sex trafficking rates across the country. Using data from India's National Health Survey, I constructed an original dataset to better understand how a women's sense of empowerment in India currently affects trafficking rates. I also used this dataset to create a series of maps to help visualize the current relationships that exist and what factors need to both be addressed and understood further within a woman's experience to eliminate her desire to enter the sex trafficking world. I also attempt to understand how India's criminal justice system contributes to trafficking patterns across the country. Through soliciting interviews from key stakeholders within India's criminal legal system such as litigators who consistently perform work on sex trafficking cases and interact with trafficked victims, I analyze how India's legal system helps proliferate the spread of sex trafficking. I will conclude my paper by explaining what implications my theory holds for the Indian government in their efforts to combat sex trafficking as well as how socioeconomic and institutional factors are limiting of a woman's employment opportunities beyond the sex trafficking industry. I will also remark on the ways in which state governments can play an increased role in addressing trafficking within their own

regions and why this approach, either in conjunction with or separate from a widespread movement at the national level, may be more effective.

Dependent Variable: The Prevalence of Sex Trafficking in Indian States

According to the Crime in India 2020 report released by India's National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), the Indian state of Maharashtra continues to have the highest number of human trafficking cases across all the Indian states. India as a country had 1,466 human trafficking victims last year alone, of which Maharashtra accounted for 557 victims. Moreover, 97% of the victims from Maharashtra were sexually exploited through forced prostitution. The same report reveals that the state of Nagaland in India has consistently only seen between 0-3 cases of sex trafficking since 2018. This stands in stark contrast with Maharashtra which has seen cases in the 300s during the same three-year time-period (*The Times of India*).

This discussion of states with the most and least human trafficking cases within India emphasizes the need to understand sex trafficking at the subnational level in India. Given the nature of India's governing structure, in which power is often given to the states to carry out national policies, it is important to consider not only how individual states perpetuate cycles of trafficking, but also how they can be given more resources and support to adequately address this problem. Moreover, though Indian states share a common identity of being located within the same country, the subnational approach to studying sex trafficking leaves room to account for the unique socioeconomic and institutional factors within each state that might be motivating females into trafficking. Ultimately, the national level data that exists about sex trafficking in India is composed of the individual rates of trafficking within each individual state. Thus, it is important to understand the rates of sex trafficking and the causes behind such rates at the state level to better contextualize the national rate of sex trafficking in India.

Literature Review: Existing research about trafficking

Existing literature surrounding sex trafficking in India primarily focuses on describing three main facets of this growing problem: the nature and frequency of sex trafficking at the country level, problems within the legal system that perpetuate this practice, and the relationship between socioeconomic factors and sex trafficking rates across the Indian subcontinent.

Nature & Frequency of Sex Trafficking

The first category of research describes the nature and frequency of sex trafficking within India. Sarkar 2014, for example, contextualizes the problem of trafficking within the India through a statistical lens, which leads Sarkar to the conclusion that the government's overall response to trafficking ought to be more comprehensive to be effective. Sarkar remarks that human trafficking challenges both governance and law enforcement as India not only has a high demand for forced labor but has a ready supply of victims for sex trafficking due to lack of education and employment opportunities as well as gender discrimination faced by females in India. Thus, Sarkar concludes that the Indian government needs to prioritize a more robust response to sex trafficking in which the poor conditions that women face in India are better addressed in addition to the institutional factors that enable this crime to occur (Sarkar, 12). Similarly, Rai and Rai (2021) attempt to understand the nature of sex trafficking in India by comparing a few different states within the region. The authors perform a systematic review of quantitative and qualitative literature and find that sex trafficking is high in regions of India that are the poorest and where the number of vulnerable populations, such as women and children, are the highest. They also found that criminal organizations that promote this activity make tremendous profit from doing so. Thus, the authors argue, the Indian government is approaching

sex trafficking from a very one-dimensional lens and to truly have an impact on decreasing sex trafficking levels, they must consider all the factors contributing to this issue.

Other sources such as Naik (2017) and Jani et. al (2015) look at why women enter sex trafficking in India in the first place. In Naik (2017), they utilize a qualitative literature survey method to better analyze the factors pushing women into sex trafficking in India as well as how this crime impacts society at large in India. Naik (2017) argues that by far the biggest factor motivating women into this work is poverty and that poverty levels are driven in large part due to a lack of education among females in India as well as strong employment opportunities for females. They also argue that increasing globalization in the world is elevating levels of sex trafficking in countries because now women are not only trafficked within a country but across various countries and regions of the world. Thus, to better address these factors, Naik argues that there needs to be more comprehensive education given to females not only in traditional school settings but about laws regarding human trafficking. The nature of it, as well as just general awareness of its existence. They also argue that more technical education focused on cultivating employable skills within women is essential so they can acquire a job and a stable source of income to support themselves and their loved ones consistently.

Similarly, Jani et. al (2015) utilize a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis approach to better understand whether gender biases exist in South Asian countries, including India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, and how these biases affect the nature of sex trafficking in these countries. Through observing interviews of rescued trafficking victims in India conducted by an external agency and the World Bank's World Development Index dataset, the researchers were able to extrapolate important findings. This study demonstrated that gender biases persisted in 100% of the families of sex trafficking victims, with the strongest types of biases being

discrimination of girls in the family and discouragement or ignorance of females' education in the family by parental units. Over 80% of the females who participated in the interviews also believed that females were sold into trafficking because of social customs and traditions such as dowry, female feticide, and selling daughters. There was also some perception among trafficking victims about the role of political biases on their vulnerability into sex trafficking. The main conclusion from this piece was that a more decentralized approach, in which employment, educational, and trafficking awareness opportunities, are afforded in all countries and states within the South Asian region needs to be implemented.

The sources described above are essential for understanding the nature of the problem of sex trafficking within the Indian subcontinent as well as the motivating factors behind why women enter this work in the first place. However, this body of literature fails to address why there are variations of trafficking rates across different regions of the country as well as how institutions are complicit in perpetuating patterns of sex trafficking in India. As discussed above, understanding variations within states in India is important to contextualizing sex trafficking as socioeconomic and institutional variations can be better understood and targeted reforms within Indian states can be made to better address the problem within India. Moreover, while Naik (2017) and Jani (2015) discuss important casual factors for why women may enter this industry. Their findings indicate that specific attention should be paid to factors affecting females' socioeconomic status and sense of independence within the Indian society when attempting to understand sex trafficking in India.

The Criminal System & Trafficking

The second category focuses on the structural inefficiencies within the Indian criminal justice system, and the ways in which sex trafficking cases are processed, to better understand

how the legal system perpetuates the practice of sex trafficking within the country. Hart (2012) discusses the corruption within policing institutions in India have on proliferating sex trafficking patterns through listening to civil society narratives. She includes one story of Stanly K.V., co-founder of Odanadi, a non-governmental organization in Mysore, India working to combat human trafficking. In the story, Stanly mentions how upon entering a brothel where child sex trafficking victims were confirmed to be located, the Indian police refused to aid in rescue efforts and threatened to arrest the civil society members for “destroying property” because they had to break open a hollow wall to find the victims (Hart, pg. 1169). Hart also explores data collected from outside sources on the amounts of money Indian police have extorted from citizens and even participated in a process called “registering,” where brothel owners would inform the police of a new victim within their establishment and bribe the police officers for their silence (Hart, pg. 1170). Hart also briefly comments on the biases against victims exhibited by the Indian Supreme Court, which has been known to be active in fighting other societal issues within the country (Hart, pg. 1171). However, the relationship between corruption within policing institutions and the variation in prevalence of sex trafficking in states across the country was not mentioned.

Pandey et.al (2013) continue this discussion about legal responses to sex trafficking in by examining existing laws and statues supporting sex trafficking and analyzing how they are enabling rather than preventing this practice. They argue that the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act (SITA) created in 1956, later amended to the Immoral Traffic in Persons Prevention Act (ITPPA) in 1986, intended to disintegrate trafficking of women and girls for commercial sexual exploitation. Both acts attempt to do so with a myriad of definitions of key terms such as “prostitution” and “child,” and these statutes even call for the creation of distinct courts specializing in the processing of sex trafficking cases. However, in practice it

seems that not only did these courts fail to be established nor were given adequate resources to function, but neither of these statutes “offer adequate security and protection to the victims and has often been used against the victims instead of the perpetrators” (Pandey et. al, pg. 50).

Pandey et al. (2012) offer value insight into sex trafficking in India but fail to account for how these structural inefficiencies motivate variation in sex trafficking levels across Indian states.

India’s structure as a federal republic allows states to have discretion in terms of how they carry out laws at the national level. Implementation is key. To counter trafficking, it is vital to understand how it does so on a state level and what consequences it has for sex trafficking as a result.

Shetye (2018) examines the experiences of police officers, prosecutors, judges, NGO’s and female victims in Mumbai, India. Shetye finds that ITPAA is often abused, especially by the state’s legal institution, and leaves victims in the same vulnerable conditions under which they were originally trafficked. Moreover, rather than protecting the victims, like existing research, Shetye finds that police often prosecute the victims themselves as they are not seen as valuable members of society. Ultimately, the author argues that more recognition for the experiences and rights of victims is needed (Shetye, pg. 8). Though this resource develops a much more comprehensive overview of how the legal system intertwines with the problem of sex trafficking at the state level, this article only focuses on one state- Mumbai- rather than looking at how this same problem could be repeated in other states within India and ultimately explain variation in sex trafficking levels across Indian states.

Women's Individual Empowerment

The last category of research attempts to understand the relationship between women's knowledge around sex trafficking and their socioeconomic status at large and their vulnerability to becoming sex trafficking victims. Giri et. al (2012) conducted a cross-sectional study and examined 103 female sex workers in a specific district of the city Mumbai in India. They interviewed female sex workers about topics such as their condom use, knowledge and attitudes towards HIV and Aids, perception of HIV risk, feeling at risk of being infected by STDs, etc. The results demonstrate that most of the female sex workers were knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS as well as the modes of their transmission and the possibility of transmitting such diseases to children through breast feeding. A small portion of this population also reported consistent condom use with their partners in the sex trafficking industry. The authors conclude that their results indicate that because a large portion of women were knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS, they just simply chose to ignore such information to participate in the sex trafficking industry (Giri et. al, pg. 5). However, the study largely stops there. This study, though useful in understanding the relationship that exists between knowledge on such topics and trafficking, does not explore why such rates are so high even though awareness around STDs seems high. Moreover, the study also examined a very small section of a city within India which does not begin to explain the variations in trafficking rates among the different states across India.

Shrestha et. al (2015) examine 292 adolescent female students older than 10 across three high schools in Nepal. The specific city from which the students were chosen for this study in Nepal was characterized by poverty and a low literacy rate- 2 factors that increase a female's susceptibility to being lured into trafficking. The findings of this study demonstrate that 76% of students were aware of sex trafficking and largely were informed about this crime via radio and

television. Of the students, 56.8% also demonstrated positive attitudes towards both sex trafficking and anti-sex trafficking campaigns and cited both as sources of increasing awareness around the problem of sex trafficking. Shrestha et. al (2015) conclude that anti-trafficking programs need to be invested in more consistently and need to include educational components that improve the knowledge and attitudes that females exhibit towards trafficking. This study, though also foundational to the work in this field, does not seek to explain how even though women seem to have high rates of knowledge surrounding the issue, there is still a widespread trafficking problem across Nepal. Like India, Nepal has a well-documented record of sex trafficking over the years, and thus it is important for the authors to address why high rates of knowledge on the issue is still not preventing women from entering the industry.

Additionally, existing literature does not seek to understand how unemployment, financial literacy, or authority within families play a role in motivating women into trafficking. Sex trafficking is linked directly to these factors as the primary motivators that females cite for entering the industry are poverty and a broken family (Giri et. al). Thus, it is important to take into consideration these socioeconomic factors, which could not only explain why education on the topic isn't the only factor that needs to be considered, but also demonstrates the need to improve women's socioeconomic status in India to truly make a dent in the trafficking rates across the Indian states.

