Assessment of the Current State of Child Trafficking into the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Napak and Kampala Districts, Uganda

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Abstract

Child trafficking into the worst forms of child labour is a critical issue in Uganda, particularly in Napak and Kampala districts. This study aimed to assess the current state of child trafficking in these areas by examining its nature and dynamics, identifying key contributing factors, and evaluating community awareness and acceptance in Napak district. The objectives focused on understanding the socio-economic drivers, cultural perceptions, and systemic vulnerabilities that perpetuate trafficking, with the ultimate goal of informing targeted interventions. A cross section research design was employed; combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches was used. Data were gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and field observations. A sample of 500 participants was selected using stratified random, purposive, and convenience sampling techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data were processed through NVivo. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed throughout the research process. The study revealed a child trafficking rate of 14% in Napak district, indicating that 14% of children experienced trafficking within a four-month period. Forms of exploitation included adoption trafficking, forced labour, sexual exploitation, and organ trafficking. Family members facilitated 64.4% of trafficking cases, with poverty and famine cited as primary drivers. Community awareness was mixed: 57.8% of parents/guardians reported awareness of child trafficking, while 42.2% had never heard of it. Alarmingly, 71.8% of parents/guardians were unwilling to stop trafficking, often viewing it as economic survival. School enrollment data showed only 37.6% of children attended school regularly, with 62.4% either out of school or attending irregu-

larly, heightening vulnerability to trafficking. Child trafficking in Napak and Kampala districts is a complex issue rooted in socio-economic challenges, cultural norms, and systemic vulnerabilities. Poverty, low education rates, and community acceptance of trafficking as a survival strategy exacerbate the problem. The study recommends multifaceted interventions, including poverty alleviation programs, comprehensive awareness campaigns, and community-based initiatives to shift perceptions. Targeted educational interventions, such as incentive programs for school attendance and removing barriers to education, are critical to reducing vulnerability. Addressing both immediate manifestations and underlying causes is urgently needed to combat child trafficking effectively in Uganda.

Keywords

1. Introduction

There is substantial evidence pointing to the existence of child trafficking in Uganda. While cross-border trafficking is a growing concern, the domestic trafficking of children emerges as a more significant problem as noted in the Trafficking in Persons Report by United States Department of State (2023). Child trafficking encompasses various exploitative practices, including commercial sexual exploitation and involvement in other forms of hazardous labour. The migration of children from rural to urban areas has become alarmingly common, often fueled by the misconception of abundant employment opportunities in urban centers. Unfortunately, these children frequently find themselves in exploitative situations such as street work, hawking, commercial sexual exploitation, domestic labour, and other undesirable environments. The prevalence of child trafficking in Uganda is a critical concern, particularly with the alarming growth of domestic trafficking. This study, rooted in legal and human rights perspectives, aimed to investigate and understand the intricate issue of child trafficking, focusing on Napak (as a source district) and Kampala (as a destination for trafficked children). The international legal frameworks, including, among others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), condemn human trafficking (Article 4). The United Nations Palermo Protocol (2000) supplements this by explicitly defining human trafficking and addressing child trafficking, even in the absence of certain means (OHCHR, 2018).

Uganda's legal landscape, as underpinned by the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (PTIP Act) 2009, aligns with the Palermo Protocol. This law criminalizes human trafficking, providing a comprehensive framework to combat child trafficking for various forms of exploitation. Under Section 4 (A and B), the law is explicit that where the victim of trafficking is a child, the crime committed by

the offender is not simply trafficking but aggravated trafficking. Section 5 of this law expounds further on what constitutes the offense of child trafficking. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 182 (ratified by Uganda) necessitates urgent measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking. As a member state, Uganda is obligated to adhere to these international labour standards (International Labour Organization, 1999).

The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (PTIP Act) 2009 in tandem with the United Nations Palermo Protocol (2000) defines human trafficking and exploitation, highlighting the various means and purposes associated with these heinous acts. Article 4 of the PTIP Act defines a "victim of trafficking" to include a person who is being or has been trafficked, aligning with the broader international understanding of trafficking victims (PTIP Act, 2009). Article 5 of the PTIP Act delineates the offense of human trafficking, specifying actions that constitute trafficking, such as recruitment, transportation, transfers, harboring, or receipt of persons through force or coercion for the purpose of exploitation. Additionally, this article expands the scope to include those who facilitate trafficking acts through force or coercion for various exploitative purposes, including prostitution, pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, involuntary servitude, death, or forced or arranged marriage (PTIP Act, 2009).

Child rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its two Optional Protocols on 1) The Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography; and 2) The Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, assertively prohibit child trafficking. These instruments stress the need for protection and prevention, emphasizing the rights of children to be safeguarded against exploitation (Arkadas-Thibert, 2022). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) reinforces these commitments, underscoring the gravity of child trafficking as a violation of children's rights (Arkadas-Thibert, 2022). The Constitution of Uganda, notably Article 34(4) and 34(5), The Children Act (amended) 2016 (Section 8), and The Employment Act (Section 32), all prohibit the involvement of children in the worst forms of child labour. This is regardless of whether children are aged at least 16 (the national minimum age for admission into employment). Despite these legal frameworks, Uganda grapples with cases of internal and cross-border child trafficking, exploitation in various sectors, and incidents involving unaccompanied and separated child refugees. Uganda has garnered international attention due to its ranking as a Tier 2 Watch List country in the 2020 US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report. The nation is identified as a source, transit, and destination for victims of both domestic and transnational human trafficking, involving both children and adults.

Recent reports highlight a concerning trend in the trafficking of Karimajong girls and boys in livestock markets in specific districts, shedding light on the dire circumstances in Eastern Uganda (Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, 2022; EN-ACT Africa, 2021; Sunrise Uganda, 2021). This distressing situation reveals that child trafficking is common in the impoverished Karamoja region, with staggering

400 - 900 children affected, of which 90% are girls (Sunrise Uganda, 2021). Thousands of Karamoja women and girls are trafficked each year into Nairobi, Kenya, to work as domestic servants, with some ending up as commercial sex workers (Susan & Otieno, 2023). Despite efforts to combat trafficking, child trafficking remains a significant problem in Uganda, as reported by New Vision (2019). This region, plagued by famine, poverty, and cattle rustling, serves as a source of vulnerable children who are bought and potentially end up in the worst forms of child labour (Susan & Otieno, 2023). Such practices not only violate children's rights but also expose them to various vulnerabilities, including sexual abuse, exploitation, early marriages, armed conflict, and other forms of violence.

According to the 2018 Ugandan Trafficking in Persons Report, the number of registered victims of human trafficking increased significantly from 355 in 2017 to 650 in 2018, comprising 495 adults and 155 children. However, the 2020 US TIP Report indicates a reduction in identified victims to 455 in 2019. Regardless of the fluctuations in these figures, the scale of human trafficking in Uganda remains alarming, particularly highlighting the pre-existing vulnerability of children to this heinous crime. Despite the existence of a wealth of legal and policy frameworks, laxity in defending children's rights persists, leading to a direct correlation between child trafficking and a lack of schooling. This background underscores the urgent need for a national emergency plan, especially in Napak district, where a significant population of children is at risk (UBOS, 2021).

The prevailing issue of child trafficking, particularly the worst forms of child labour, remains a critical concern in Napak and Kampala, Uganda. Reports indicate that children, predominantly from rural areas, are trafficked for exploitation, visible on the streets of Kampala engaged in exploitative work rather than attending school (Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, 2022; ENACT Africa, 2021; Sunrise Uganda, 2021). This alarming situation is exacerbated by a lack of prosecution for recruiters, traffickers, transporters, and those involved in exploiting children. Local village leaders, though aware of the issue, do not report it to the police, possibly due to a lack of awareness of their mandate or a loss of faith in the police as an institution. Key institutions responsible for critical functions such as investigations and prosecutions remain silent, contributing to the perpetuation of child trafficking (Economic Policy Research Centre, EPRC, 2021).

