

## Chapter 4

# Sex Trafficking and Forced Sex Work Amongst Girls and Women in Namibia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The main objective of this chapter is to examine sex trafficking amongst girls and women in Namibia. In 2019 the United States Department of State deemed Namibia a Tier 2 country in terms of its effort to fight trafficking. Thus, while Namibia is not considered a nation where the massive exploitation of girls and women for international sex trafficking occurs, there is research indicating that there is significant intranational sex trafficking. Impoverished rural women and girls, often from ethnic minorities, are coerced or forced to move to border towns, urban areas, and tourist destinations to engage in sex work. This form of trafficking is frequently under-reported, if reported at all. The material presented in this chapter is based on research from recent reports regarding the situation. This information will be augmented with data and excerpts from transcribed interviews conducted in 2013 with 73 self-identified sex workers and ex-sex workers, many of whom were forced to relocate for the purpose of engaging in sex work.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*Two men invited us [a group of girls] into a van to drink and drove us [from Windhoek] to Swakopmund. It is kind of like a bar/club. During the day you were locked up and then at night men would come and pick you up. There were 20 girls working there – small girls – underage girls. Didn't know who was running the place – different guys every night. At night we dressed up and made up and they would come and choose. Some would take you to a hotel and some would take you to a house. They would take you back so you could not escape. They did not put the money in your hand but paid the men. They were white guys, Namibians speaking Afrikaans and English and Angolans. (24-year-old sex worker who was trafficked when she was 16 years old)*

The United Nations defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by improper means (such as force, abduction, fraud, or coercion) for an improper purpose including forced labor or sexual exploitation” (NIJ, 2019). The U.S. government defines sex trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000). The major difference in these two definitions is that the US includes all sex work as trafficking whereas the UN does not. However, the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protections Act does make a distinction between sex trafficking and “severe” trafficking. Policy has addressed the latter more than the former and defines “severe” sex trafficking as when “a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017).

It is well known that the U.S. has made the prevention of human trafficking a top priority (Davy, 2016; Lerum & Brents, 2016; Siskin 2013). The U.S. government annually generates the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report as a tool to display foreign governments' efforts to address human trafficking in their respective nations. Nations designated as Tier 3 are those that did not try to meet the minimum standards set forth by the TIP, resulting in the possibility of facing trade and humanitarian related sanctions enforced by the U.S. and the international financial community (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Namibia has been rated a Tier 2 country by the U.S. government since 2009. In 2019, Namibia was deemed a Tier 2 Watch List country. The U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report described Namibia as one of the “Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the VTVPA's [Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act] minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards” (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Given this context of US-led pressure on governments like Namibia's

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