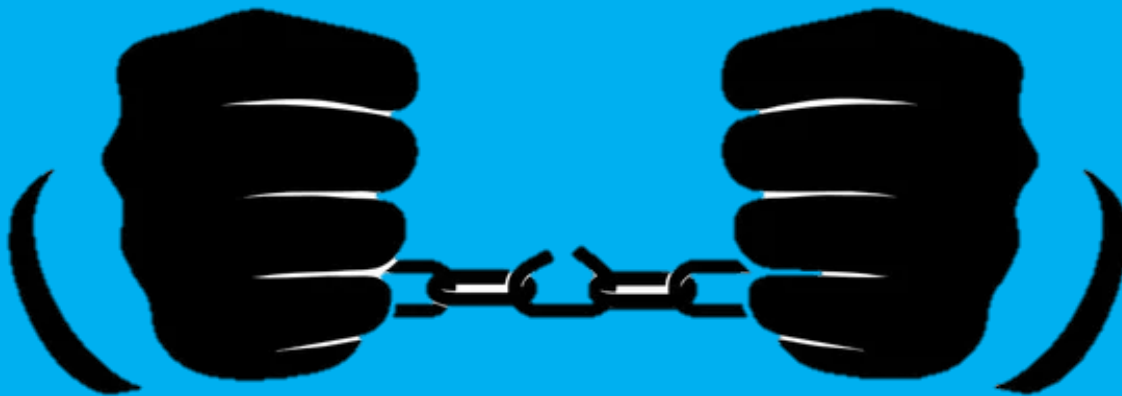


Impact of the Corona Pandemic on Modern Slavery



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Introduction

Today there are approximately 40.3 million people under the name of slaves, and this number is more than at any time in human history and their number today is greater than the number of the population of some countries. There is one in four who are enslaved as a child. There is no universally agreed upon definition of the concept of modern slavery, but for the purposes of analogy, modern slavery is defined by the International Labor Organization as “any state of exploitation which no one can refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception and abuse of power.” Thus, modern slavery is an umbrella term that includes forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices, and some forms of human trafficking. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a common denominator among these crimes is that they are exploitative, in which one person is under the control of another.

Modern slavery has many forms and names, but the most well-known are: human trafficking, forced and bonded labor, commercial sexual acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, involuntary servitude, slavery-like practices, and debt bondage. In general, modern slavery occurs when a person is under the control of another person who exercises violence and force to maintain that control, and the object of this control is exploitation.

Since slavery is officially abolished everywhere, these practices are illegal, and therefore hidden from the public and the authorities. Since modern slavery is a global concept that remains hidden within homes, communities and workplaces, accurate figures are difficult to obtain from primary sources. The best that can be



done is to estimate based on secondary sources, such as UN investigations, newspaper articles, government reports and figures from NGOs.

The report sheds light on modern slavery, its various types, and the extent of its spread, in light of the impact of the Corona pandemic. The report also discusses the conventions on slavery and human trafficking that urge to combat both and limit their spread.

First: International Conventions

Many international conventions deal with the topic of "slavery" due to the importance of the topic and its impact on the international community. The term "modern slavery" has recently spread, which was addressed by some agreements, given that it is a current problem facing the international community, especially in the Asian country, in light of the spread of the Corona pandemic. The lack of effective legal and technical interventions and safeguards created a global landscape that allowed the epidemic of modern slavery to spread.

Target 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals calls for immediate and effective measures to eliminate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and eliminate the worst forms of child labor, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. By 2025, all forms of child labor must be ended.

1. Slavery Convention 1926

The agreement was amended by the protocol concluded at United Nations Headquarters in New York on December 7, 1953 and the amended agreement



entered into force on July 7, 1955, in accordance with Article III of the protocol. The Convention contains articles defining what modern slavery is. Article 1 of the Convention defines modern slavery as follows: *“Slavery is the state of a person over whom any or all of the powers attached to the right of ownership are exercised. The slave trade includes all acts involving capture or possession or the disposal of a person with the intent of turning him into slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of slaves with intent to sell or exchange them; all acts of disposition by sale or exchange of slaves acquired with the intent of selling or exchanging them; and, in general, every act of trade or transfer of slaves”.*