Remaining Questions

In understanding a sample of the literature that exists today, it is evident that there is still much work to be done in terms of both conceptualizing the problem of sex trafficking, but more importantly understanding why state level variation in sex trafficking levels exists in India. For

instance, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Assam, and Maharashtra, Assam, and are some of the worst regions for trafficking, with annual cases ranging from 240- 311 respectively (*Crime in India 2020*). However, none of the existing literature looks at why these trends persist and what factors make some women in some regions more susceptible to trafficking than in others. Moreover, though there is a lot written about why women enter the sex trafficking industry, there is very little literature regarding how the Indian legal system or factors affecting females' socioeconomic status affect both females' vulnerability to trafficking and sex trafficking levels at large. More specifically, there is hardly any literature that focus on factors affecting the female experience in India and how these factors, such as education and financial empowerment of women, affect rates of female trafficking victims in India. Because females, from all age ranges, compose by far the largest population of sex trafficking victims, it is imperative that literature makes attempts to understand the female experience and factors may be forcing them into this world of crime and deceit. this study, I hope to address the importance of understanding current flaws within institutions and why they are ineffective for female survivors when discussing sex trafficking in India, the intersection between a woman's sense of empowerment in Indian society and sex trafficking, as well as the necessity of understanding sex trafficking at the subnational level in India. Trafficking happens at the individual level. The more we can hone in on micro-level factors and local determinants of trafficking, the better we can combat this horrific form of modern day slavery.

My Theoretical Argument: Focusing on Regional Variation and Women's Empowerment

Drawing on existing explanations, I examine several hypotheses for why sex trafficking rates vary across India. First, I hypothesize that the existing corruption within the Indian legal system, particularly the ways in which sex trafficking cases are handled, affect the prevalence of

sex trafficking in each Indian state. Existing literature gives us insight into the ways in which India's legal system is corrupt. However, as mentioned before, the only extension that is made is how this corruption leads to more sex trafficking, rather than how does this inherently explain variation amongst Indian states with regards to sex trafficking of females.

Second, I theorize that the regions of India in which women do not have comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS have higher rates of sex trafficking and that regions in which women do not know that consistent condom use can reduce the chance of getting HIV/AIDS have higher rates of sex trafficking. Because sex trafficking is based upon women having some form of coerced sexual relations with their perpetrator, literature has shown that women who participate in this industry have a much higher likelihood of contracting a STI, and HIV and AIDS are the most common among female sex trafficking survivors. Moreover, I believe that women consistently utilizing condoms is one way to ensure that they have a strong understanding of how to apply their knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS as consistent condom use is proven to decrease one's chance of developing any kind of sexually transmitted disease (Pinkerton & Abramson 1997). Thus, even though general education is important, especially as a woman, I theorize that knowledge surrounding reproductive health such as HIV and AIDS, as well as applying this knowledge through consistently using condoms as a preventive measure, are important to discouraging women from entering an industry where such diseases are commonly contracted.

Third, I consider the role of education. I expect that areas in which a majority of women do not have 10 or more years education are more likely to get trafficked. Santhya and Jejeebhoy (2007) examine reproductive health education in young people in India and find that "programs to build awareness on sexual and reproductive health matters tend to focus on school- and college-going youth rather than those out of school." Moreover, this study details that in 2005

the Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education and the National AIDS Control Organization launched HIV/AIDS education programs in 60,000 higher secondary institutions and colleges out of 150,000 institutions across the Indian subcontinent. In 2006, they were expected to cover 123,810 schools and colleges nationally (Santhya and Jejeebhoy, pg. 14). Thus, I theorize that women who receive at least 10 years of education would have exposure to topics surrounding reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS and ways to both contract and prevent it. And again, because HIV/AIDSs are commonly contracted by sex trafficking victims and several authors in literature surrounding this topic advocated for increased education for women, I believe that regions in which women who are both generally educated and knowledgeable about topics in reproductive health will have lower levels of sex trafficking.

Fourth, I theorize that not participating in at least three household decisions, owning, and operating a personal bank or savings account, and females' unemployment rates within each Indian state affects a woman's likelihood of getting trafficked. I focus specifically on rural women in India for the unemployment rates as typically poverty is higher in rural areas compared to urban areas (Alkire et. al). All three of these variables are linked through their connection to a female's socioeconomic status and financial freedom within Indian states. A growing body of literature, as mentioned previously in this paper, demonstrates that a lack of lucrative financial opportunities for women in South Asia have often forced women into the sex industry as a form of income. And especially for families that females often support, entering the world of sex trafficking is often the only way for them to support their families and themselves. Thus, these factors assess how empowered a female feels in her lifestyle to make responsible

decisions surrounding family and money and the relationship these factors may hold with a female's entry into the trafficking world.

These 4 factors—corruption, HIV knowledge, education, and financial empowerment—provide insight into how and why sex trafficking varies across India. Drawing on these, I consider the following specific hypotheses:

1. **Hypothesis 1:** Indian states in which less than the average percentage of females have comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS will have higher rates of sex trafficking.
2. **Hypothesis 2:** Indian states in which less than the average percentage of females know that consistent condom use can reduce the chance of getting HIV/AIDS will have higher rates of sex trafficking comparatively.
3. **Hypothesis 3:** Indian states in which less than the average percentage of females do not have 10 years of education will have higher rates of sex trafficking.
4. **Hypothesis 4:** Indian states in which less than the average percentage of married women do not participate in at least three household decisions will have higher rates of sex trafficking.
5. **Hypothesis 5:** Indian states in which less than the average percentage of married women do not have their own personal bank or savings account will have higher rates of sex trafficking.
6. **Hypothesis 6:** Indian states in which unemployment rates for rural Indian women are greater than the average will have higher rates of sex trafficking.
7. **Hypothesis 7:** Corruption and malpractice within the Indian Legal system leads to the variation of sex trafficking within Indian states.

Evaluating these hypotheses offers important insight into how sex trafficking varies across the Indian states. I discuss my empirical approach to assessing these hypotheses below.

Research Methods

To evaluate my hypotheses, I rely on an original dataset tracking trafficking across the Indian state, sub-national state level socioeconomic data, secondary sources, and interviews with Indian attorneys.

I created an original dataset combining data on rates of human trafficking among women in Indian states and union territories with women's empowerment and socioeconomic factors.

There are 324 observations in the dataset covering 28 Indian states and 8 union territories from 2018-2020. I relied on several different sources of data. Data about female human trafficking victims are taken from the Indian National Crime Records Bureau for the years 2018, 2019, and 2020. There is no easily accessible dataset tracking sex trafficking victims within India. Because sex trafficking victims in India are predominantly females, I focus exclusively on the human trafficking rates of women as a measure of sex trafficking victims in India.

To account for the percentage of females with knowledge around HIV/AIDS, consistent condom use, with schooling beyond 10 years, participation in household decisions, and ownership of personal bank and/or savings accounts, I used data from India's National Family Health Survey. This survey is large-scale, multi-round survey that is conducted in a representative sample of households across India and contains data at the subnational level for factors surrounding females' empowerment. This survey contained data for both rural and urban women in India as well as a column that combined both subgroups. Because I was looking at the entire female population in India, I used the column titled "Total" that accounted for both rural and urban women in India.

Lastly, to account for female's unemployment rates in India's states and union territories, I used data from the Reserve Bank of India. This source also had separate datasets for rural and urban women, but I used only the dataset for rural women as existing literature demonstrates that poverty is worse in rural areas than in urban areas. Because poverty has been established as a key motivating factor for women entering sex trafficking, I believed data on rural women would be the most appropriate to include. In total, this dataset accounts for all 28 Indian states and 8 union territories within the Indian subcontinent. The 8 union territories are: Andaman & Nicobar

Island, Chandigarh, Dadra Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, and Puducherry.

Using this original dataset, I then created six descriptive maps depicting the rates of each of my independent variables surrounding a woman's experience in India. These maps, when seen in conjunction with the map of human trafficking cases across Indian states in 2020, reveal meaningful and important trends that demonstrate what factors should be further concentrated on by the Indian government when attempting to eradicate sex trafficking.

The limited amount of data makes regression analysis of limited utility here. Instead of using regression, analysis, to give more context to these maps and discuss the visual trends that appear, I calculated the averages for each of the independent variables as well as the number of human trafficking cases in 2020, as this is the most recent year for which all the variables have data. I considered datapoints higher or lower than the average as "High" or "Low" rather than using the conventional 0.51 or 51% metric, because there were some variables whose range only began above 70%. Thus, using the 0.51 or 51% metric would not have been meaningful as that would mean for some variables that every state was above average and there was no relationship at all with the dependent variable. I then investigate the trends that emerge for each of the variables across states that have high and low rates of human trafficking to better gauge the effect that socioeconomic and female empowerment factors could have.

To evaluate the relationship between institutional flaws within the Indian criminal legal system and sex trafficking, I interview several lawyers, or 'advocates' as they are more commonly known in India, who work within this system currently. The questions I asked them centered around how perpetrators are held accountable, how victims are brought justice and are

supported within the trial process, and why these lawyers believe that there are differences in sex trafficking rates between the Indian states.

Understanding Sex Trafficking in India

Prior to discussing the factors fueling sex trafficking in India, it is important to conceptualize the severity of sex trafficking in Indian states. The maps below depict rates of sex trafficking in India in the years 2018, 2019, and 2020 and largely depict decreasing trends in the number of sex trafficking cases within Indian states and union territories. There are, however, some exceptions. For example, Telangana's human trafficking cases increased from 137 to 184 from 2019 to 2020 and Uttar Pradesh also saw an increase from 35 to 48 to 90 over the course of 2018-2020. Despite cases decreasing across India overall, it is important to recognize that about half of the Indian territories have very high cases of sex trafficking. For example, the mean of human trafficking cases in 2020 is 53.5 and 12 Indian states far exceed this value. It is difficult to make a similar comparison among India's union territories due to lack of consistent data, but the sheer number of states that have cases of human trafficking exceeding this mean demonstrates the severity of this problem within India. Some of the states and union territories appear in some maps but not in others. For example, Jammu and Kashmir appear on both the 2018 and 2020 map, but not on the 2019 map. This reflects lack of data collected for this region in 2019.