Socio-cultural norms, as highlighted by the EPRC (2021), play a significant role in shaping perceptions of child labour, a key component of child trafficking. Karamoja, particularly, faces educational challenges, with a low Net Enrolment Rate, high school dropouts, and a high prevalence of child labour (UBOS, 2021). Napak district emerges as the epicenter of child trafficking, characterized by extreme poverty, lax enforcement of laws, and harmful cultural practices, especially affecting girls (Women and Equal Opportunities Desk and In Need Home, 2020). Recognizing these challenges, documenting the current state of child trafficking, particularly into the worst forms of child labour, was critical to gaining insight into the intricate realities of child trafficking in Napak and Kampala districts. To un-

derstand the complex nature of child trafficking into its worst forms in Napak and Kampala districts, this study aimed to assess the nature and dynamics of child trafficking in Napak and Kampala, identify key contributing factors in Napak, and evaluate community awareness and acceptance of child trafficking in the same district. The findings are expected to inform interventions at national, local, and community levels to address child trafficking comprehensively.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Nature of Child Trafficking

Child trafficking encompasses various forms of exploitation, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the International Labour Organization estimates that around 3.3 million children were subjected to forced labour in 2021, with 1.7 million experiencing commercial sexual exploitation. The complexity of child trafficking lies in the coercive methods used, such as force, fraud, and psychological manipulation, which often leave the victims unaware of their exploitation. Despite extensive research, gaps remain in understanding the regional and cultural nuances of trafficking, particularly in non-Western contexts. This study aimed to fill this gap by focusing on the specific forms of child trafficking prevalent in Uganda, thereby offering a more localized understanding of the issue (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2022).

Existing research, such as that by Cockbain et al. (2018), highlights the prevalence of sex trafficking among minors, accounting for 45% of child trafficking cases in the UK. However, their work primarily focuses on Western countries and lacks a broader geographical scope. Similarly, the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program in the United States indicates an increase in trafficked children but fails to provide detailed insights into their experiences post-resettlement. By examining the unique circumstances in Uganda, this study addresses these limitations, offering a comprehensive analysis of both domestic and transnational trafficking patterns, and the socio-economic factors contributing to child labour and sexual exploitation. This will not only enhance the global understanding of child trafficking but also inform the development of more effective, culturally sensitive interventions (Cockbain et al., 2018).

In addition, several studies highlight different aspects of this problem, though they often leave gaps in understanding the full scope and implications of child trafficking. For instance, the study by Pearce (2011) delineates the differences between smuggling and trafficking, emphasizing that trafficked children are coerced whereas smuggled children are seen as having consented to their movement. However, this distinction is often blurred in practice, as noted by Anderson and O'Connell-Davidson (2004) and further explored by Triandafyllidou and Maroukis (2012), who argue that the line between smuggling and trafficking can be thin and dynamic. The current research falls short in addressing how children might initially consent to smuggling due to misinformation or coercion, only to

find themselves in trafficking situations. This study aimed to bridge this gap by examining the transitional phases between smuggling and trafficking, emphasizing the role of coercion and misinformation in transforming a smuggling scenario into a trafficking situation, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of children's experiences.

2.2. Dynamics of Child Trafficking

The dynamics of child trafficking in Africa, particularly in Uganda, are complex and multifaceted, involving various actors, methods, and contributing factors. Recent literature highlights the intricate nature of trafficking networks and the diverse experiences of victims. For instance, Klabbers et al. (2023) emphasize Uganda's role as a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking, underscoring the transnational dimension of this issue. This perspective aligns with broader regional findings by Meredith et al. (2022), who note the intractability of child trafficking across Africa. However, these studies reveal a gap in understanding the specific socio-economic factors contributing to child trafficking in Uganda, suggesting a need for more targeted research to inform effective interventions.

The methods employed in child trafficking vary, often exploiting vulnerabilities in communities. Johnson (2019) emphasizes the particular vulnerability of women in East Africa, focusing on Kenya as a case study. This gendered perspective, while valuable, highlights a significant gap in the literature regarding the experiences of male victims. United States Department of State (2023) report on Uganda provides a more comprehensive view, detailing various forms of exploitation across industries such as agriculture, fishing, and domestic work. The report also highlights the use of deceptive recruitment tactics, including fraudulent job advertisements in local media, which lure vulnerable individuals from rural areas into exploitative situations.

The dynamics of child trafficking in Uganda are further complicated by historical and regional factors. The legacy of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency has contributed to the prominence of child trafficking in northern Uganda (Government of Uganda, 1997). Additionally, United States Department of State (2023) report identifies the Karamoja region, particularly Napak district, as an area of heightened vulnerability due to limited economic and educational opportunities. These regional disparities underscore the need for tailored interventions that address localized risk factors. Furthermore, the involvement of community leaders in trafficking activities, as noted in the report, complicates efforts to combat the issue, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach that considers local power structures and cultural contexts in developing effective anti-trafficking strategies.

2.3. Factors Contributing to Child Trafficking

Child trafficking in Uganda is driven by a complex interplay of socio-economic,

cultural, and systemic factors. Economic disparities play a significant role, with impoverished families sometimes resorting to trafficking their children for financial gain. Klabbers et al., (2023) identify Uganda as a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking, with 1476 cases reported in 2020. However, Nakandi's (2021) study in Busia district emphasizes the need for understanding specific local economic contexts that drive families towards trafficking, highlighting a gap in our understanding of regional nuances. This discrepancy underscores the importance of tailored interventions that address distinct economic circumstances in different parts of the country. The HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to be a major contributor to child trafficking in Uganda, despite a decline in overall prevalence. With over 1 million people living with HIV/AIDS, the country faces an ongoing crisis of orphanhood (MoGLSD, 2004). The number of orphans has escalated to an estimated 1.8 million (MoGLSD, 2016), with many left without adequate familial support. This situation is exacerbated by the breakdown of traditional extended family systems, leaving older caretakers often living in poverty and unable to provide for these children (UNAIDS, 2004). Consequently, orphaned children become more susceptible to exploitation and trafficking.

Poverty and conflict have further amplified the vulnerability of children to trafficking. With 38% of the population living below the poverty line, many children are forced into exploitative labour to supplement family income or support themselves (UBOS, 2002). The prolonged conflicts, particularly involving the Lord's Resistance Army, have led to the abduction and trafficking of children for various purposes, including use as child soldiers, porters, and wives for commanders (Amnesty International, 2005; Kasirye, 2006). These factors, combined with homelessness and the need to pay school fees, increase children's susceptibility to commercial sexual exploitation and other forms of trafficking. Systemic weaknesses in law enforcement, immigration control, and awareness also contribute to the prevalence of child trafficking in Uganda. Porous borders and inadequate expertise in child labour inspection facilitate the trafficking of children, particularly girls, within Uganda and across East Africa (ILO-IPEC, 2005). The lack of awareness about trafficking risks among parents, children, and local leaders, coupled with the exploitation of cultural practices like sending children to live with wealthier families, creates an environment conducive to trafficking (GTZ, 2003). Additionally, urbanization has led to increased exploitation of children in the entertainment industry, with demand exacerbated by the presence of military troops, public work projects, and tourist centers (UYDEL Report, 2003-2005). These multifaceted factors highlight the need for comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches to address child trafficking in Uganda effectively.

2.4. Community Awareness Regarding Child Trafficking

Community awareness is a crucial component in the fight against child trafficking, as it enables the identification and prevention of such activities. Studies highlight that enhanced community awareness leads to increased identification

and reporting of child trafficking cases (Smith, 2016). The narrative of child trafficking in Uganda, particularly within the Karamoja communities, underscores the importance of raising awareness as a foundational step in addressing this issue. Organizations like Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH NL) and the European Union (EU) have emphasized the role of community dialogues in spreading awareness and educating the public on child trafficking (EU, 2022). However, despite these efforts, a significant gap remains in the literature concerning the long-term effectiveness of these awareness-raising activities and their ability to bring about sustained behavioral change within communities (Klabbers et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the literature points out that awareness campaigns must go beyond merely informing the public. They should aim to change harmful cultural norms that contribute to child trafficking. TdH NL's approach to challenging gender-based violence and early marriages within the Karamoja communities is a case in point. The EU (2022) asserts that altering cultural norms is vital in preventing child trafficking, as these norms often create an environment conducive to exploitation. Yet, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the specific cultural dynamics within Karamoja that perpetuate child trafficking. Johnson (2019) advocates for context-specific analyses to tailor interventions effectively and ensure they resonate with the targeted communities. Another critical aspect of community awareness is addressing gender-specific vulnerabilities. The literature consistently highlights that girls and boys face distinct challenges regarding child trafficking. Issues such as early marriage and gender-based violence are significant risk factors for girls, necessitating targeted interventions (Meredith et al., 2022). Conversely, the vulnerabilities of boys, particularly those influenced by traditional perceptions of masculinity, remain underexplored. The Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (2021) suggests that further research is needed to understand these unique vulnerabilities better and develop strategies that address the exploitation of boys effectively.

