

Understanding Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) that put Children at Risk of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation in West Bengal, India

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Background

Evidence on the effectiveness of anti-trafficking awareness campaigns to prevent exploitation of children is limited. Stronger evaluations are needed and emerging evidence is clear that behavioral change communication (BCC) campaigns must have local resonance and be rigorously piloted.¹ This briefing note presents key findings from a Seefar and My Choices Foundation (MCF)-led Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) assessment of community-level vulnerabilities to Child Trafficking (CT) and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). Combining Seefar's [Strategic Communications](#) services with MCF's [Surokhito Gram Karyakrom](#) (Safe Village Program),² Seefar is testing a BCC campaign for community-level stakeholders to recognize the risks and approaches of traffickers in Bankura, Bardhaman, and Birbhum, three vulnerable districts in West Bengal, India.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCBR) of India identifies West Bengal as one of the states with the highest number of missing women and children; from 2016-2018 over 8000 children were reported missing annually.² While trafficking of children is driven by structural conditions of poverty, unemployment, and distress migration, a lack of knowledge and internalization of risks to trafficking further endangers

vulnerable communities. Traffickers, including labor recruiters and marriage brokers, often target children in the most vulnerable districts and villages of West Bengal. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, children are increasingly being lured through social media.³⁴

The study assesses KAP among three groups of community-level stakeholders:

- 12-18-year-old boys and girls
- their parents
- community leaders (panchayat leaders, health workers, police officers, religious leaders, and self-help group (SHG) leaders)

By identifying gaps in knowledge and risk perceptions among each of these groups, this study enables targeted prevention efforts to reduce vulnerability to trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in West Bengal. In addition to informing BCC strategies with contextual evidence, this assessment provides a robust baseline for outcomes evaluation. No such household-level representative dataset focused on risks of child trafficking and exploitation is available for West Bengal.

Methods

Seefar, with support from Sattva, coordinated a representative baseline survey of households and community leaders in all three districts from January to February 2021. The districts were selected using

a vulnerability mapping tool (Seefar-Sattva Village Vulnerability Index- SSVI) that incorporates factors such as literacy and employment levels, village amenities, and school drop-out rates.



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Sampling

For selecting child-parent respondent pairs, multi-stage sampling first identified villages and then households for participation. Forty villages were randomly selected from a pool of 71 villages categorized as high-risk according to the SSVI. With a target sample size of 300 households per district, village-level samples were estimated using Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling. Within each village, systematic sampling (transect walk) was employed

starting from the center of the village and moving in four directions. For the selection of community leaders, a census list of community leaders was generated for each village in consultation with the panchayat leader. Six community leaders from each list were randomly sampled for interview. Structured quantitative questionnaires were developed for each stakeholder group, drawing from literature review and extensive [market research](#).

Safeguarding

Safeguarding protocols, methods, tools, and consent procedures were approved by the [Centre for Media Studies](#). The safeguarding protocol covered background checks on enumerators, enumerator training on child protection and trauma-informed data collection practices, and procedures for escalating

information on risks or harm to children. A complaint mechanism was provided to all study participants and protective protocols were established to consider risks to enumerators from exposure to sensitive topics. Finally, Seefar generated a protocol and daily checklists for monitoring the safety of enumerators and participants for the COVID-19 pandemic.

KAP Domains of Risk and Scoring

KAP scores for each respondent were generated from ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ responses to questions on various domains of risk; the cumulative number of desirable answers on questions generated raw scores that were categorized into high, moderate, and low levels of KAP.⁵

Knowledge: Respondents were given a series of questions regarding their awareness of risks across five domains:

- non-enrollment in school
- child labor
- child marriage
- violence/abuse at home
- unsupervised use of online platforms

An additional module asked children to share the extent to which they felt the topics were relevant to their their own lives in order to assess internalization of risks.

Attitudes and Practices: Respondents were given scenarios or asked to report on current practices related to accepting offers of work and marriage (for girls in the family), use of online platforms, and domestic violence or substance misuse.

Respondent is at low risk of CT/CSEC	High levels of knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP)	> 80% of desirable responses
Respondent is at moderate risk of CT/CSEC	Moderate levels of knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP)	60-79% of desirable responses
Respondent is at high risk of CT/CSEC	Low levels of knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP)	< 60% of desirable responses

KAP scores range from 0 to any positive value (0 when all responses are non-desirable indicating poor knowledge and practices; higher scores indicate respondent demonstrates desired knowledge and practices)

Assessing Households Most at-Risk of Child Trafficking

In order to assess households most at-risk, the parent survey included questions on exposure to high-risk situations over the last six months with respect to their children. Households were coded to be at-risk using a combination of child-parent KAP responses, household demographics,

and recent exposure of children to harmful situations. Further, using multivariate regression models, Seefar explored the individual, household, community-level factors that influence a child’s vulnerability to trafficking (as measured by a child’s KAP score).