Figure 1: Sex Trafficking Rates Across India, 2018-2020

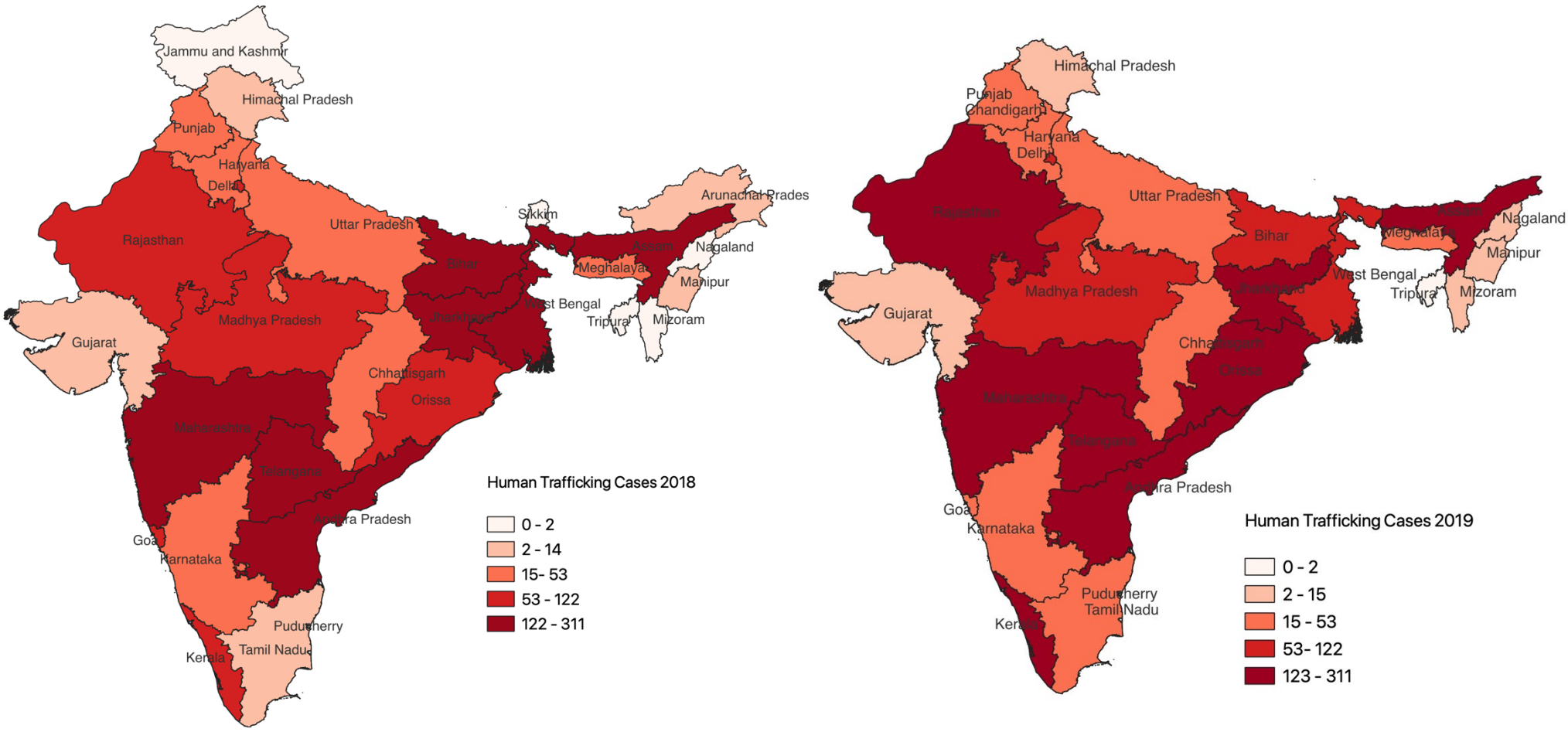
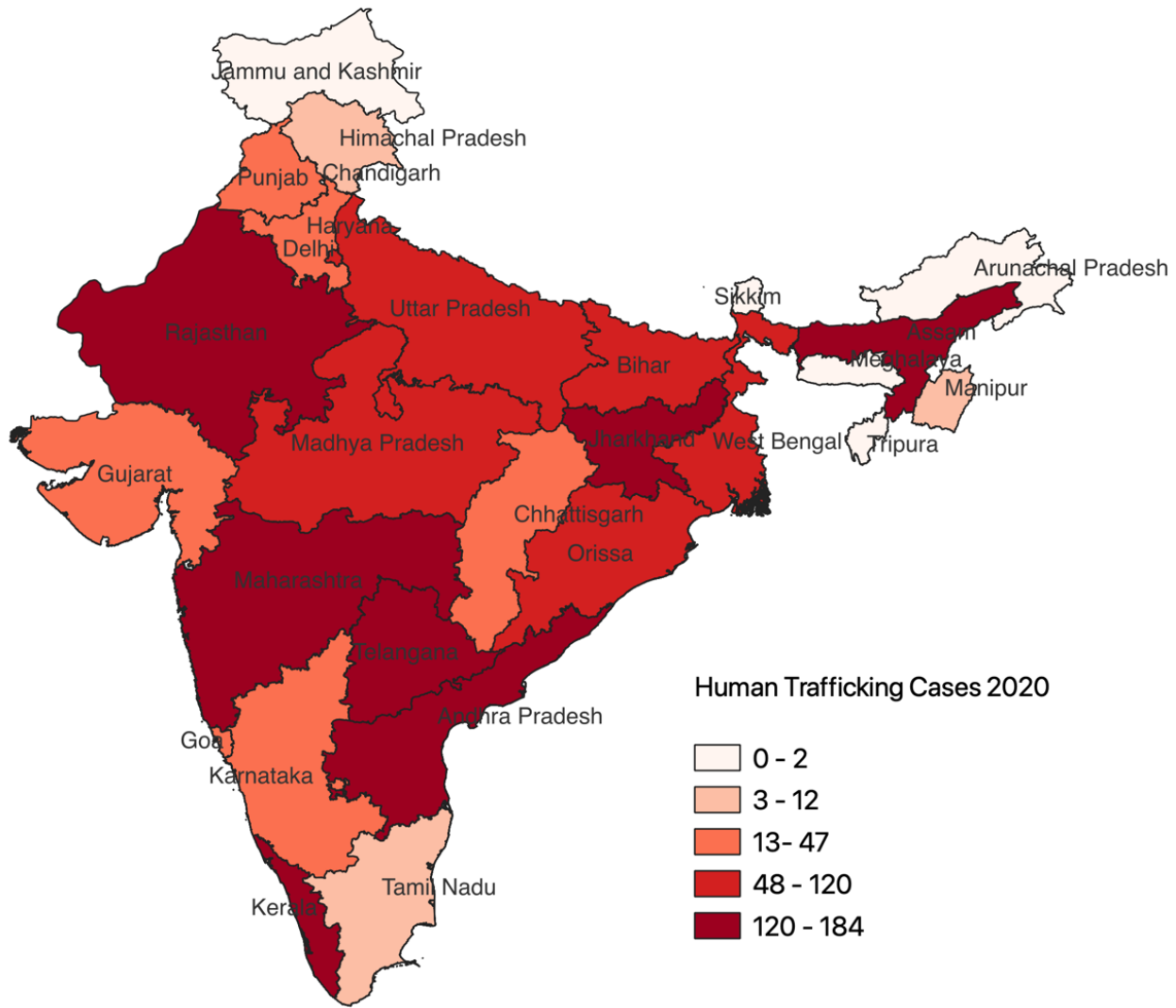


Figure 1: Sex Trafficking Rates Across India, 2018-2020

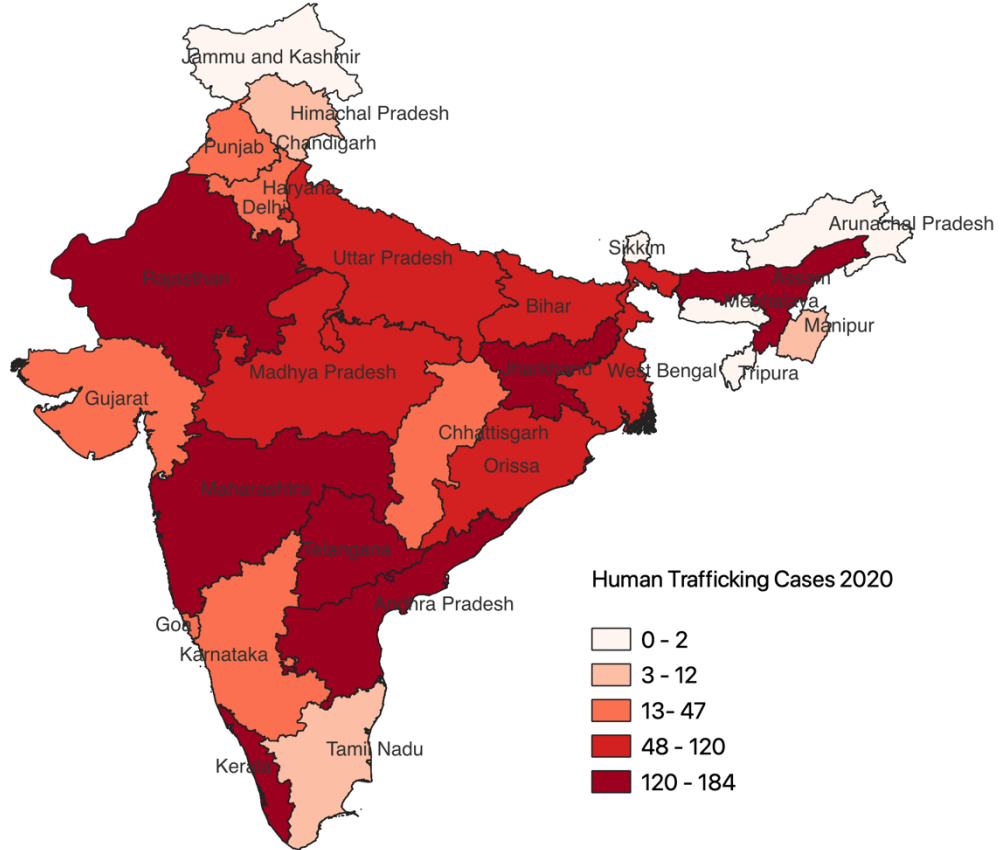
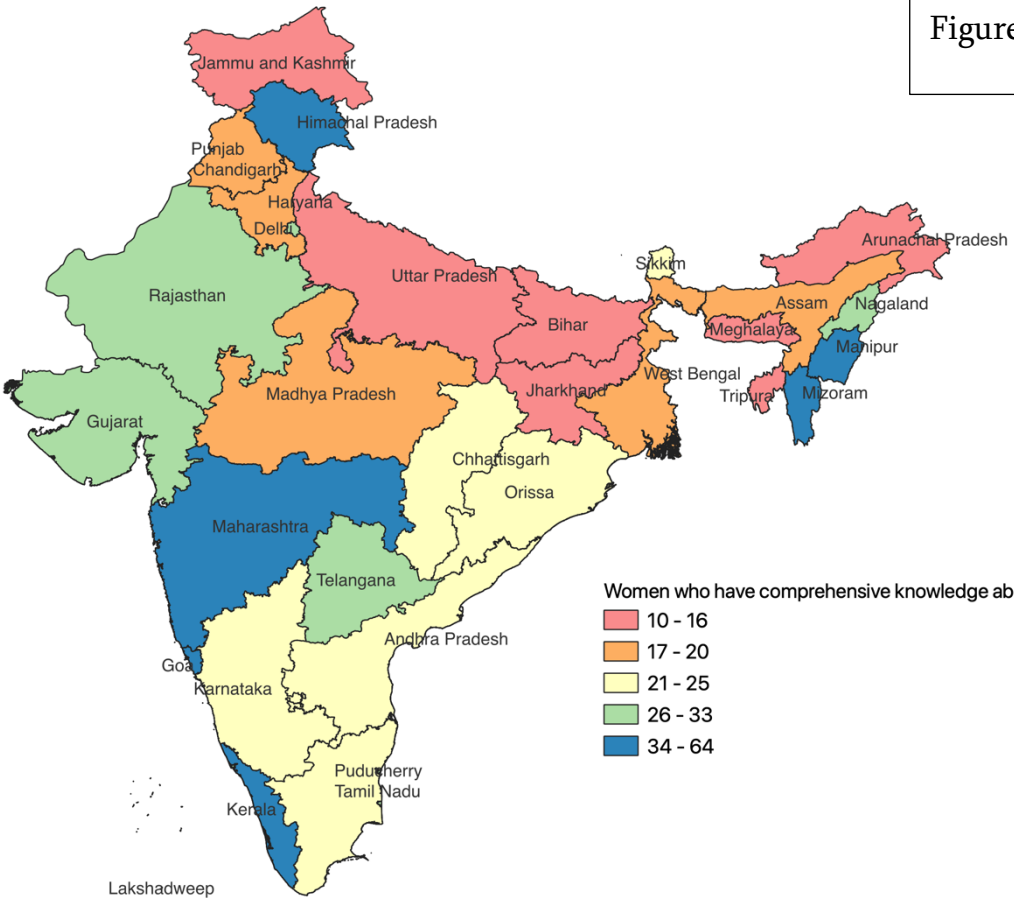


Sex Trafficking Rates & Knowledge of HIV/AIDS among Women in India

The maps below demonstrate both the rates of sex trafficking in Indian states (Map in red) along with the percentage of women who are aware of HIV/AIDS within the Indian states. The map in red is provided to better understand the number of sex trafficking cases that are in each specific state within India. When comparing the two maps, some stark trends begin to emerge. The mean of the human trafficking cases in 2020 was 56, so any state that had more than 56 cases of sex trafficking was further investigated.