2.5. Community Awareness Regarding Child Trafficking

The level of community acceptance of child trafficking significantly impacts the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts. Research indicates that in some communities, child trafficking practices, such as child labour or child marriage, may be normalized or accepted due to socio-economic or cultural factors (United States Department of State, 2021). This normalization creates an environment where trafficking is not recognized as a severe issue, hindering efforts to identify and address it. Meredith et al., (2022) points out that in communities with high poverty levels, social marginalization, or gender-based discrimination, child trafficking may be seen as a means of economic survival, further complicating prevention and intervention strategies.

Despite these challenges, there are instances where communities have successfully fostered a culture of intolerance towards child trafficking. A community-led

initiative in Southeast Asia, for example, effectively changed social norms and empowered residents to identify and report suspected trafficking cases (MGLSD, 2018). This type of grassroots approach, combined with targeted interventions and support services, has proven effective in increasing community acceptance and engagement in anti-trafficking efforts. It underscores the importance of involving community members in developing and implementing strategies that resonate with their unique contexts and needs.

Moreover, understanding and addressing traditional belief systems' role in shaping community attitudes towards child trafficking is critical. Some scholars argue that traditional beliefs may perpetuate trafficking by normalizing certain exploitative practices (Johnson, 2019). However, others, like Klabbers et al. (2023), suggest that these beliefs can be leveraged positively to foster community resistance against trafficking. This dichotomy highlights a significant gap in the literature, necessitating a nuanced approach that respects cultural nuances while promoting anti-trafficking norms. Addressing this gap is essential for designing interventions that are culturally sensitive and more likely to be accepted and sustained by the community.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design

This mixed-methods study (both quantitative and qualitative) employed a cross-sectional design. The qualitative approach aimed to obtain data from multiple sources, including, where possible, boys and girls who had been trafficked, law enforcement, labour, and immigration departments, and local leaders. The quantitative approach enabled us to quantify the extent of child trafficking, identify patterns, and establish statistical associations. This approach was particularly effective in assessing the prevalence of trafficking, understanding demographic trends, and generating reliable baseline data in line with the output, outcome, and impact indicators in the Log Frame. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the cultural, contextual, and interpersonal dimensions surrounding child trafficking. Understanding the motivations, challenges, and contextual nuances through qualitative data enriched the overall analysis, providing valuable insights into the underlying causes and factors sustaining the issue. The cross-sectional design helped in studying the phenomenon of child trafficking into the worst forms of child labour at one point in time.

3.2. Study Settings

This study was conducted in two districts of Uganda: Napak and Kampala. Napak district, situated in the Karamoja sub-region, is predominantly rural and marked by high levels of poverty, insecurity, and underdevelopment. It has a longstanding practice of supplying children to other districts, particularly Kampala, for commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC) and domestic work. Many children found on the streets of Kampala originate from Napak. Kampala district, Uganda's capital

and largest city, serves as the administrative and commercial center, making it a primary destination for trafficked children. Kampala has the highest number of cases related to the worst forms of child labour (WFCL), with children being exploited in domestic work, petty trade, cross-border trade, and commercial sexual exploitation (MGLSD, 2018; United States Department of State, 2020). The contrasting socio-economic conditions of these districts provided a comprehensive backdrop for understanding the multifaceted dynamics of child trafficking. This setting enabled the study to capture data on both the supply (Napak) and demand (Kampala) aspects of child trafficking, offering valuable insights into the local contexts influencing this issue. The study was conducted over a two-month period, from March to April 2024, balancing the need for comprehensive data collection with practical considerations related to accessibility, logistics, and seasonality.

3.3. Study Population

The study population comprised parents and guardians, teachers, head teachers, community leaders (religious, traditional, and local government), trafficked children in Kampala District, and children in Napak district (both in and out of school). These participants were engaged through quantitative methods like questionnaires to gather first-hand information about their experiences and perspectives on child trafficking. Additionally, secondary study participants comprised law enforcement agencies and legal professionals, Civil Society Organization (CSO) representatives, representatives from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) and Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), as well as records from Napak district and LC1 chairpersons. These secondary participants provided qualitative data through interviews, offering expert opinions, policy insights, and organizational perspectives on child trafficking. This diverse population ensured a comprehensive understanding of the issue from multiple dimensions and stakeholders.

3.4. Sample Size and Sampling Strategy

To effectively capture the diversity within the sizable study population, a sample size of 500 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table. The study employed a combination of stratified random sampling, purposive sampling, and convenience sampling to select participants. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure a representative sample of children by categorizing them into in-school, out-of-school, and formerly trafficked groups, and then randomly selecting participants within each category. Purposive sampling was utilized to select key informants, such as local leaders, teachers, and CSO representatives, based on their roles and expertise related to child trafficking. Convenience sampling was employed for parents and guardians, selecting participants based on their availability and accessibility. This multifaceted approach ensured a comprehensive and representative sample, capturing diverse perspectives and experiences related to child trafficking (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of qualitative and quantitative sample size.

Category of study participants		Kampala sample size	Napak sample size	Total sample size	Method of data collection
Quantitative Sample					
	Teachers and head teachers		78	78	Questionnaire
	Parents/guardians	20	120	140	Questionnaire
Children	i) Returnee found in Napak (formerly trafficked)		40		Questionnaire
	ii) Street children in Kampala (Trafficked)	50		242	
	iii) Children in Napak district (never trafficked)		152		
	Leaders (religious, traditional and local government leaders)		33	33	Questionnaire
Qualitative Sample (Key Informants)					
Law enforcement agencies and Legal professionals		2	2	4	Interview guide
Representatives from MGLSD and KCCA		3		3	Interview guide
Total		**76**	**432**	**500**	

3.5. Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Data collection employed mixed methods, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Questionnaires were administered to children, parents, and teachers to gather quantitative data. Key informant interviews were conducted with law enforcement officials, CSO representatives, and local leaders to obtain qualitative data. Field observations were also carried out to directly observe the conditions and contexts related to child trafficking. The instruments used included structured questionnaires for quantitative data and interview guides for qualitative data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issue from multiple perspectives.

3.6. Quality Control Measures

To ensure the validity and reliability of findings, several quality control measures were implemented. Pre-testing of the questionnaire and the interview guide was conducted to refine the tools. Training of data collectors ensured consistency and accuracy in data collection. Triangulation was used to compare and validate data from different sources and methods. Biases were addressed by employing stratified random sampling and purposive sampling to ensure representative and knowledgeable respondents. Regular monitoring and supervision during data collection, along with the use of reliable software (SPSS and NVivo) for data analysis, further enhanced the quality and credibility of the study's findings.

3.7. Data Management

Data management protocols were meticulously designed to ensure the confidentiality, security, and integrity of the collected data. Raw data were securely stored in digital format on servers with restricted access and encryption measures, while processed data were stored in a digital table format overseen by the lead statistician, who acted as the Data Administrator. A backup mechanism was established to prevent data loss. Any audio recordings were encrypted, and transcripts were anonymized, with professional transcribers adhering to confidentiality agreements. Access to processed data was restricted to the involved parties, with formal access requests submitted to the Principal Investigator. After the formal dissemination of findings, data access was limited to the involved parties for three months before allowing other interested parties to apply for access. Processed data were retained for a minimum of three years, with strict security measures, including encryption and restricted access, in place to prevent unauthorized use or disclosure. Violations of the Data Sharing Agreement could result in termination of access and legal repercussions. Panameet Africa (U) Ltd held administrative responsibility, ensuring adherence to legal, ethical, and confidentiality standards.

3.8. Data Analysis

The review and organization of field notes obtained from individual respondents and key informant interviews were completed daily. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed for the analysis of quantitative data, establishing frequency distributions, and incorporating descriptive statistics as needed. The interpretation of these results enabled comparisons, trend identification, and proportion analysis, ultimately leading to drawing conclusions. The presentation of findings involved the creation of tables and graphs to enhance the clarity and easy interpretation of quantitative data analyzed. NVivo software was used to analyze qualitative data. Qualitative data underwent analysis through a systematic process of data reduction, involving the organization, structuring, and streamlining of data. This included identifying groupings, themes, and relationships, and drawing conclusions that were subsequently verified.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Ensuring ethical considerations was paramount in the research endeavor, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics such as child trafficking. Measures implemented to uphold ethical standards included maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of participants, respecting their dignity, rights, and privacy, and avoiding any harm by using sensitive questioning techniques and refraining from unnecessarily intrusive questions. Participation was entirely voluntary, with participants free to withdraw at any time without facing negative consequences. The research aimed to contribute positively to the community by promoting awareness and advocacy for change. The research protocol underwent ethical review and approval by Makerere University School of Social Science Research Ethical Commit-

tee (10.2024.717) and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (SS2547ES). Additionally, researchers were culturally sensitive, understanding and respecting local customs and traditions. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and, where applicable, their parents or guardians, with consent forms translated into local dialects to ensure comprehension.