2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Slavery was the first human rights issue of widespread international concern, and yet it still persists, slavery-like practices are still a serious and ongoing problem. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding slavery comes as follows: *“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude, and slavery and the slave trade in all their forms shall be prohibited.”*

3. Palermo Protocol supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, ratified in November 2000. Article 3 of the Protocol defines human trafficking, and the text of the article is as follows: *“It is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of the threat of force or its use or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud,*



deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. All other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

4. Modern Slavery Act, Britain 2015

Considered the first of its kind in Europe, the Contemporary Slavery Law received Royal Assent on March 26, 2015. This law consolidates slavery and human trafficking crimes, and imposes heavier penalties and punishment rules. It ensures major offenses are subject to the strongest asset recovery regime under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, issues specific orders for slavery and trafficking compensation, and provides for the confiscation of vehicles, ships and aircraft used for the purposes of human trafficking.

The law ensures that the National Crime Agency, the police and other law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to pursue, disrupt, and prosecute those who engage in human trafficking, slavery and forced or compulsory labor. It also introduces measures to enhance the protection of victims of slavery and human trafficking. A new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner was appointed whose role is to promote good practice in preventing, detecting, investigating and prosecuting crimes of slavery and human trafficking, as well as identifying the victims of such crimes. This role is pertinent to all current crime of slavery and trafficking in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.



5. International Labor Convention

Article 3 of the Convention prohibits human trafficking and all forms of slavery and forced labor, especially child labor. The article reads: *“All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; the use, prostitution or offering of a child for the purposes of prostitution or producing or performing pornographic performances The use, procuring or offering of a child for illegal activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in relevant international treaties Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to be harmful the health, safety or morals of children (hazardous child labor).”*

6. International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, 2 December, marks the date of the adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (Resolution 317 of December 2, 1949). The focus of this day is on eliminating contemporary forms of slavery such as trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, worst forms of child labor, forced marriage and forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.



Second: What is modern slavery?

Slavery has developed and manifested itself in various ways throughout history. In our time, some of the old traditional forms of slavery still exist as they were in the past and some of them have been transformed into new forms. Reports written by United Nations bodies and NGOs document the persistence of ancient forms of slavery embodied in traditional beliefs and customs. These forms of slavery resulted from long-standing discrimination against the most vulnerable groups in societies such as those perceived to be of lower social class, tribal minorities and indigenous peoples.

For many of the same reasons that gave rise to the ancient differences, modern slavery continues to be an economically beneficial practice despite ethical concerns. The problem has been exacerbated in recent years by the possibility of disposing of slaves and the fact that the cost of slaves has been greatly reduced.

Modern slavery is portrayed as a result of poverty in some developing countries, which has increased due to the Corona pandemic. According to the Global Slavery Index Asian countries come out on top with Haiti, India, Nepal, Mauritania and Pakistan having the highest prevalence of slavery in the modern era. In terms of absolute numbers, the largest numbers of people being enslaved are in China, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. In India, the victims of modern slavery are believed to be around 14 million.

Modern slavery often occurs in hard-to-reach areas of the state, and modern slavery has many types such as forced labor, debt bondage (debt servitude), child labor and forced marriage. Debt bondage is widespread in developing Asian countries such as India and Pakistan.



1. Debt Bondage

Debt servitude or debt bondage is one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery at the present time, and this type of slavery has spread as a result of low levels of education in some developing countries, especially in the continent of Asia due to the high rates of poverty. It occurs when people surrender themselves to slavery as security in exchange for a loan or when they inherit a debt from a relative. It can be made to look like an employment agreement, but it is an agreement in which a worker begins a debt to pay it off, usually in dire circumstances, only to find that repaying the loan is impossible. Then their enslavement becomes permanent.

The process begins with a debt, whether earned or inherited, that cannot be repaid immediately. Then, while the worker works to pay off the debt, the employer continues to add additional expenses. For example, a worker might start out with an initial debt of \$200 while working and unable to leave. The business owner collects \$25 a day in debt to cover those expenses. Thus, the employee only grows his debt while continuing to work for his debt, and repayment is impossible.