When analyzing every single one of these states that had more than 56 cases of sex trafficking almost all of them had a population of less than 50% of women that were educated about HIV/AIDS. For instance, when looking at Maharashtra, which had 282 cases of human trafficking and the most in the year 2020, only 34% of women were educated on the issue. Similarly, Andhra Pradesh and Assam, the second and third largest states with human trafficking cases, 245 and 201 cases respectively, less than 30% of both states female population has been educated and is aware of HIV/AIDS. This stands in stark contrast to Manipur or Mizoram, which have 6 and 0 cases respectively, and had over 50% of their female population educated about HIV/AIDS. There are some mixed results as well demonstrated in the maps. For example, in the state of Tamil Nadu which has 11 human trafficking cases, far below the mean of 56 cases, only 23.6% of the female population is educated about HIV/AIDS. The same stands true for Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Meghalaya.

Figure 2: HIV Knowledge and Trafficking Rates in India, 2018-2020



Sex Trafficking Rates & Knowledge of Consistent Condom Use Preventing HIV/AIDS among Women in India

When the map for knowledge on consistent condom preventing HIV/AIDS in women is compared with the map of sex trafficking rates in 2020, there are some faint patterns that emerge. Appendix A has more details. Overall, most Indian states and union territories had a very high percentage of women that had knowledge about the impacts that consistent condom use could have on their chances of developing HIV/AIDS. This was even true among states that surpassed the average value of human trafficking cases in 2020 (>56). However, there were some states that exhibited the positive relationship I had predicted regarding lower levels of knowledge about consistent condom use and HIV/AIDS and higher rates of human trafficking levels. The average percentage of women who had knowledge about consistent condom use and HIV/AIDS across all the Indian states was 71.26%. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, which had 171 cases of human trafficking in 2020 (greater than the average of 56), only 63% of women had knowledge about the relationship between consistent condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS.

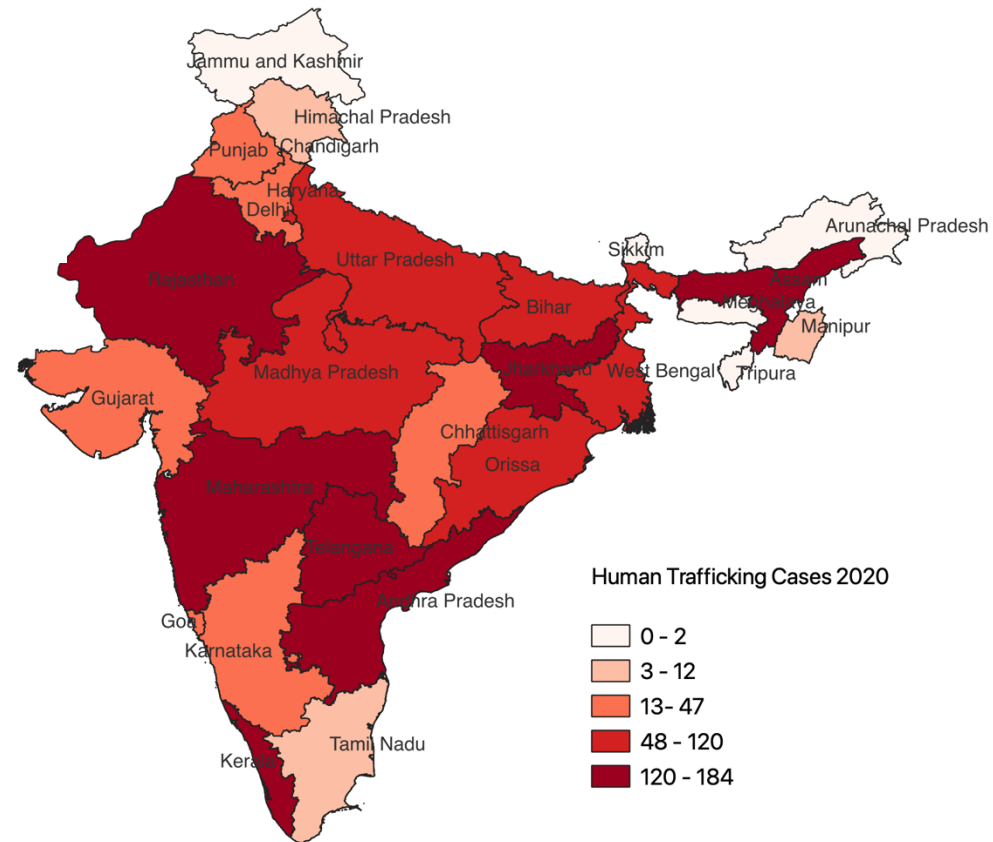
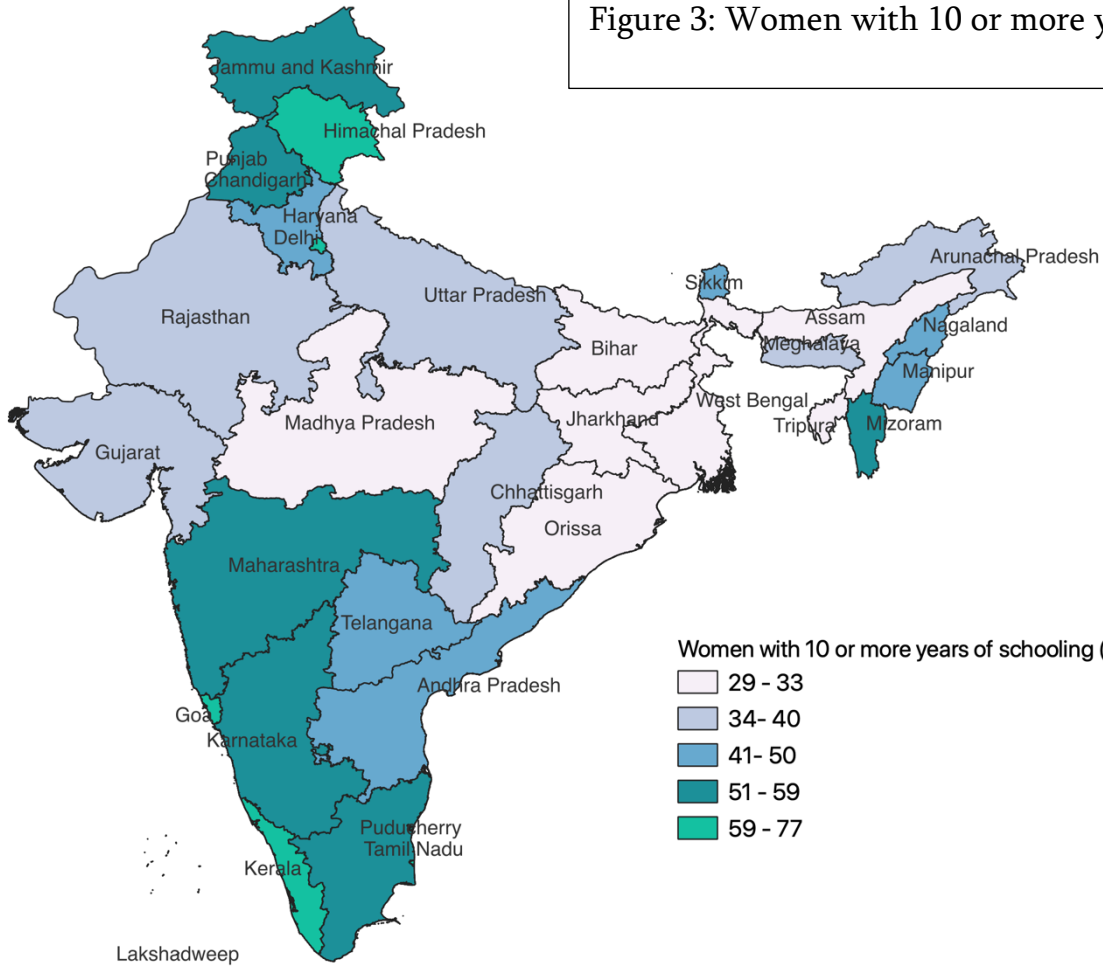
A similar pattern can be seen in Telangana which had 184 cases of female human trafficking in 2020 and only 68.9% of females within the state had knowledge about consistent condom use and HIV/AIDS. But in states such as Maharashtra, which also had 184 cases of female human trafficking in 2020, over 72% of women had knowledge about consistent condom use and human trafficking. Though this is only marginally higher than the average value for this variable (71.26%), cases like Maharashtra demonstrate that knowledge about consistent condom use and HIV/AIDS may not be a complete explanation for the level of female human trafficking cases in Indian states.

Sex Trafficking Rates & Women with 10 or more years of Schooling

When comparing the map for this variable with human trafficking cases in 2020 below, a very clear pattern emerges. In almost every state that has more than the average number of human trafficking cases in 2020 (56), the percentage of women who have 10+ years of education is less than the average for this variable. The average percentage of women educated 10 years or beyond in India is 46.68%. In states such as Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, which as stated above have high rates of human trafficking, the percentage of women educated 10 years and beyond are 39.6% and 29.3%.

The same is also true for Bihar, an Indian state with 75 female human trafficking cases in 2020 and only 28.8% of women with 10 or more years of education and Rajasthan, an Indian state with 128 cases of human trafficking in 2020 and only 33.4% of women with 10 or more years of education. Like the other variables, there are some outliers. For example, in Kerala, a South Indian state with 166 cases of human trafficking in 2020, 77% of women have 10 or more years of education. The same is true for Maharashtra, which had 184 cases of human trafficking in 2020 and where 50.4% of its female population with 10 or more years of education. However, because 10 out of the 12 states with more than the average number of human trafficking cases were also characterized by a lower-than-average percentage of women with 10 or more years of education, this demonstrates that some relationship does exist between both variables.

Figure 3: Women with 10 or more years of schooling and Trafficking Rates in India, 2018-2020



Sex Trafficking Rates & Currently Married Women who usually participate in 3 or more household decisions within the family

Looking at the maps for this variable in the Appendix, another faint yet important pattern emerges. Appendix B provides more details about this. The average percentage of women who usually participate in 3 or more household decisions with the family in India is 90.53%. In 8 states out of 12 that exceed the average number of human trafficking cases in 2020, the percentage of women who participate in such household decisions falls below the average. For example, In Uttar Pradesh, which had 90 cases of female human trafficking in 2020, 87.6% of women had participated in 3 or more household decisions within the family and in Bihar, which had 75 cases of female human trafficking in 2020, only 86.5% of women had participated in such decisions. The same can be said for Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra where 84.1% and 89.8% of women were involved in household decisions respectively. However, like the other variables there were some outliers as well. For example, in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, states that have over the average number of human trafficking cases in 2020, 91% of women participated in such household decisions.

Sex Trafficking Rates & Women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use

In looking at the map for this variable in comparison to the human trafficking levels in 2020, unlike the other variables, a very inconsistent relationship appears. Appendix C provides more details. To visualize this, it is important to know that the average number of women who operate their own bank or savings account is 79.7%. Now in looking at the states which have more than 56 cases of human trafficking, only 4 states have a lower-than-average amount of women who have a bank or savings account that they themselves operate. In Madhya Pradesh

and Maharashtra two states that have already been discussed for having human trafficking cases above 56, 74.7% and 72.8% of women respectively have a bank or savings account that they themselves use. The same is true for West Bengal, a state with 59 cases of human trafficking in 2020 and 76.5% of women who use such financial accounts and Bihar, with 75 cases of human trafficking and 76.6% of women who operate their own financial accounts. But what is interesting with this variable is that it is the states and territories that have lower rates of female human trafficking that have lower than average amounts of women who have a bank or savings account that they use. For example, in Gujarat and Haryana, which had 13 and 14 cases of human trafficking in 2020, only 70% and 73.6% of women used their own accounts respectively. The same can be observed for Nagaland which had 3 cases of human trafficking in 2020 and the union territory NCT Delhi.

Sex Trafficking Rates & Female Unemployment rates

Lastly, we turn to total female unemployment rates in India and its relationship with sex trafficking. Appendix D provides more details. The average female unemployment rate in India was 0.09312% and there were several states and territories that significantly exceeded this value. For instance, Arunachal Pradesh and Goa, two Indian states, had unemployment rates of 0.127% and 0.197% respectively. However, both states had far less than the average amount of human trafficking cases, with Arunachal Pradesh only having 2 cases of human trafficking and Goa only having 17 cases of human trafficking in 2020. The only state with higher-than-average unemployment rate and a high number of human trafficking cases was Kerala, who had 166 cases of human trafficking in 2020 and an unemployment rate of 0.156%. Thus, this does not

discredit the importance of unemployment rates in explaining human trafficking but shows that it might not explain human trafficking rates in India by itself.