4. Study Findings

4.1. Demographics of Child Respondents

4.1.1. Trafficking Status and Gender Distribution of Child Respondents

Table 2 categorizes respondents into three groups: returnees in Napak (formerly trafficked), trafficked street children in Kampala, and children in Napak who were never trafficked. Among the returnees, 77.5% are female, highlighting that girls are more frequently trafficked and returned to Napak compared to boys (22.5%). Similarly, among the street children in Kampala, 70% are female and 30% male, indicating a higher prevalence of trafficking among females. For children in Napak who were never trafficked, the gender distribution is equal, with each gender constituting 50% of the total. Overall, 58.7% of the children are female and 41.3% are male. These findings imply that females, particularly young girls, are more vulnerable to trafficking in this context. The significant disparity between genders among trafficked children suggests that interventions should focus more on protecting girls, addressing the specific risks and vulnerabilities they face. This could involve targeted awareness campaigns, community education, and stricter enforcement of laws protecting girls from trafficking.

4.1.2. Age Group and Gender Distribution of Child Respondents

Table 2 further presents the age distribution of children by gender across three age groups: 10 to 12 years, 13 to 14 years, and 15 to 17 years. In the youngest group (10 to 12 years), 63.2% are female and 36.8% are male. The 13 to 14 years group has 61.5% females and 38.5% males. The oldest group, 15 to 17 years, is more balanced with 52% females and 48% males. The data indicates that younger children, especially girls, are more prevalent among the trafficked population. This suggests that younger females are particularly targeted for trafficking. These findings imply that anti-trafficking efforts need to prioritize younger girls, providing early interventions and protective measures to prevent trafficking at an early age. Educational programs and community vigilance should be heightened to safeguard this vulnerable age group.

4.1.3. Education Status and Gender Distribution of Child Respondents

Table 2 illustrates that among the children surveyed, 29% have never attended school, with a significant majority being female (74%) compared to males (26%). Additionally, 24% of the children have attended school but subsequently dropped out, with females again representing a higher proportion (63%) compared to males (36.8%). Finally, 48% of the children are currently attending school, with a slightly higher percentage of males (52.6%) compared to females (47.4%). The findings sug-

gest a critical issue of gender disparity in educational access and retention among children in these districts. The high percentage of females who have never attended school or have dropped out indicates that girls are particularly vulnerable to educational neglect, which directly correlates with their increased risk of being trafficked. This gender-based educational inequality implies that efforts to combat child trafficking must prioritize educational opportunities for girls, ensuring that they are not deprived of schooling due to cultural, economic, or social barriers.

4.1.4. Tribe and Gender Distribution of Child Respondents

Table 2 also examines the ethnic distribution of children by gender, showing that all surveyed children belong to the Karimajong ethnic group. Among them, 58.7% are female and 41.3% are male. This uniform ethnic representation highlights that the Karimajong community is significantly affected by child trafficking issues. The findings imply that culturally specific interventions are necessary. Efforts to combat child trafficking should be tailored to the Karimajong people, incorporating cultural understanding and community engagement to effectively address and reduce trafficking within this ethnic group. This might include community-based programs, involvement of tribal leaders, and culturally sensitive educational campaigns.

4.1.5. Parenthood status and Gender Distribution of Child Respondents

In addition, Table 2 shows that majority (96%) reported not having children, with females slightly higher at 57.3% compared to males at 42.7%. Only 4% of respondents have children, with 90% of this group being female and 10% male. The data suggests that a small proportion of trafficked children have their own children, but among those who do, the vast majority are young mothers. This indicates severe forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, which often results in pregnancy. The findings imply a need for targeted interventions that include reproductive health education and support services for young mothers who are victims of trafficking. Providing these services can help address the immediate needs of young mothers and contribute to breaking the cycle of exploitation and trafficking.

4.1.6. Parent's Status and Gender Distribution of Child Respondents

Table 2 explores the parental status of children, categorized by gender. Among the surveyed children, 83% have both parents alive, with 57.5% being female and 42.5% male. Only 11% of children have lost both parents, and the gender distribution is relatively balanced (54% female and 46% male). For those who have lost only one parent, 5% have only their mother alive (77% female and 23% male), and 1% have only their father alive, all of whom are female. These findings suggest that the majority of trafficked children still have living parents, which implies that parental presence alone does not prevent child trafficking. However, the relatively high percentage of children without parents or with only one parent, especially among girls, indicates that orphaned or partially orphaned children are at greater risk of trafficking. This underscores the need for targeted support systems for or-

phans and single-parent families to mitigate their vulnerability to trafficking.

Table 2. Distribution of other demographics and Gender.

	Category of respondents	Gender		Total/%
		Female/%	Male/%	
Category	1) Returnee found in Napak (formerly trafficked)	31 (77.5)	9 (22.5)	40 (17)
	2) Street children in Kampala (trafficked)	35 (70)	15 (30)	50 (21)
	3) Children in Napak district never trafficked)	76 (50)	76 (50)	152 (63)
Total		**142 (58.7)**	**100 (41.3)**	**242 (100)**
AGE	1) 10 to 12 years	36 (63.)	21 (36.8)	57 (24)
	2) 13 to 14 years	64 (61.5)	40 (38.5)	104 (43)
	3) 15 to 17 years	42 (52)	39 (48)	81 (33)
Total		**142 (58.7)**	**100 (41.3)**	**242 (100)**
Education status	1) Never attended school or dropped out of school	51 (74)	18 (26.1)	69 (29)
	2) Yes, I've ever attended school but dropped out	36 (63)	21 (36.8)	57 (24)
	3) Yes, I currently go to school	55 (47.4)	61 (52.6)	116 (48)
Total		**142 (58.7)**	**100 (41.3)**	**242 (100)**
Tribe	Karimajong	142 (58.7)	100 (41.3)	242 (100)
Total		**142 (58.7)**	**100 (41.3)**	**242 (100)**
Parenthood	1) No	133 (57.3)	99 (42.7)	232 (96)
	2) Yes	9 (90)	1 (10)	10 (4)
Total		**142 (58.7)**	**100 (41.3)**	**242 (100)**
Parent status	1) No	14 (54)	12 (46)	26 (11)
	2) Only my father	3 (100)	0 (0)	3 (1)
	3) Only My mother	10 (77)	3 (23)	13 (5)
	4) Yes	115 (57.5)	85 (42.5)	200 (83)
Total		**142 (58.7)**	**100 (41.3)**	**242**
Parents Occupation	1) Peasant Farmers	55 (55)	45 (45)	100 (41)
	2) Dead	14 (54)	12 (46)	26 (11)
	3) Unemployed	18 (56)	14 (44)	32 (13)
	4) Civil servants	10 (62.5)	6 (37.5)	16 (7)
	5) Other forms business	45 (66)	23 (34)	68 (28)
Total		**142 (58.7)**	**100 (41.3)**	**242 (100)**

4.1.7. Parent's Occupation and Gender Distribution of Child Respondents

Table 2 categorizes the parental occupation of the surveyed children by gender. Peasant farmers constitute the largest group (41%), with a balanced gender distribution (55% female and 45% male). Children with deceased parents make up 11% of the sample, with 54% female and 46% male. Among children whose parents are unemployed (13%), 56% are female and 44% are male. Civil servants account for 7%, with a higher percentage of female children (62.5%) compared to males (37.5%). Other forms of business comprise 28% of the total, with 66% female and 34% male. The data indicates that children from families engaged in peasant farming or other forms of business are predominant among the trafficked, reflecting the economic vulnerabilities in these groups. The higher percentages of children from unemployed families and those with deceased parents also highlight the economic and social vulnerabilities contributing to trafficking. These findings imply that poverty and lack of economic opportunities are significant drivers of child trafficking, necessitating interventions that provide economic support and opportunities for vulnerable families.