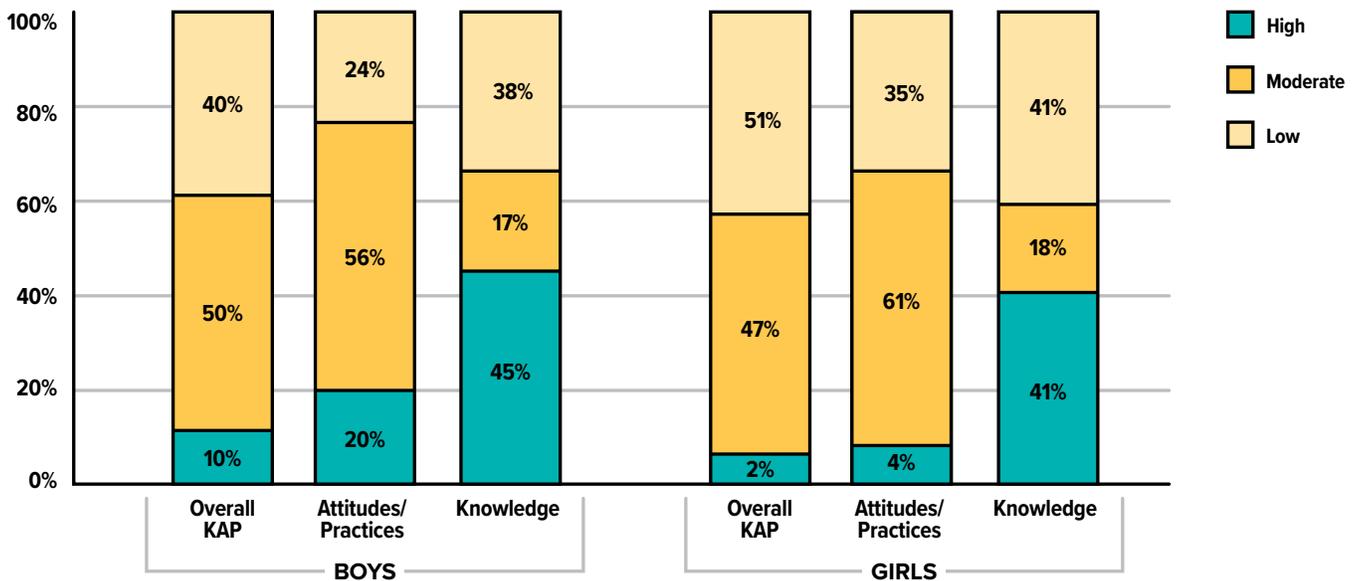
Key Findings

Interviews were completed with 909 children (53% female), 909 parents/caregivers (65% mothers), and 234 community leaders (58% female).

CHILDREN'S AGE GROUPS AND EDUCATION LEVELS

52% 12-14 years old
48% 15-17 years old

97% of children in the 15-17-years old age group are still enrolled in secondary school, of which **91%** are attending regularly.



Over 90 percent of children reported overall KAP scores that indicate they face moderate to high levels of risk to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Children's knowledge levels were significantly higher than their reported attitudes and practices, suggesting that knowledge alone is not sufficient for modifying children's risk. Boys reported relatively higher levels of desirable attitudes and practices than girls, and younger girls (age 12-14) demonstrated the poorest KAP scores (and thus are most at risk).