India's Criminal Legal System: The Flaws

Several current lawyers who work within the Indian legal system, and specifically lawyers who work with sex trafficking cases on a weekly basis, provided critical insight into how trafficking happens in India and how the legal system addresses it.¹

Interview with Mr. K.V. Ramaraj:

My first interview was with advocate Mr. K.V. Ramaraj, former member of the All-India Lawyers Union and current member of the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, we discussed many facets of the Indian legal system that are driving trafficking rates across the country. Mr. K.V. Ramaraj told me that his association with sex trafficking cases is through the cases the Commission for Protection of Child Rights receives that have portions of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act cited. This act, and specifically Article 44, he explained, were commonly cited in the First Information Report (FIR) that police officers receive from victims or individuals who report sex trafficking instances and is utilized when a sexual offense is committed against a child in India.

Moreover, the Commission for Protection of Child Rights is the monitoring authority of sex trafficking cases against children and there are individual branches of this Commission established in most Indian states that serve this same purpose. Mr. Ramaraj said that he believes sex trafficking is most prevalent in the North compared to Southern India because literacy rates

¹ This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Colorado Boulder. The project ID is [Sex Trafficking in India].

and awareness about the issue is higher in the South. Additionally, he said, Northern states have easy access to Nepal, another sex trafficking hub for South Asian women, and from Nepal, they have access to the global sex trafficking ring. Mr. Ramaraj believes that the primary cause of sex trafficking is perpetrators' desire for money. He said that many women and girls are sold to Mumbai and Nepal, which he said were major South Asian trafficking hubs, and that sex trafficking was often a hobby for rich people. Mr. Ramaraj also said, women could go into this industry due to drug addiction and poverty and due to the pervasiveness of these conditions across the country, levels of sex trafficking are high in India (Ramaraj, 2022)

We then began discussing the Indian legal system which Mr. Ramaraj says has three fundamental flaws as they relate to sex trafficking. He began by first depicting how cases are handled and prioritized within the Indian judicial system. He stated the Indian courts are very strong, including the judges, and they play a big role in bringing justice to the victim. Mr. Ramraj said that sex trafficking cases, however, are not prioritized or handled any differently than regular criminal cases due to police officers either failing to bring charges against the perpetrator, which is mostly due to negligence and denial of a survivor's experience (Ramaraj, 2022).

Mr. Ramaraj then began to describe the three major flaws he sees in the Indian judicial system that contribute to sex trafficking. The first, he says, is the police. In general, the police in India have an attitude towards getting acquittal for the accused rather than getting justice for the victim. As a result, there is a very long lag time between finding out about sex trafficking and filing a case against the accused. There is also a very long lag time between arresting the accused and conducting a crime scene investigation at the site of the trafficking scheme. In some cases, even if the police find out about trafficking incidents, arrest warrants are not filed because

sex trafficking is not a priority within the legal system and the attitude towards getting the perpetrators off the hook compounds their interest to not shed light on the trafficking incident. In other words, Mr. Ramaraj says, there is no accountability for sex trafficking through police officers. The second problem, he says, is the prosecution. Though India has a very independent judicial system, prosecution is quite weak in India, which leads to a very low conviction rate of perpetrators as well as very low chances of victims receiving justice within the system. He further, “Advocates do not have a progressive mentality, meaning that they do not have any interest in saving the children or women who are trafficked.”

The third flaw Mr. Ramaraj mentions are the lack of comprehensive victim assistance programs throughout the court process and beyond. He stated that witness protection programs do not exist and that in many cases women are afraid to come forward about their experiences because they do not want to face any consequences from their perpetrators for testifying. As a result, sex trafficking continues. Moreover, Mr. Ramaraj mentioned that police officers do not even transport survivors to the court even though they do transport perpetrators from the jail to the court. He also stated that the kinds of victims’ assistance programs that are available in India are not adequate currently though a skeletal structure of these programs does exist. There is a growing emphasis on the science of victimology, Mr. Ramaraj said, and thus a recognition that victims have gone through unique experiences that warrant attention and validation. However, victim protection programs do not exist, making many victims afraid to testify against their abusers, and as mentioned earlier, without any support from the police to and from the courthouse, the victims feel vulnerable to consequences that their abusers may direct at them. Mr. Ramaraj stated that there is no law currently requiring such victim assistance programs and there hasn’t been any indication of such a law within the Indian Parliament either. Mr. Ramaraj

stated that as far as he knows, there is also no rehabilitation programs for trafficking victims that is sponsored by the Indian government but that there are several anti-trafficking agencies that are working on this. He states that rehabilitation is not a priority, leading many trafficking victims to just re-enter the world of trafficking after the court process ends for one of their perpetrators. To fix this, Mr. Ramaraj says there needs to be laws created within the Indian Parliament that help adequately compensate and support the victim and their family in addition reforming the police and prosecution system (Ramaraj, 2022).

I also asked Mr. Ramaraj about his take on why the levels of sex trafficking vary across Indian states. He stated that in addition to many Indian states with high rates of trafficking facing problems with their state criminal legal system, awareness and literacy rates play a big role in explaining trafficking rates. Mr. Ramaraj said that women and children are very aware about this issue in some states whereas the same is not true for others. He depicted that there was a split between the North and South India in which Northern states have lower literacy rates and awareness rates of sex trafficking. This in combination with easy access to Nepal, a global trafficking hub, he said, makes rates of trafficking in some Northern states worse than those in Southern India.

Lastly, I asked Mr. Ramaraj about his belief in the effectiveness of the government's response and what the future looked like for sex trafficking in India. Mr. Ramaraj mentioned that there was a Anti-Sex Trafficking Bill that was making its third attempt in the Indian Parliament this year due to not being as comprehensive in the past. He made contributions to the bill's language and believes that this piece of legislation is a key aspect of both validating the severity of the problem in India as well as a survivor's experience. Currently, Mr. Ramaraj said that there are two laws regarding sex trafficking in India but that they do not very directly call out or

address the problem. As such, more legislation surrounding the topic is necessary to hold more perpetrators accountable and bring victims justice. Mr. Ramaraj also mentioned that an overhaul of both the police and prosecution's response to sex trafficking was needed to be more proactive about seeking out cases, handling them appropriately, and providing the necessary support for victims throughout their trial process. Mr. Ramaraj says that he does have faith in the Indian government for prioritizing and tackling this problem, but that the police and prosecutorial systems are the root causes that need to be addressed (Ramaraj, 2022).

Interview with Advocate Jeevakumar

I also had a chance to speak with Advocate Jeevakumar, who is a member of the All-India Lawyers Union, operates out of Tanjore, India and focuses specifically on sex trafficking cases. Mr. Jeeva has been an advocate for over 25 years and mentioned that he has seen lots of children who are suffering from trafficking and the issue is only continuing to grow within India. He called sex trafficking "a curse to society" that the government needs to eradicate.

When asked why sex trafficking even occurs in India, Mr. Jeevakumar mentioned that helping a family survive is what often motivates a female to engage in such work. Perpetrators prey on impoverished women and children, he said, because they know that out of desperation to survive and help their family survive, the females will enter the sex trafficking industry. He also cites the low quality of life for women and corruption as reasons for why sex trafficking exists. An ancient, yet deeply rooted patriarchal system, Mr. Jeevakumar says, is responsible for lowering a female's quality of life in India and makes finding stable employment opportunities rather difficult. Moreover, with police officers turning a blind eye to sex trafficking, state governments hiding incidents of trafficking to shield themselves from criticism by the national

government or international realm, and the sheer amount of influence that traffickers often have within society, corruption is also deeply entrenched in Indian society. All these factors combined, Mr. Jeevakumar says, give rise to the societal evil of sex trafficking (Jeevakumar, 2022).

Like the previous interview, Mr. Jeevakumar mentioned that the main proliferators of sex trafficking are the police and the prosecution system in India. Mr. Jeevakumar stated that there was no separate police wing or investigations unit for sex trafficking, leaving these cases lumped in with hundreds of thousands of other cases and not given any special attention. Moreover, he stated, the general police wing that is doing the work is not knowledgeable at all about the issue nor do they have the resources to register the trafficking cases. He also mentions that there is no human approach to the issue, meaning that victims aren't even given the time to express their story and the abuse they endured. Mr. Ramaraj, in the previous interview, even mentioned that police officers don't even transport victims to court when they are called as witnesses in trial whereas they do transport the perpetrators to court (Jeevakumar, 2022).

Mr. Jeevakumar also pointed out lots of fatal flaws within the prosecution system. He started off by giving me a common statistic that is used by lawyers focusing on sex trafficking cases: If 10,000 cases are reported, he said, only 3,000 cases are booked and investigated and nearly 7,000 of the cases are dropped for not having sufficient evidence. Thus, the conviction rate for sex trafficking cases is less than 2% across India. This indicates that over 70% of the cases are left without any filing of charges or making improvements within the system to bring the accusers to justice. Mr. Jeevakumar also furthered that the speed of the trial is extremely slow and that there are no public prosecutors within India, meaning that access to strong legal advocacy is quite difficult for individuals from impoverished backgrounds. He furthered that

because women and girls who are trafficked are primarily from impoverished backgrounds and are motivated into the sex industry because of financial freedom, it is no surprise that they have difficulty affording advocacy and in turn legitimacy for their experiences (Jeevakumar, 2022).

When victims are asked to come to court, which he said was already very infrequent, Mr. Jeevakumar stated that they were treated very harshly, and their stories were not validated. He stated that victims do not get adequate justice in the court system either, which often discourages other victims and survivors from coming forth about their experiences. Because both the state governments and the criminal legal systems operating within them want to hide that sex trafficking is even occurring within their borders for fear of repercussions by the national or international community, the rate of conviction for traffickers is very low. Thus, the rate of registered sex trafficking offenders is quite low even though people come forward to report their cases (Jeevakumar, 2022).

I also asked Mr. Jeevakumar how the perpetrators were held accountable given the current system. He mentioned that truthfully, there was no accountability, and this stemmed from not only the prosecution and the police, but the atmosphere of corruption that exists throughout India. The pimps and traffickers who are performing this act are often very powerful and influential members of society who have the means to escape the law. Mr. Jeevakumar stated that not only do traffickers often have beautiful houses and very good lives, but they are also often in policy-making positions where they ensure the law allows them to continue their illegal activities while punishing victims for their participation (Jeevakumar, 2022).

When asked why he thought sex trafficking varied across different regions in India, Mr. Jeevakumar remarks that it boils down to reporting and the culture around sex trafficking. He stated that the rates of sex trafficking in Indian states are much higher than the reports describe.

In many states, women prefer not to report their incidents of sex trafficking, he says, because they are ashamed to reveal that they participated in such work and harsh culture within the state is punishing rather than supportive of a survivor's experience. Moreover, some state governments also actively suppress that sex trafficking is happening within their borders because they are ashamed to report that this is occurring within their borders to the national government and to the world. Thus, he says, sex trafficking is overwhelmingly increasing in India but because of problems with reporting and the differences in culture within each state, there are variations in sex trafficking rates across the country (Jeevakumar, 2022).

To conclude the interview, I asked Mr. Jeevakumar about his belief in the government's response to sex trafficking and whether this crime would persist in the future. He said that "if the government is engaging in the eradication of sex trafficking wholeheartedly, and if there is consistent action on the issue, sex trafficking will be gone from our society." However, he hasn't seen such efforts from the government quite yet. He stated that there is more representation of women in political spheres, as India has had many prime ministers, chief ministers, and presidents who were female. But even they have not prioritized sex trafficking enough for it to be eradicated. Mr. Jeevakumar remarked that the legal system needs some revolutionary changes, and that the government needs to focus on uplifting the conditions of women in the country as this is the root cause of sex trafficking. He mentioned that moral support for a victim, rather than just financial support after her experience in sex trafficking, is needed (Jeevakumar, 2022).