Often this debt is passed down from generation to generation, making it eerily similar to the baggage slavery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is seen around the world when employers force children of employees to work in the same position as their parents in order to help pay off their parents' debts or when parents or family members pass away and employers ask for another body to fill the lost role, all on the pretext of outstanding debts. Debt labor is also used across a variety of industries to produce products for consumption around the



world. The most vulnerable group to debt labor are immigrant workers who contract work in other countries in order to improve their economic conditions but end up worse off.

Debt Bondage in India

Debt bondage in India was legally abolished in 1976 but is still prevalent due to poor enforcement of laws by the government. Debt bondage is a phenomenon rooted in the history of India going back to the period when India was under colonialism.

According to the Global Slavery Index 2016, India ranks fourth in terms of the number of slaves, with 19 million Indians enslaved in some form, including debt bondage, and many Indians are forced to resort to debt bondage to reduce the risks of the financial burden of daily life. In India, social inequality and corruption have collectively allowed this system to continue. And agricultural workers and brick kilns, including children, who are exposed to labor to repay parents' debts are the groups most vulnerable to this type of work.

The Indian government is keen to free many debt workers and give them financial compensation but although the government is keen to grant this compensation to the freed workers, most workers face negative consequences such as more inequality and health effects, which often leads to the suicide of these workers.

Another factor affecting the spread of debt bondage in India is the spread of ignorance in India and the ignorance of many Indians about their rights, which leads to their exploitation in various industries for less money. According to a 2010



survey, 76 out of every 100 bonded laborers in India were unable to read or write. Illiteracy in India leads to more ignorance of law and human rights.

Also due to the prevalence of debt bondage in India Child labor is widespread As debt is often passed down from generation to generation, many children find themselves at a very early age in the debt bondage system. In addition to illiteracy, unemployment and poverty are often cited as reasons for children to enter into debt bondage.

2. Child Labor

All over the world, children are exploited through their labor. Child labor can be defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, exceeds the number of hours allotted to work and interferes with the child's education and interest, and also such dangerous mental and physical work interferes with education and long-term development, Its worst forms include slavery, trafficking, sexual exploitation and hazardous work that puts children at risk of death, injury or disease.

Child labor is more widespread in developing countries, where millions of children, some of them as young as seven years old, still work in quarries, mines, factories, fields and service institutions. Children make up about 10% of the labor force in Middle Eastern countries and about 2% to 10% of the workforce in most of Latin America and some parts of Asia. The worst forms of child labor include enslaving children, being separated from their families, exposing them to serious risks and diseases or leaving them to fend for themselves on the streets of big cities, often at a very young age. Many children are also forced to work in what is called debt bondage, due to the inability of the parents to pay those debts.



3. The difference between human trafficking and forms of modern slavery

The concepts of human trafficking and modern slavery overlap, as some view human trafficking as a form of modern slavery and some define it as the "modern slave trade". The United Nations defines "trafficking in human beings" as *"the recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."*

Modern slavery or slavery, according to the report, *"includes a number of immoral practices such as servitude or forced labor (including child labor), debt bondage, slavery-like practices, servitude, fraudulent recruitment, forced marriage, prostitution, organ trafficking, and trafficking Modern slavery differs from historical forms of slavery, particularly what is referred to as "baggage servitude", where in many jurisdictions it was legal for one person to own another human being, to buy, sell, or inherit that human being, to exploit or deprive him of life. without any repercussions for those who offended him "*.

Thus, we see that the concept of modern slavery is a broader and more comprehensive concept of human trafficking, as the concept of slavery contains many illegal activities that endanger human lives, such as human trafficking and smuggling, debt bondage, child labor, forced labor, and forced marriage.



Third: The impact of the Corona pandemic on the concept of modern slavery

The Corona pandemic has led to an increase in the threat to immigrant workers and workers in the informal economy, as the pandemic has led to an increase in social and economic inequality between the different social classes. The pandemic also increased the danger to the groups most vulnerable to modern slavery due to the loss of their work as a result of the various factories resorting to reducing employment or dispensing with many of them, following the methods of combating the Corona virus.