4.2. Nature of Child Trafficking in Napak and Kampala Districts.

In addition to the above, Parents and guardians provided various descriptions of the nature of child trafficking in Napak as perceived by parents and guardians. The responses offer a diverse range of perspectives, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this issue. One prevalent theme is the mention of different forms of exploitation, including adoption trafficking, forced labour, sexual exploitation, and organ trafficking. These responses underscore the severity and complexity of child trafficking, which encompasses various forms of exploitation and abuse. Additionally, respondents mentioned specific activities such as child soldier recruitment and begging from the streets, which further emphasize the exploitative nature of child trafficking and the diverse ways in which children are coerced or forced into detrimental situations. In addition to the above, head teachers and teachers were asked how serious the problem of child trafficking is in Napak district, and an overwhelming majority of respondents, constituting 85.9% (**Figure 1**), indicated that they perceive child trafficking as a very serious problem in the district.

This finding underscores the gravity of the issue and highlights the urgent need for concerted action to address child trafficking within the community. Additionally, while a smaller proportion of respondents, comprising 12.8%, indicated that they perceive child trafficking as somewhat serious, it is crucial to recognize that even a perception of partial seriousness warrants attention and intervention.

The data reveals a concerning situation in Napak district, with 14% of children experiencing trafficking over a four-month period. This significant **Figure 2** suggests that child trafficking is a serious issue requiring immediate attention from authorities and child protection agencies. While the majority of children (86%) were not trafficked, the fact that more than one in ten children were affected high-

lights the severity of the problem and indicates active trafficking networks in the area. This high rate calls for urgent intervention, including enhanced security measures, community awareness programs, and support services for vulnerable children and families. It's important to note that child trafficking is often underreported, so the actual number could be higher. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to combat trafficking, protect children, and address the potential long-term social and economic impacts on the community.
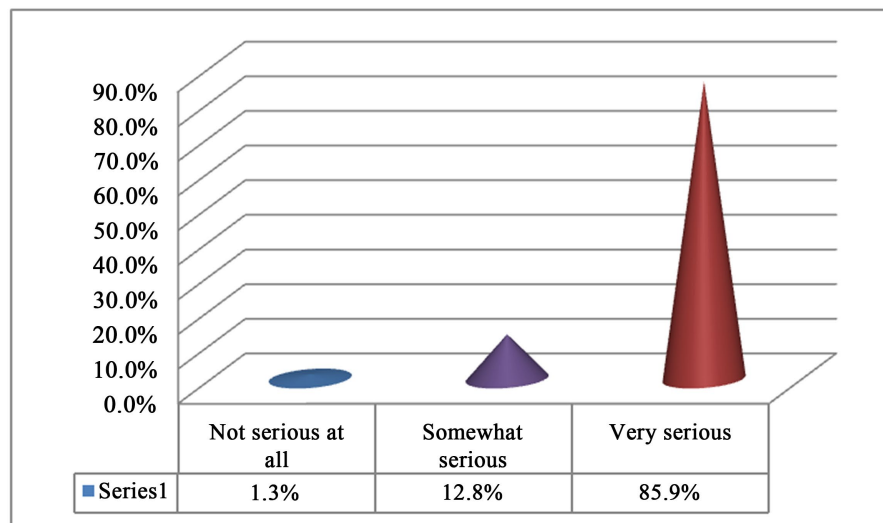
Figure 1. The level of seriousness of the problem of child trafficking in Napak district.
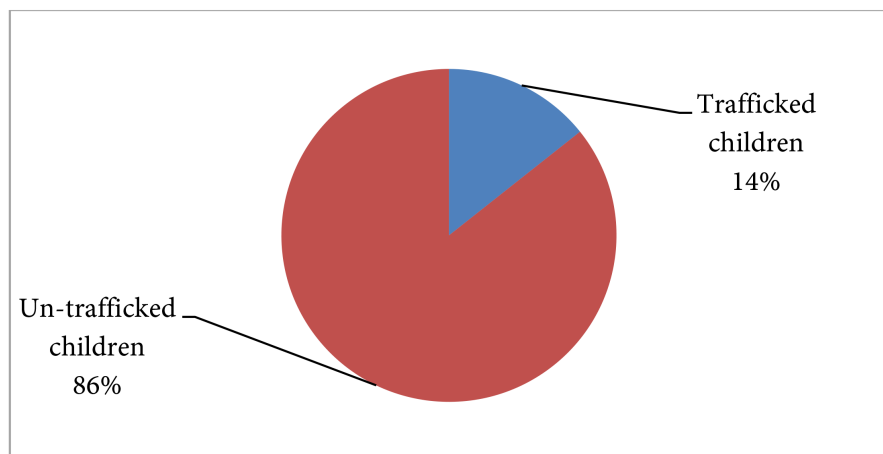
Figure 2. Rate of child trafficking in every four months.

Figure 3 shows that majority of respondents, comprising 72.2%, reported staying in Base zone Katwe, indicating a significant concentration of street children and returnees in this particular zone within Kampala. Additionally, smaller percentages of respondents stay in other zones within Katwe, such as Katenda Zone, and in areas like Kisenyi, Nsambya Kevina, and Katwe Kitoro. The distribution of respondents across different zones suggests the spatial dispersion of

street children and returnees within the study area. The high concentration in Base zone Katwe underscores the importance of this area as a focal point for interventions aimed at addressing the needs and vulnerabilities of street-connected children.
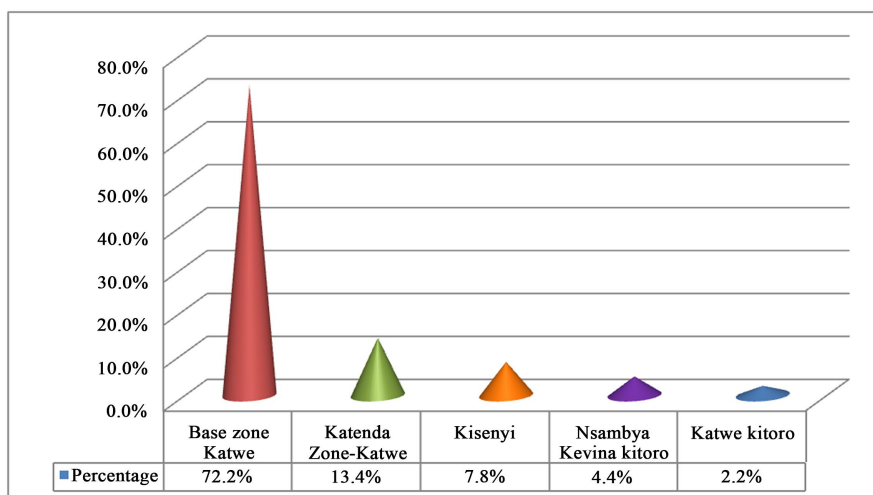

■ Percentage	Base zone Katwe	Katenda Zone-Katwe	Kisenyi	Nsambya Kevina kitoro	Katwe kitoro
Percentage	72.2%	13.4%	7.8%	4.4%	2.2%

Figure 3. Areas where trafficked children stay in Kampala.

Parents and guardians were asked to provide the age group that is more vulnerable to child trafficking and the highest percentage of respondents, at 43.6%, identified the age group of 13 - 17 years as the most vulnerable (**Figure 4**). This age range typically encompasses adolescents who may be more susceptible to manipulation, peer pressure, and promises of a better life, making them targets for traffickers. Additionally, 29.3% of respondents expressed the belief that all age groups are equally vulnerable to child trafficking. This perspective suggests recognition of the diverse vulnerabilities and risks faced by children across different age groups within the community. It underscores the importance of addressing child trafficking comprehensively and implementing interventions tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different age groups.
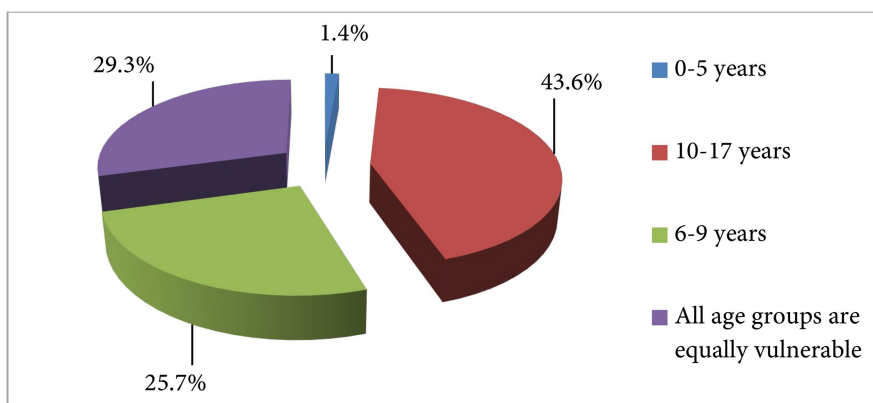

Figure 4. Age group that is more vulnerable to child trafficking.