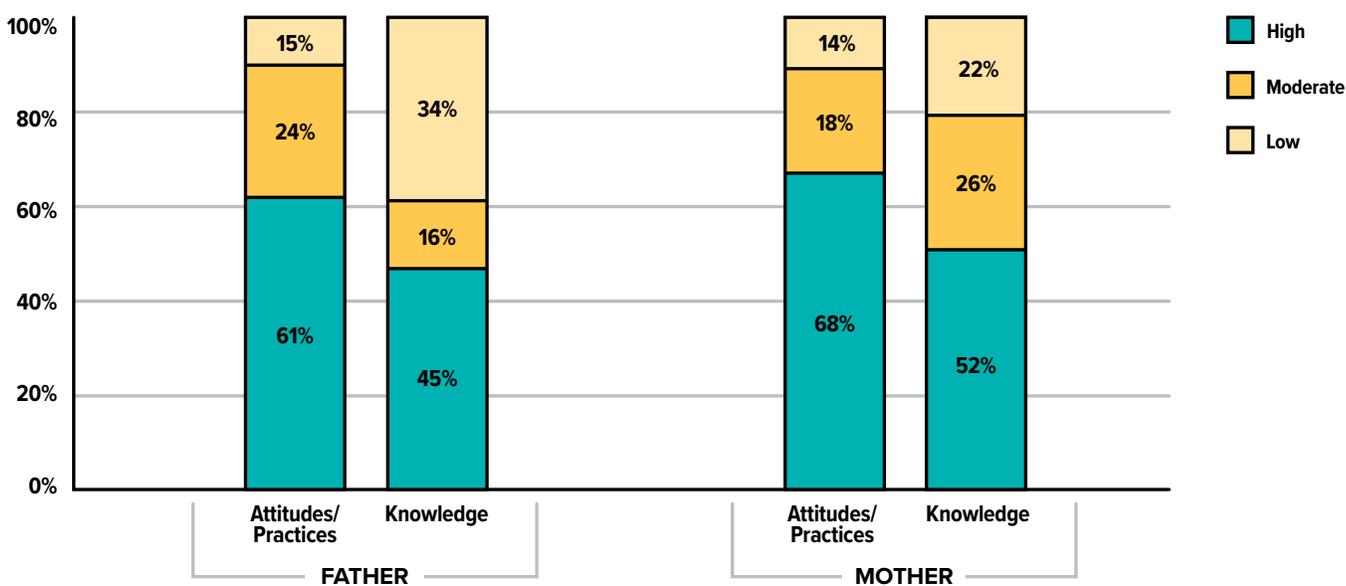


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Children had low awareness of how domestic violence and abuse within their homes can be associated with risks to trafficking. While over 50 percent of children knew the risks of unsafe online practices, the results also showed that they were much less likely to practice safe behaviors.

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HOUSEHOLD SOCIAL CATEGORY	PARENTS' EDUCATION	PARENTS' EMPLOYMENT
17% General 13% Other Backward Classes (OBC) 70% Scheduled Castes (SC)/ Scheduled Tribes (ST). ⁶	23% Never enrolled 65% Primary education, 13% Secondary and above	3% are salaried/employed 43% have seasonal employment/ informal employment 48% earn income through household activities 6% no source of income



As compared with their children, parents reported higher levels of positive attitudes and practices associated with risks of child trafficking and child commercial sexual exploitation. Similar to their children, parents also had less knowledge on how violence or abuse at home can put households at risk.

95% of community leaders have high levels of knowledge of the risks children in their communities face, but only 28% reported high levels of desirable attitudes and practices. This difference in KAP is broadly similar for male and female community leaders. Among community leaders, younger female leaders reported the strongest KAP scores.



As compared with fathers, mothers are more likely to **TRANSLATE KNOWLEDGE** into desirable practices.



FEMALE COMMUNITY LEADERS may be more willing to invest time and energy discussing the risks of trafficking and drive change within their communities. Hence they can serve as crucial entry points for CT/CSEC prevention campaigning.

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SEVENTY-ONE PERCENT of households were categorized as being at high risk of trafficking.

Households most at risk are characterized by relatively:

- younger children,
- middle-aged parents,
- parents with lower levels of education,
- parents with seasonal/informal employment (e.g. agricultural or construction labour, government employment programs)
- a higher proportion of socially marginalized community members (by caste), and
- larger household size.

The multivariate analysis confirmed that gender differences, parental education levels, and working status are the most influential factors to risk of exploitation and trafficking. Key results:

- Younger girls who are working (part-time) to support economically fragile households are most at risk of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.
- Stable employment within the household is not sufficiently protective of children's vulnerability where the household is socially marginalized (by caste) or has a large household size.
- Children's vulnerability to trafficking is reduced after inclusion of parental factors (education, occupation status), suggesting that strengthening parents' KAP towards risks of trafficking and exploitation is an effective strategy for protection of at-risk children.

Developing evidence-based approaches for prevention programs

A systematic review of awareness campaigns found they need to be targeted to specific sub-populations, have clear messaging, and be adapted to local contexts.⁷ Modern slavery researchers and practitioners have emphasized the need for prevention programs to employ better evaluation methods to ensure that

activities are both grounded in contextual evidence and are able to be effectively monitored.⁸ The study will support longer term evaluation needs of the Seefar prevention campaign and contribute to wider understanding of what really works to reduce vulnerabilities for children in this high risk region.



SEEFAR

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6. OBC (Other Backward Classes), SC (Scheduled Castes), ST (Scheduled Tribes) are classified as marginalised communities. Further details can be found at [Introduction: Census of India Primary Census Abstract, Definition of SC and ST in India.](#)
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