Workers in various trades or in factories are among the groups most affected by the epidemic, especially migrant workers and daily wage workers. Pre-coronavirus migrant workers were already at increased risk of modern slavery, due to their dependence on daily wages, the illegal status of some in the destination country, and exclusion from government economic and social support services. Rapid changes in labor supply and demand may also have tempted some companies to use it as an excuse to exploit vulnerable workers or force them to work during the pandemic, putting them at risk of contracting the virus.

Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020, migrant workers have not been vulnerable to contracting the virus in their often-hazardous working and living conditions, but have been exposed to an increased risk of needing money in the destination country after job loss, detention due to illegal immigration status and indebtedness due to loans obtained before and during the pandemic; and increased exposure to debt bondage and slavery.



For children and young people, social isolation increased their vulnerability to grooming and abuse. In those institutions, where many children are now confined to school buildings, they are increasingly being abused and punished because they have no income. The challenges of self-isolation, social distancing, and satisfactory hygiene are particularly difficult for slaves and the many vulnerable communities who live in slums, on the streets, or in crowded refugee and displaced camps.

In Mauritania, the sons of the Haratines are routinely born into slavery ("descent bondage") and possessed by their "masters". In light of the Corona crisis, many wealthy families began expelling domestic workers in the Haratin, or forcing them to stay in the workplace to avoid travel. This creates an impossible situation for people exposed to slavery, as it leaves them with two choices, both difficult, either to remain unemployed and unable to find a living, or to stay with and continue with their employer despite the harsh and dangerous working conditions.

Mass unemployment, high debt, and a lack of a government safety net created opportunities for human traffickers and severe economic turmoil created increased risks to the poorest through food shortages and income loss. The shutdowns in an effort to stem the spread of the virus led to mass layoffs as many global brands canceled orders and factories were told to close. The garment industry has been hit hard. More than a million workers in Bangladesh were laid off or temporarily suspended by late March 2020, and workers are facing similar crises in Southeast Asia including Cambodia, India, Myanmar and Vietnam.

Migrant workers returning home due to coronavirus restrictions are at risk of infection when traveling on crowded public transportation, stranded at borders or other jams where physical distancing is nearly impossible. The Haliya people in



western Nepal are lower-caste and often work as enslaved agricultural laborers, although the practice has been outlawed since 2007, with the start of the closures. An estimated 150,000 migrants from neighboring India have returned to western Nepal, and a rapid assessment of over 6,700 found families that more than half of them face food shortages. Thus, growing desperation creates hope for human traffickers who offer "underground" work in construction or agriculture.

Tests and vaccines for the virus are currently insufficiently available, confirming that many individuals are infected with the Coronavirus, stigmatizing them and in some cases forcibly isolating them from the rest of their community at home. With schools closed, children are also at risk of being sent to work, and the dire situation is pushing people back into the hands of local landlords and back into outlawed forced labor. Closing markets in Mali risks leaving people isolated and forcing them back into slavery or migration with their children, putting entire families at risk of exploitation or trafficking. Large-scale coronavirus-related closures around the world have also reduced the activity of anti-slavery organizations.

Early reports also indicated that the pandemic could make it more difficult for people trapped in modern slavery, while some survivors already in state care had difficulties receiving essential support to rebuild their lives.

In addition, the pandemic has affected the broader structures and safety nets of the most disadvantaged people, including women, children or migrant workers.

However, clear global trends have yet to be identified, as companies struggle with hard tradeoffs to secure their financial viability and protect their employees. Nor is



the full impact of domestic lockdowns and countries prioritizing their responses to the coronavirus alongside tackling modern slavery.

Conclusion

Despite the attempt of many countries to limit the spread of these illegal practices and enact laws for this, these laws are not sufficient to eliminate modern forms of slavery, as permanent livelihoods must be provided for the most needy groups in different societies through which they can provide a monthly income that enables them to live with dignity and not resort to illegal practices that pose a threat to their lives. The Corona pandemic has affected all different aspects of daily life, starting with the transformation of work and study to the method of working remotely through devices, to the imposition of wearing a medical mask wherever we go to limit the spread of the virus. Of course, the global crisis of Corona had a great impact on the increase in the spread of various practices of modern slavery and the resorting of many to it, especially against immigrant workers, as workers in the informal economy were forced to resort to these methods after closing many factories and either reducing employment or expelling them entirely.