4.3. Dynamics of Child Trafficking in Napak and Kampala Districts

This section delves into the comprehensive analysis of the current nature and dynamics of child trafficking in the districts of Napak and Kampala, shedding light on the multifaceted tactics employed by traffickers, the experiences of trafficked children, and the conditions facilitating this grave issue. It explores deceptive and coercive recruitment strategies, including the use of force and intimidation, as well as the promises made to children to lure them away from home. The roles of individuals who convince, entice, or force children to move, along with parental or guardian consent and the underlying reasons, are scrutinized. Additionally, the section examines recruitment methods, transportation strategies, and the number of children involved at various stages of trafficking, highlighting the negative experiences endured throughout the process. Finally, it investigates the custodians at the final destinations, providing a comprehensive overview of the entire trafficking journey and forming a foundation for targeted interventions and policy recommendations to combat this pervasive issue.

Figure 5 provides insights into the methods used by child traffickers to recruit children, with the majority of children (36%) reporting that promises of a better life, followed by 33% reporting promises of jobs, and 27% reporting education as commonly employed tactics. Additionally, a smaller percentage of children mentioned kidnapping (3%). The prevalence of promises of a better life, jobs, and education as recruitment tactics highlights the manipulative strategies employed by traffickers to lure vulnerable children into exploitative situations. These promises appeal to the aspirations and desires of children for a brighter future, exploiting their hopes and dreams for personal gain. This underscores the importance of addressing systemic issues such as poverty, lack of opportunities, and inadequate access to education and employment, which make children more susceptible to exploitation.
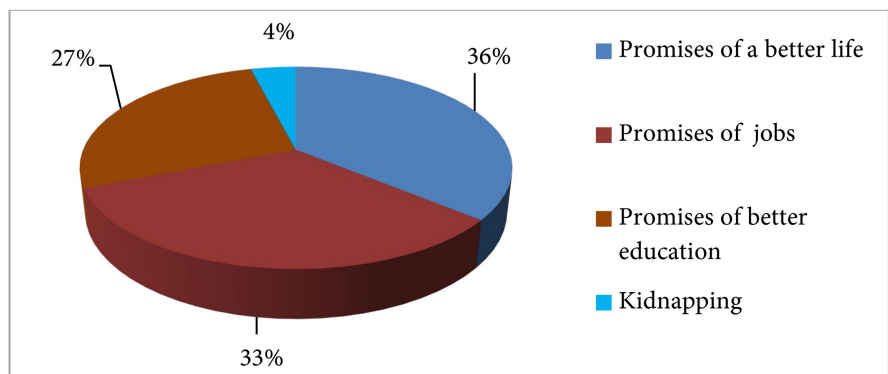

Figure 5. Tricks and tactics used by child traffickers to recruit children.

The mention of kidnapping as a method of recruitment is particularly concerning, indicating the use of coercion and violence to force children into trafficking situations against their will. Kidnapping deprives children of their agency and autonomy, subjecting them to immediate and severe harm. This underscores the

need for robust measures to prevent and respond to child abduction and trafficking, including enhanced law enforcement efforts and support services for victims. Other methods mentioned by respondents, such as offering education and offering jobs, highlight the diverse tactics used by traffickers to exploit vulnerabilities and manipulate children into trafficking situations. These methods may involve false promises or deceptive practices that entrap children into situations of exploitation. It is essential to address the root causes of vulnerability and provide support and protection to at-risk children to prevent them from falling prey to such tactics. In addition to the above, parents further highlighted the various methods employed by traffickers to lure or coerce children into exploitative situations. One prevalent tactic mentioned is the use of false promises of a better life, which may include offers of education, jobs, or improved living conditions. Traffickers may exploit the vulnerabilities of children and their families by enticing them with the prospect of a brighter future, only to subject them to exploitation and abuse once they are under their control.

Kidnapping is also identified as a tactic used by traffickers to forcibly take children away from their homes. This method involves abduction without the child's consent or the consent of their parents or guardians. It represents a grave violation of children's rights and can have severe and long-lasting consequences for the victims and their families. Additionally, peer influence and pressure from friends or groups were mentioned as tactics used by traffickers. This implies Children are influenced by their peers to engage in risky behaviors or to follow them into situations of exploitation. This underscores the importance of addressing social dynamics and peer relationships in efforts to prevent child trafficking and protect vulnerable children. Moreover, there are responses indicating that some children leave home alone or are influenced by their own desires or circumstances to escape. This highlights the need for community awareness and support systems to identify and assist children at risk of trafficking or exploitation.

Figure 6 indicates that 52% of the respondents reported that recruiters do indeed use force, intimidation, or deception, while 48% stated that they do not. This suggests that a significant portion of street children and returnees in Napak and Kampala have experienced or observed coercive tactics employed by recruiters to compel children into trafficking situations. The high percentage of respondents reporting the use of force, intimidation, or deception underscores the predatory nature of child trafficking and the vulnerability of children to exploitation. It highlights the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to protect children from such predatory practices and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of providing support services and safe spaces for victims of trafficking to recover and reintegrate into society. Parents and guardians were also asked whether recruiters use force or intimidation during the recruitment process and most parents and guardians in Napak, accounting for 93.6%, reported that recruiters do not use force or intimidation during the recruitment process (Figure 7). This finding suggests that, according to the perceptions

of respondents, child trafficking in the community may not primarily involve overt coercion or intimidation tactics. Instead, it may involve other forms of manipulation, persuasion, or exploitation to recruit children into exploitative situations.
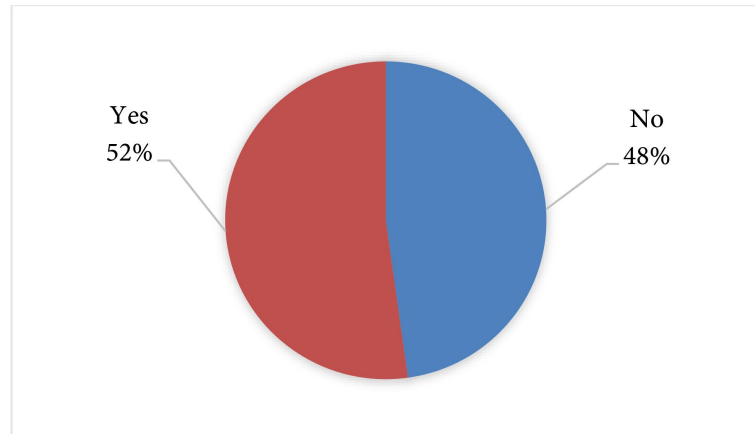

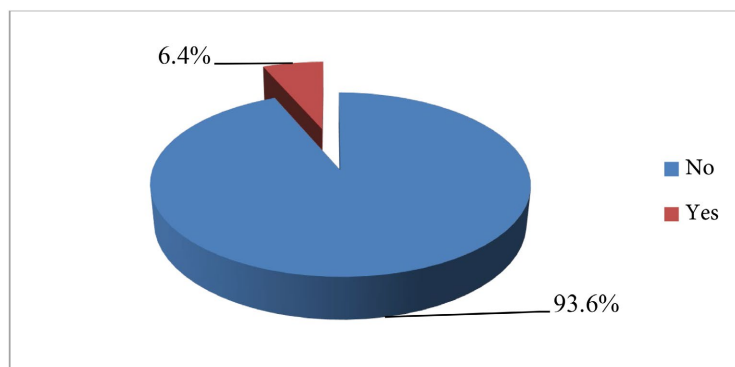**Figure 6.** Children's responses on the use of force or intimidation during recruitment.

Figure 7. Parents'/guardians' responses on the use of force or intimidation by recruiters during the recruitment process.

However, the 6.4% who indicated that force or intimidation is used during the recruitment process highlights a concerning aspect of child trafficking in the community. Even though it represents a minority of cases according to this data, the presence of such tactics underscores the need for vigilance and proactive measures to protect vulnerable children from exploitation and abuse.