Interview with Archana Abarnesh

I spoke with advocate Archana Abarnesh who has been an advocate within the Indian legal system for 8 years and is from Madurai, a small city in India. Mrs. Abarnesh has connections to sex trafficking cases as she is often the one arguing such cases in court and helps victims not only see the consequences of participating in this work but connects them with other employment opportunities to ensure they do not recidivate back into trafficking. When asked why sex trafficking occurs in India, Mrs. Abarnesh cited socioeconomic and family background as the two causes of sex trafficking in India. She stated that significant constraints imposed on a female by her own family regarding what they should wear, study, etc. leads to gender inequalities and lack of opportunities for women compared to their male counterparts.

Mrs. Abarnesh indicated that education is still a big source of gender inequality in India, as men are frequently encouraged to seek out an education whereas women are forced to stay at home. As a result of this mentality by the parents, a woman becomes reliant on her family for survival. When she does eventually attempt to become self-reliant, women are not educated or qualified enough to find opportunities which pushes them into trafficking. Moreover, even when women do seek out stable employment opportunities, women get paid significantly less than what men do in India, leading them to either seek out more lucrative positions such as forced marriage, sex trafficking, or prostitution. Mrs. Abarnesh says that sex trafficking is also common among single mothers because the gender-wage gap makes it so that a woman cannot survive without a male's income and if the male dies, the woman must take on other opportunities, such as trafficking, to provide for herself and potential children. Mrs. Abarnesh kept emphasizing the necessity of education for girls to prevent women from entering the world of sex trafficking, and

stated that she hopes the national government continues to make more reforms in this area (Abarnesh, 2022)

Ms. Abarnesh also indicated that the prosecution system is very weak in India as it is not very slow or very active in ensuring that victims receive justice. Ms. Abarnesh mentioned that because of the power and authority that traffickers often hold in society, prosecutors are afraid to go after them, allowing traffickers to continue harming millions of girls and women. In her specific region, Ms. Abarnesh says that the police are very helpful towards women and young girls who have been trafficked. She mentioned that after police are notified about cases of trafficking and specific streets or districts where it is the most prevalent, the officers will call women and ask them to come in for counseling and support resources to survive without participating in trafficking.

She said, however, that she knows the relationship between police officers and trafficking victims is not as strong in other areas. With regards to rehabilitation, Mrs. Abarnesh says that she is only familiar with Tamil Nadu, a state in South India, but that there are lots of rehabilitation systems here that are sponsored by both the government and the Red Cross. After survivors are either tried through the court process or brought to homes where they are given counseling about the consequences of sex trafficking, the government and the Red Cross volunteers connect these women with opportunities in hotels or tailoring shops. She says these programs are effective and they result in less women participating in the sex trafficking industry (Abarnesh, 2022).

We also discussed why Mrs. Abarnesh believed that sex trafficking was higher in some regions than in others. She stated that in Northern Indian states, there is a big culture that revolves around having more than one legal wife, and often the unspoken rules allow for up to four lives for one man. Meanwhile, in Southern India, also where Ms. Abarnesh runs her

practice, there is a culture where men are only allowed to have one wife and must be faithful to her or else society shuns the individual. Thus, she says these cultural differences account for the variation in sex trafficking across India. Moreover, Mrs. Abarnesh states, that in some states women are more restricted by their partners. Though there are plentiful job opportunities for women, their male partners often constrict them to housework and taking care of children after marriage, leaving women no room to finish their education or apply their skills in the workforce. Thus, when they eventually do attempt to join the workforce, these women often do not have the skills necessary to acquire secure jobs and often turn to sex trafficking to contribute to their family. Their male partners, despite being restrictive, condone such work because it often brings in income and reinforces the patriarchal system in which men feel more dominant than their female counterparts. Mrs. Abarnesh remarks that this is quite sad because when women are encouraged to finish their education, they are often so successful (Abarnesh, 2022).

Lastly, Mrs. Abarnesh discussed her confidence in the government. She says that 60% of her feels confident that the government will eradicate this problem and 40% of her has no confidence at all in the government. Mrs. Abarnesh says that the inconsistent spotlight on the issue by the government has shown her that they will not prioritize the issue, but rather say that everything is fine, and that sex trafficking is a part of every society without taking any steps to fix it. But the small programs they have started to help create, with regards to rehabilitation, for example, do give Mrs. Abarnesh hope (Abarnesh, 2022).

Discussion of Results

I examine 4 hypotheses in this paper about what explains the variation in sex trafficking across the Indian states. In Table X below, I summarize the support I find for each of the hypotheses.

Table 1: Summary of Support Found for Hypotheses

<u>H1:</u>	Found support for the relationship between females having less-than-average levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and higher rates of sex trafficking in Indian states.
<u>H2:</u>	Found mixed support for states in which women have less knowledge about consistent condom use preventing HIV/AIDS and higher rates of sex trafficking in those states.
<u>H3:</u>	Found strong support for women having less than 10 years of education and higher rates of sex trafficking in those states
<u>H4:</u>	Found slightly strong support for less-than-average percentages of women participating in at least 3 household decisions and higher rates of sex trafficking in those states.
<u>H5:</u>	Found a weak relationship between states in which women do not have their own personal bank or savings account and higher rates of sex trafficking in those states
<u>H6:</u>	Found a weak relationship between Indian states with high rates of unemployment and high rates of sex trafficking.
<u>H7:</u>	Found support for flaws in the criminal legal system worsening sex trafficking levels across the country.

Hypotheses 1-2: Knowledge about HIV/AIDS & Consistent Condom Use preventing

HIV/AIDS:

With regards to the variable measuring the amount of knowledge women have about HIV/AIDS, the positive relationships that exist between areas where women have lots of knowledge about these subjects and there are fewer rates of sex trafficking seems rather intuitive. Because of the number of clients females within this industry see each week as well as the frequency with which they perform sexual acts without using protection has proven to increase contraction of HIV/AIDS among the female sex worker population. Thus, having lots of knowledge about the issue and the ways in which it can be contracted could lead to women, even those who are desperate for income, to seek other alternatives to avoid these severe health consequences.

Similarly, the relationship between areas in which women do not have lots of knowledge about these subjects and sex trafficking rates are quite high also seems rather straightforward. As

stated previously, the sex industry is very conducive to women contracting these sexually transmitted diseases, and especially severe ones such as HIV/AIDS. However, if women are not aware of this, their desire to survive and provide for themselves and their families might drive them into this dangerous industry.

What becomes more complex to explain are the cases in which regions have populations of women that are very aware of HIV/AIDS but the rates of sex trafficking are quite high. I hypothesize that in these scenarios women are ignoring the signs and symbols that indicate danger within the sex industry, including the possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS, because they feel trapped in their current lifestyle of poverty. In other words, because they want to be able to provide for themselves and their families, even though they know they could damage their own health by doing so, they are willing to partake in the sex trafficking industry for the meager benefits it could provide. Literature provides ample support for the motivating factors that force women into these occupations (Naik 2017 and Jani et. al 2015) and indicate that women do not want to be in the sex trafficking industry willingly but rather are in it because they are driven by poverty and the patriarchal culture, they live in. Advocate Archana also confirmed this in her own interview when she mentioned that women do not want to be in sex trafficking but do so despite the consequences to survive.

It is also important to acknowledge the knowledge women have about prevention mechanisms of HIV/AIDS through consistent condom use. As noted above, having knowledge about HIV/AIDS is important, but it is more important for women to know how to apply that behavior in practice and using condoms consistently when engaging in any sexual acts is an important preventative measure (Pinkerton & Abramson 1997). The relationship between lower levels of knowledge around the effectiveness of consistent condom use in preventing HIV/AIDS

and higher rates of sex trafficking seems rather intuitive. If women are not educated on the consequences that could arise because of engaging in sexual intercourse with strangers multiple times a week without any protection, they may not realize that contracting HIV/AIDS is even a possibility. Thus, they may not even realize that they contracted the disease when it does occur, and they will continue engaging in the act because they are desperate for a source of income and are blind to the consequences of the work. The outlier cases in which cases with high rates of trafficking also have a female population that is well-educated about consistent condom use preventing HIV/AIDS can be explained using a similar explanation to the variable discussed above. Even if women know that consistent condom use is one of the most effective ways to prevent HIV/AIDS, they may continue engaging in sex trafficking, an industry where condoms are not typically used on a consistent basis, because they are desperate for income. Moreover, women in this industry may be using condoms when performing transactional intercourse with their trafficker, but because there is no specific data on condom usage during sex trafficking encounters, this statement cannot be confidently made.

Hypotheses 3-6: Socioeconomic Factors & Sex Trafficking Levels in India

10+ years of schooling:

As predicted, there was a defined trend between women having 10+ years of schooling and sex trafficking levels in a country. In other words, the maps depict those areas in which there is a smaller percentage of women who have 10 or more years of education, there are higher levels of sex trafficking. This could be explained in two ways. As stated in the literature review, high school and college is typically where most students across all genders receive the most education about topics regarding reproductive health. If women do not make it to this level of

education, they could often miss out on information regarding healthy sexual encounters and STDs, which could make them engage in sex trafficking out of desperation without knowing the dangers associated with it. Moreover, literature shows that there is a very pervasive culture around India that discourages women to pursue their studies so that they can be more helpful around the house (Raj et al.). As Ms. Abarnesh stated in her own interview, such women become more dependent on their families for income and when it becomes time for them to seek out their own jobs or support the family, they are often forced into sex trafficking because they don't have the skills necessary to seek out safer job opportunities within the workforce.

Participation in 3 or more household decisions

As I also predicted, there is a relatively clear relationship between less-than-average percentage of married women who participate in at least three household decisions and higher rates of sex trafficking in Indian states. Participating in household decisions gives women a sense of authority; whereas men are traditionally dominant in providing for the family, it is the woman that often stays at home in traditional patriarchal societies and takes care of both household chores and the children. In other words, the household is under the control of a woman. When even this is stripped away from her, a woman can feel not only a loss of control, but she can also feel a loss of identity and stability. This could force a woman into sex trafficking in order to both provide for the family and because she feels lost as an individual with no guidance for what is right and wrong. Participating in household decisions is also a sign of gender equity within the household, because both the spouse and the children respect the woman's word to listen to her even if they don't follow through on her opinion. Thus, in households where women do participate in such decisions, women could feel respected enough that they do not seek out

opportunities such as sex trafficking in which women are often at the beck and call of a male trafficker.

Women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use

I had originally predicted that states in which less than an average percentage of married women had a bank or savings account that they used would have higher rates of sex trafficking. I thought this relationship would exist because not having independent banking accounts would constrict a female's sense of financial freedom. Especially given the patriarchal society in India, even if a woman were to earn money, I thought that sharing bank accounts with her spouse could give rise to men taking earnings away from the woman unwillingly. However, when comparing the rates across Indian states for this variable and their corresponding rates of human trafficking, there was a very mixed relationship between the variables. It was states and union territories that had lower levels of sex trafficking that had lower levels of women who owned and operated their own bank or savings account. This could be explained by two different explanations. First, it could be that my initial thought process was incorrect and that joining bank accounts with a spouse/partner could be helpful in alleviating a woman's impoverished conditions. Thus, because she has her spouse's salary to rely on a woman does not necessarily have to turn to sex trafficking for work, if she even must work at all. Or second, because the relationship I predicted was upheld for Kerala but not for any other states with more than the average number of human trafficking cases in 2020, it could be the case that there is no relationship at all between these two variables.

