

## **AIPS Summer Research Grant 2014 Progress Report**

With the support of AIPS Summer Research Grant 2014, I was able to travel to Pakistan during November-December 2014 to collect some data for my research pertaining to trafficking in women in Pakistan. Drawing upon gender and human rights literatures, the research aims at analyzing women's trafficking in Pakistan. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with trafficked women in various government-run shelters in different districts of Punjab Province.

Human trafficking, modern-day slavery, is a shame for humanity and a disgrace to modern human civilization. In the context of Pakistan, the problem is grave and multidimensional in nature as it is a country of origin, transit, and destination. Due to the lack of understanding about the issue of human trafficking in Pakistan, trafficking is conflated with human smuggling, and no official data are available. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report (2014), Pakistan is placed under Tier 2 watch list as the government could not take enough steps to counter trafficking.

In Pakistan, women have been particularly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking largely due to persistent gender-based inequalities in every sphere of life, and have fewer options or means available to counter the deceptions of traffickers. Many times the exploitation of women is carried out in the name of "traditional practices". Drawing upon the experiences of trafficked women, I argue that trafficking occurs within a multidimensional continuum of violence—ranging from wars, intrastate conflict, to home based gendered violence—which intersects with entrenched structural inequalities and make women of particular social positions vulnerable to exploitation, often repeatedly, by traffickers. Trafficking cannot be studied as a onetime phenomenon; it might occur repeatedly within a woman's life course, though not for the same purpose and not in the same way. A woman could be trafficked for sexual exploitation and then end up as bonded labor. Further, long prevailing political and economic instability and conflicts in Pakistan and in the region of South Asia enhance the vulnerability of disadvantaged women to trafficking.

Trafficking in women is both a cause and consequence of human rights violations. Trafficking involves violation of social-political-economic-cultural rights. All women who are subject to trafficking are denied fundamental right to freedom. Due to narrow scope of trafficking related legislation in Pakistan and the lack of capacity of concerned agencies, the majority of trafficked women are not officially identified/categorized as trafficked women and their rights as trafficked persons are violated. Moreover, as trafficking legislation in Pakistan defines trafficking in terms of crossing of international border, women who are trafficked internally are not considered victims of trafficking.