Figure 8 presents data revealing that most respondents, accounting for 64.4%, were convinced or influenced by their parents, guardians, or relatives to relocate to the current area. This indicates the significant role of family dynamics and relationships in shaping migration patterns among street-connected children and returnees. Family members may have various motivations for encouraging or facilitating the move, including seeking better opportunities, alleviating economic hardships, or addressing social challenges in the place of origin. Furthermore, 22.2% of respondents reported being convinced or enticed by friends, peers, or

neighbors to relocate. This highlights the influence of social networks and peer relationships in shaping individuals' decisions to migrate to urban areas. Friends and peers may play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of urban life, sharing information about potential opportunities, and providing support during the relocation process. Additionally, 13.3% of respondents cited other factors or individuals as influencing their decision to move, indicating the diverse circumstances and motivations underlying migration among the studied population. It was further reported that some individuals made the decision to move independently due to personal circumstances such as hunger, living conditions, or the absence of support from family members. Others mentioned following friends or being persuaded by strangers encountered during their journey. These responses underscore the complex interplay of factors influencing migration decisions, including individual agency, socio-economic conditions, peer influence, and encounters with external actors. Understanding the diverse pathways and motivations driving migration among street children and returnees is essential for designing effective interventions and support mechanisms tailored to their needs and experiences.
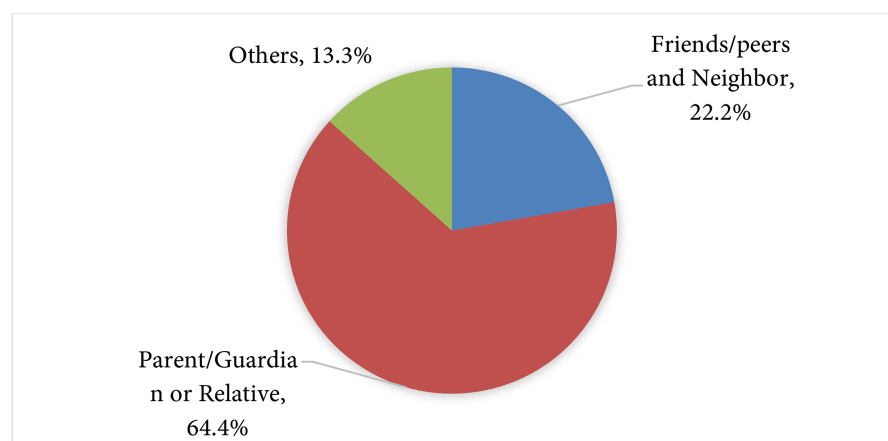

Figure 8. Persons who convince, entice, or force children to move from place of origin.

Figure 9 findings reveal that most of the respondents, accounting for 54.4%, reported that their parents or guardians consented to their relocation. This indicates that in a significant number of cases, there was some level of agreement or approval from the family members regarding the decision to move away from their place of origin. However, it is notable that 37.8% of respondents reported that their parents did not consent to their relocation, suggesting a lack of agreement or approval from their families. Moreover, 7.8% of respondents indicated uncertainty or ambiguity regarding whether their parents or guardians consented to their being taken away. This ambiguity may reflect complex family dynamics, communication challenges, or issues related to parental authority and decision-making. Understanding the factors influencing parental consent or lack thereof is crucial for addressing the root causes of child migration and developing targeted interventions to support both children and their families.
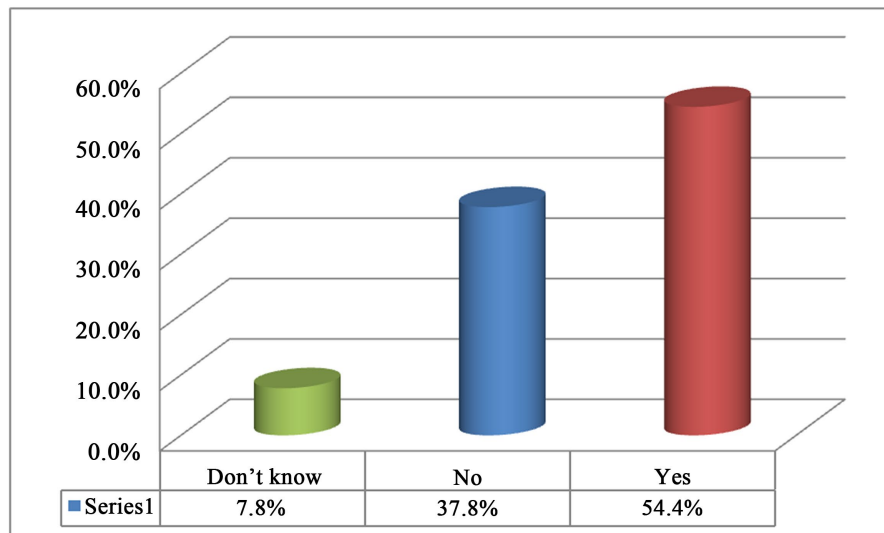
Figure 9. Parental or guardian consent for child's movement.

In **Figure 10**, among the respondents whose parents consented to their relocation, the reasons provided for parental consent primarily revolved around poverty and famine, as indicated by 78% of the responses. This underscores the significant impact of socio-economic challenges, particularly poverty and food insecurity, on migration decisions within the studied population. Economic hardship and the inability to meet basic needs may compel parents or guardians to consent to their children being taken away in the hope of accessing better opportunities or support elsewhere. Furthermore, 18% of respondents mentioned that their parents consented due to reasons related to their educational status and the prevailing economic conditions. This suggests that concerns about education, coupled with poverty and famine, may influence parental decisions regarding child migration. Additionally, 4% of responses fell under the category of "Others," indicating diverse or unspecified reasons for parental consent.
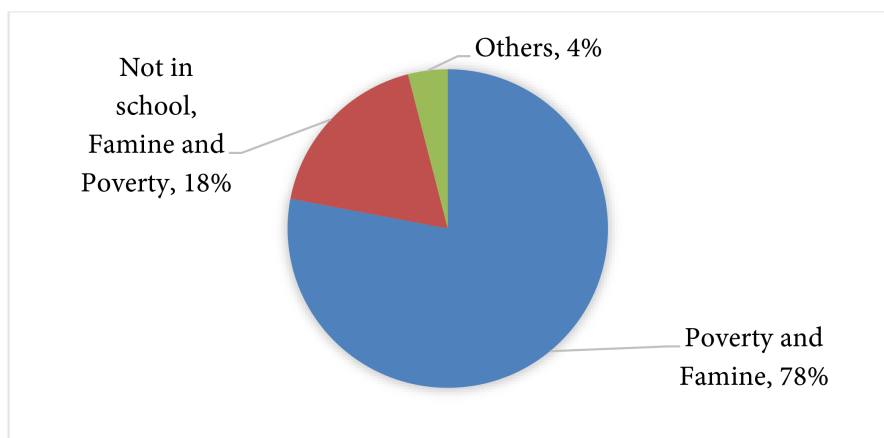

Figure 10. Reasons for parental consent for child's removal.

In the follow-up question, respondents were asked about the benefits promised

or given to their parents or guardians before being taken away. The responses included various incentives such as employment opportunities, money, and alcohol. This highlights the potential role of promises or inducements in influencing parental decisions regarding child migration. However, the diversity of responses underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of the factors driving child migration and parental consent, including economic, social, and individual considerations.

Figure 11 provides insights into the methods of recruitment experienced by street children and former street children. The data indicates that a significant portion, comprising 45.6% of respondents, reported being forced by their parent or guardian to move from their place of origin to the destination. This finding suggests that parental or guardian coercion plays a substantial role in the recruitment process, highlighting the complex dynamics within families that contribute to child migration. Such coercion may stem from various factors, including socio-economic pressures, familial conflicts, or the pursuit of perceived opportunities elsewhere. Moreover, 34.4% of respondents reported being enticed as the method of recruitment. This suggests that promises of a better life, opportunities for employment, education, or other incentives may be used to attract children to leave their homes and migrate to urban areas like Kampala. Additionally, 18.9% of respondents cited "Others" as the method of recruitment, indicating a diverse range of experiences and circumstances that led to their relocation. These varied recruitment methods underscore the complexity of factors influencing child migration, including social, economic, and individual considerations.
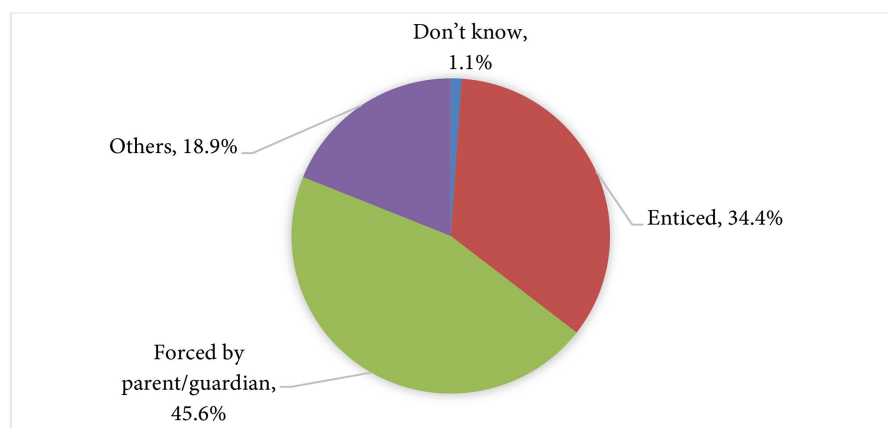

Figure 11. Recruitment methods used for child trafficking.