Unemployment rates

Originally, I had predicted that higher rates of unemployment would lead to higher levels of sex trafficking in Indian states. I thought that if there were more women who were unemployed, they would be more likely to enter the sex trafficking industry, given how prevalent it is in India and the money that it offers. However, what was observed was a very weak relationship between unemployment and the human trafficking. Only Kerala fit my hypothesis of having a high rate of human trafficking cases and a high unemployment rate. The relationship between both variables can be explained in a few different ways. First, unemployed doesn't necessarily need to equate to poverty; unemployment is far more nuanced than that. For instance, an unemployed woman could also be married, which this data set does not account for. In that case, even if a woman lost her job or is not actively seeking out job opportunities, she can rely on her spouse's salary and not have to subjugate herself into sex trafficking to provide for the family. Second, I wanted to study rural women because there has been literature that living in more rural areas contributes to higher poverty levels in comparison to urban areas (Alkire et. al). However, it could be that urban areas are where sex trafficking occurs the most so including urban women instead of rural women could better explain sex trafficking levels in Indian states. Lastly, it could be that unemployment just simply has no relationship with human trafficking levels of women in India. Women who are unemployed could be content with just performing household duties and taking care of children with no reason to seek out alternative forms of income or women could just be seeking out other employment opportunities within the workforce all together if they are unemployed.

The Criminal Legal System

Through the interviews conducted with Mr. K.V. Ramaraj, Mr. Jeevakumar, and Mrs. Abarnesh, it is evident that there is support for my hypothesis that flaws within the criminal justice system contributes to high levels of sex trafficking across the Indian subcontinent. There was a consensus among all three lawyers that the prosecution system within India does not work in the interest of sex trafficking victims and that there is not an adequate passion demonstrated by prosecutors to deliver justice to the victims. There was some consensus about the police also contributing to sex trafficking rates from Mr. Ramaraj and Mr. Jeevakumar as they discussed a lack of action regarding the registering and investigating cases in a timely manner and treating victims rather harshly when trafficking incidents are exposed. Mrs. Abarnesh did highlight a different perspective in which officers offer counseling and services to victims before finding them other employment opportunities, but she did remark that she knew relations with the police and victims were often strained in other regions of India that she was unfamiliar with. There was also consensus that more needed to be done to support victims through the court process. Though Mrs. Abarnesh discussed support from the Indian government and the Red Cross in helping victims find other employment opportunities after their trial or after they had been rescued, she did mention during the interview that more needed to be done during the trial process to make sure that victims are heard and validated, which is something the other interviewees also agreed upon. The interviews also demonstrated that there were problems with reporting and the culture within the Indian society at large that are not conducive to victims sharing their stories and experiences. Thus, it could be possible that the harsh culture that sex trafficking victims must face not only perpetuates norms and practices within the criminal legal system, but it could also perpetuate cycles of trafficking as victims could feel as though they are not suitable for any other

opportunities. Overarchingly, however, the theme of reform within the criminal legal system to address sex trafficking more directly did arise, confirming my hypothesis.

Conclusion

Sex trafficking in India is an on-going and important crisis that deserves attention. As stated previously, India is a large contributor to the international sex trafficking ring as it is a source, destination, and transit country for sex trafficking victims. Every year hundreds of thousands of young girls and women enter this profession as result of poverty, gender biases, a lack of knowledge around the crime, and other factors. Existing literature often concentrates on sex trafficking in India holistically as a country or within 1-2 specific regions within India. Unlike previous work, this paper takes into consideration variations of sex trafficking across all the Indian states and investigates factors that could explain these variations. I present an original dataset drawing from several different sources, and complement this with several in-depth interviews with people working on sex trafficking in India. My paper provides an important starting point for studying factors that need to be investigated further when considering why sex trafficking varies by state in India.

My findings reveal that flaws in the criminal justice system, namely the police, prosecution, and lack of support for victims, are the primary causes of sex trafficking in India as a whole. They also reveal that having comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS, knowledge that consistent condom use can prevent HIV/AIDS, having 10 or more years of education, and participating in at least 3 or more household decisions as a female have somewhat of a strong relationship with sex trafficking. Though owning and maintaining a bank or savings account and unemployment rates do not have as consistent of a relationship as the other factors, it is

important to not discredit these as plausible explanations, but rather recognize that these factors may play a less meaningful role in explaining sex trafficking at the subnational level in India.

In addition to laying an important framework for future research, my findings suggest several important lessons for the Indian government as they attempt to combat sex trafficking. First, rather than focusing on general approaches from the national government, this paper demonstrates that there are unique characteristics within each state that need to be addressed on different levels. For example, in some states that have a large percentage of women who are educated beyond 10 years, they have a small percentage of women who are comprehensively educated about HIV/AIDS, such as Kerala or Ladakh. This could signal that the programs that are established within the schools in these regions are not strong enough and need more support to be truly meaningful. Second, this paper demonstrates that institutional reform is needed. Because India is regarded as a strong democracy generally, there could be an assumption that the institutions within the country themselves are fine as they are. However, the interviews with lawyers who currently work within the system exemplify that the current system is not working and needs several reforms to not only work in the best interest of sex trafficking victims, but to more directly address the evident corruption within these institutions as well. Especially as India attempts to pass another Anti-Trafficking bill within the Parliament this year, it is important to recognize that just making laws about the issue is not the solution. Rather reforming the systems to ensure that these laws can be carried out thoroughly and consistently is important as well.

Lastly, this paper demonstrates a stronger need for both research and solutions aimed at addressing sex trafficking to consider the females' lived experience more directly. It is evident through this paper and existing research that ancient gender norms and stereotypes are still deeply entrenched within the Indian society, giving rise to gender inequality, social biases, and

constraints on the women that forces her into sex trafficking. Conditions for women need to be prioritized and improved, especially because this is the population at most risk for sex trafficking. For instance, education needs to be more encouraged among young women. Not only will they learn employable skills and can assert their intellect, but they will also be given more resources to become generally aware of sex trafficking and its consequences. Moreover, social biases that discourage women to be educated and earn income need to be changed. This could be through movements and initiatives prompted by the government or non-governmental organizations who spread such messages and reach large audiences.

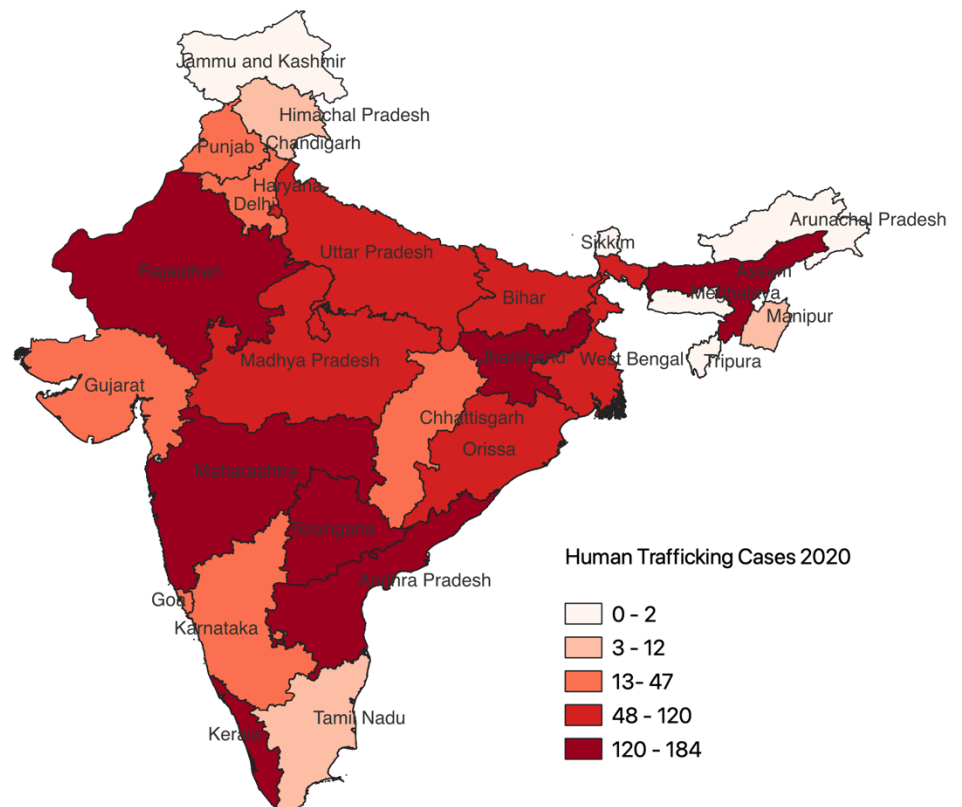
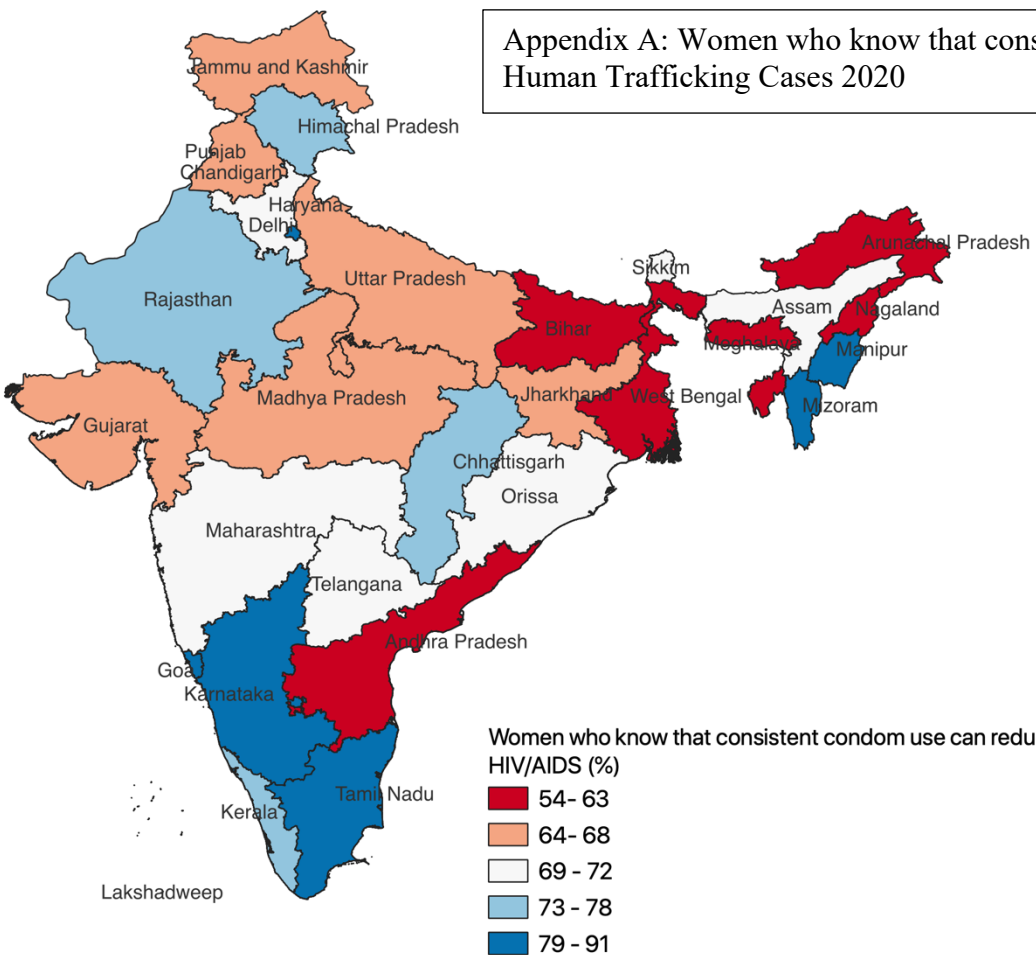
Sex trafficking is clearly a very nuanced issue that necessitates a nuanced approach, based on state and the socioeconomic conditions that exist for women within that state. Future research could consider sex trafficking at the city level to investigate whether sex trafficking is more prevalent in urban or rural areas in India and could also investigate the effectiveness of how the Indian government is attempting to tackle sex trafficking in the status quo.

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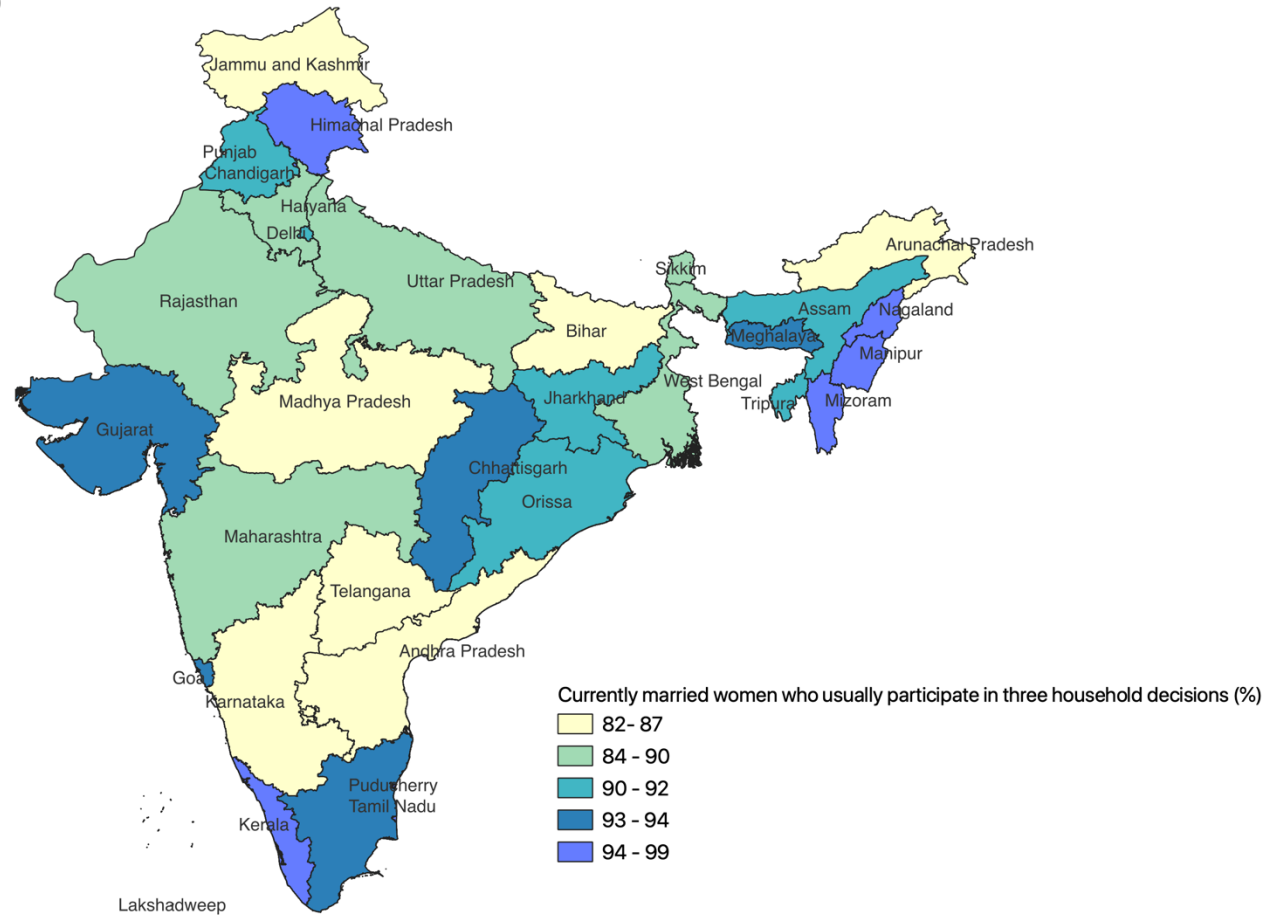
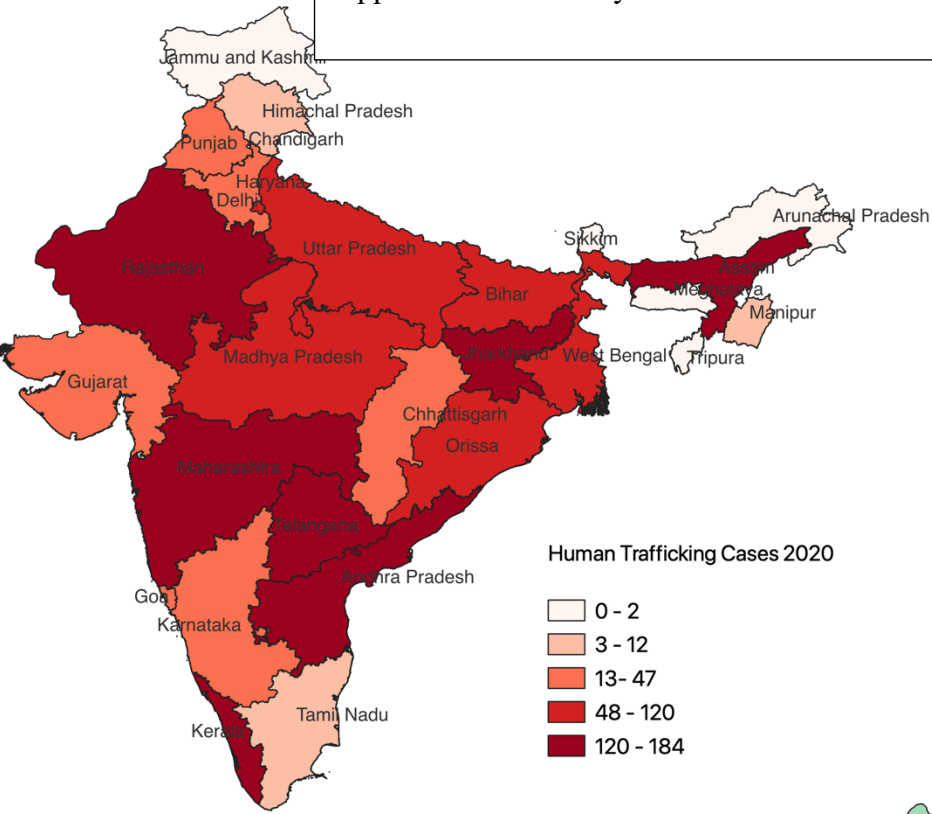
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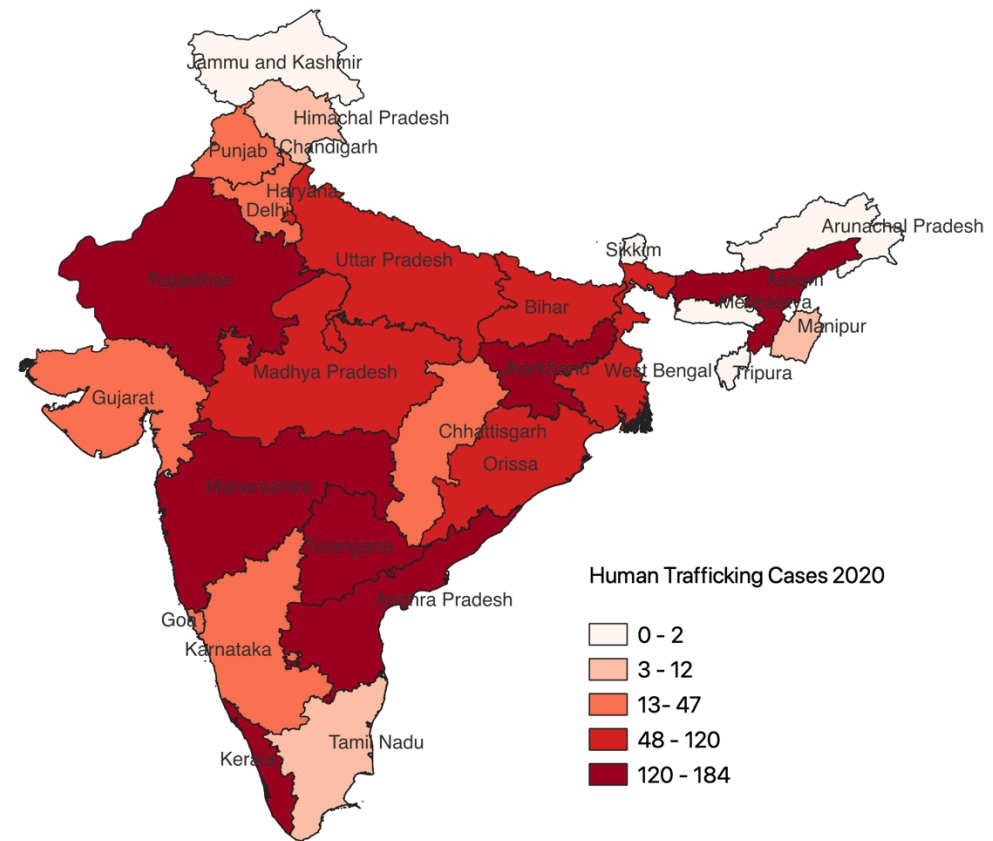
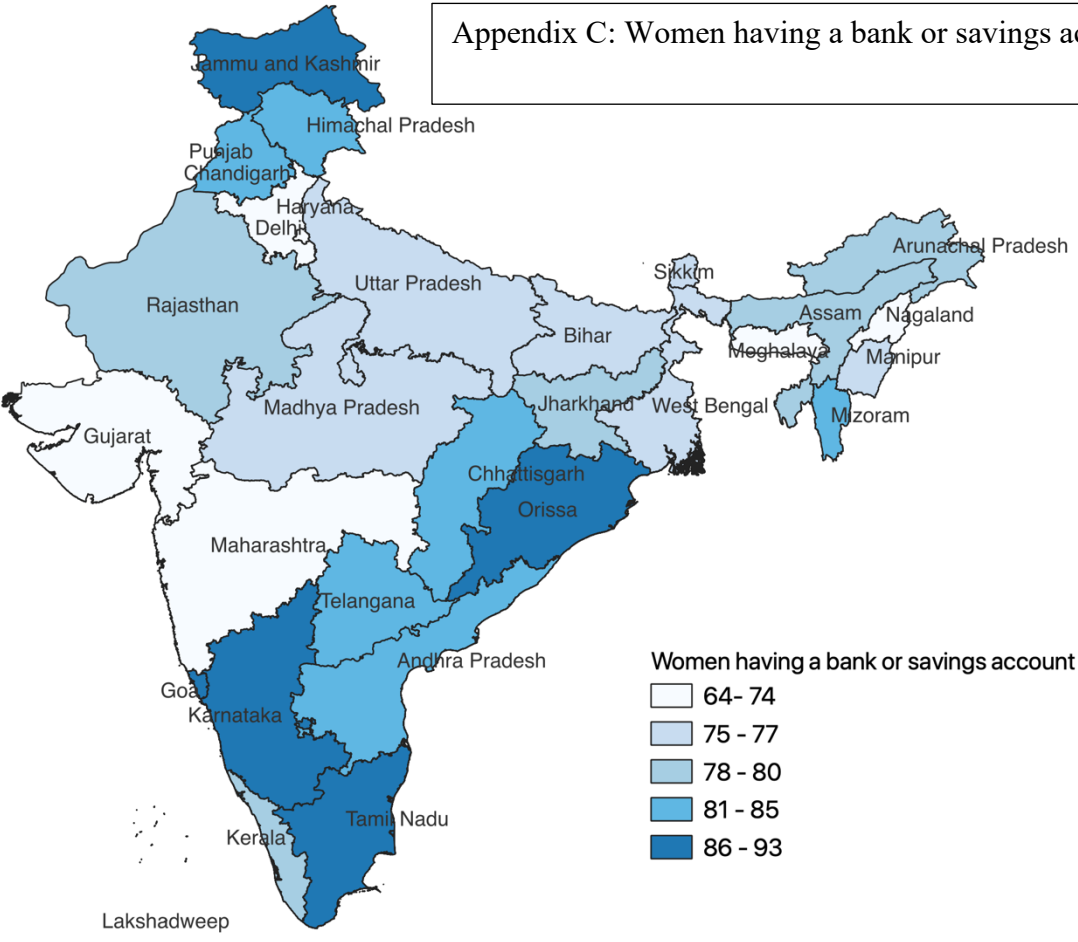
Appendix A: Women who know that consistent condom use can reduce the chance of getting HIV/AIDS & Human Trafficking Cases 2020



Appendix B: Currently married women who usually participate in three household decisions (%) & Human Trafficking Cases 2020



Appendix C: Women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use (%) vs. Human Trafficking Rates 2020



Appendix D: State-wise unemployment rate for Rural Females 2019-2020 vs. Human Trafficking Cases 2020