In Figure 12, the data sheds light on the transportation methods used to move street children and former street children from their homes to the destination. The overwhelming majority of respondents, accounting for 94.4%, reported using buses and taxis for transportation. This indicates that formal modes of transportation, such as public buses and taxis, are commonly utilized in facilitating child migration from rural areas to urban centers like Kampala. The prevalence of bus and taxi usage underscores the organized nature of child migration processes,

with traffickers or individuals coordinating transportation arrangements for children. Additionally, 4.4% of respondents mentioned "Others" as the mode of transportation, suggesting alternative or less conventional means of travel. The specified methods included boarding motorcycles (boda bodas) and using special transportation arranged by traffickers. These alternative modes of transportation may reflect the adaptability and resourcefulness of traffickers or individuals involved in facilitating child migration. Overall, the data highlights the diverse and organized nature of transportation methods employed in the migration process, underscoring the need for comprehensive strategies to address child trafficking and exploitation.
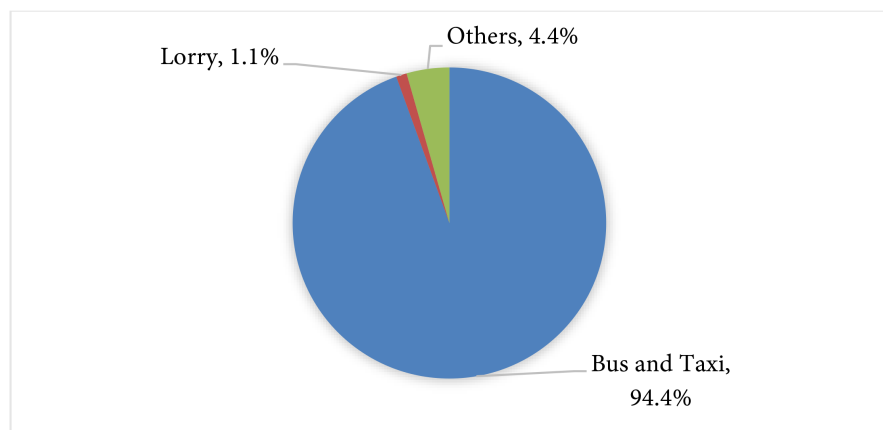

Figure 12. Methods of transportation from home to final destination.

Table 3 reveals a varied distribution, with most respondents reporting harboring with 2 children (37.8%) or 3 children (18.9%). This suggests that trafficking often involves groups of children traveling together, possibly for reasons of safety, efficiency, or logistical convenience. The presence of multiple children in trafficking situations could also contribute to feelings of vulnerability and isolation, as well as exacerbate risks of exploitation and abuse during the journey. Moreover, the data indicates that some respondents harbored alone (13.3%), while others were part of larger groups, with reports of harboring with up to 10 children. Interestingly, a portion of respondents (4.4%) stated that they did not know the exact number of children they were harbored with, emphasizing the chaotic and disorganized nature of trafficking operations in some instances. Additionally, the mention of "20 girls" as a specific category highlights the gendered dimension of trafficking experiences, suggesting that girls may be trafficked in larger groups or face unique challenges during the journey.

Table 4 reveals a range of distressing incidents, with the most commonly reported issue being the denial of food (47%). This finding underscores the vulnerability of trafficked children to deprivation and hunger, highlighting the urgent need for interventions to ensure access to basic necessities and protect their well-being. Additionally, a notable portion of respondents reported experiencing physical violence, such as being beaten (11%), and instances of sexual harassment

(2%). These findings underscore the risks of exploitation and abuse faced by trafficked children throughout the trafficking process. Furthermore, the category labeled "Others" (40%) encompasses a diverse array of negative experiences reported by respondents, including difficulties finding work, challenges adapting to the new environment, and pressure from landlords for rent.

Table 3. Number of children present during recruitment, transportation, and harboring stages (Responses from only trafficked children).

Number of children Present at recruitment, transportation, and harboring	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	12	13.3
2	34	37.8
3	17	18.9
4	6	6.7
5	5	5.6
8	6	6.7
9	1	1.1
10	4	4.4
20 girls	1	1.1
Unknown	4	4.4
Total	90	100.0

Table 4. Experiences during trafficking (Responses from only trafficked children).

Negative experiences during trafficking	Frequency	Percent
Denial of food	42	47
Other	36	40
Beating	10	11
Denied food, Beaten and Sexually harassed	2	2
Total	**90**	**100**

Figure 13 sheds light on the individuals or entities responsible for keeping the trafficked children at their destination. The data reveals that a significant portion of respondents (32.2%) reported being kept by the person they came with, indicating a level of trust or reliance on those who facilitated their journey. Additionally, friends and acquaintances played a notable role, with 27.8% of respondents stating that they were kept by a friend. This suggests that social networks and peer relationships may influence the living arrangements of trafficked children, potentially providing a sense of familiarity and support in unfamiliar environments.

Furthermore, the data highlights instances where respondents were kept by individuals they did not know, such as women (10.0%). This finding underscores the vulnerability of trafficked children to exploitation and abuse, as they may be placed in the care of strangers who may not have their best interests at heart. Additionally, the category labeled "Others" (30.0%) encompasses a diverse array of arrangements, including staying with relatives, neighbors, or individuals whose names were forgotten. This variability in living arrangements underscores the complex and often precarious circumstances faced by trafficked children at their final destination.
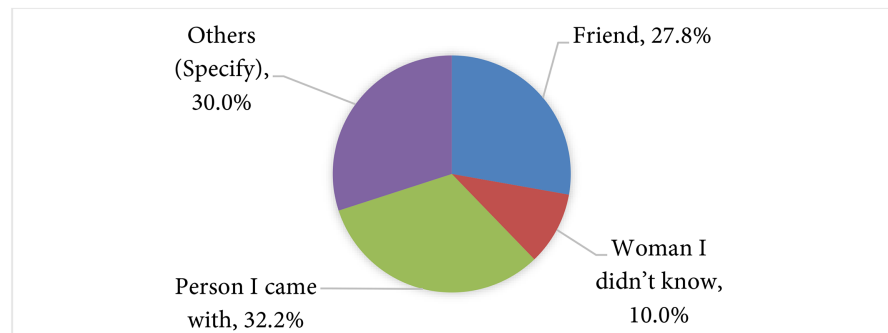
Figure 13. Custodian at destination (Response from only trafficked children).

4.4. Key Factors Contributing to Child Trafficking in Napak

During the survey, several respondents including key informants provided valuable insights into the primary reasons why trafficked children get involved in street-based activities. The responses reveal a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors, familial circumstances, and external influences that drive children into exploitative situations. One of the most prevalent reasons cited is the need to look for school fees. This indicates the dire economic situations many families face, compelling children to seek alternative means of funding their education due to financial constraints. Additionally, peer influence emerges as a significant factor, with some children getting involved in street activities due to the influence of their friends or peers who may already be engaged in similar activities. Furthermore, the need to be self-reliant and supplement family income underscores the burden placed on trafficked children to contribute financially to their households' survival. This points to the broader issue of poverty and economic vulnerability that perpetuates the cycle of exploitation among marginalized communities. It's also noteworthy that some children mentioned being forced or coerced into street-based activities by relatives or caregivers, highlighting the exploitation and abuse experienced by trafficked children. Factors such as hunger, insecurity, and lack of access to basic necessities further exacerbate their vulnerability and drive them into exploitative situations as they seek to meet their immediate needs.

Figure 14 shows that the largest proportion of respondents (25.2%) identified poverty, famine (24%), not in school (18.6%) and family issues (16.9%) as significant drivers of child trafficking. This finding aligns with existing research high-

lighting the socioeconomic vulnerabilities that often push children into situations of exploitation and trafficking. Poverty can compel families to make difficult decisions, such as sending their children away in search of better opportunities or financial support. Lack of education further exacerbates vulnerability, as children from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack the awareness and skills to protect themselves from traffickers' tactics. Addressing these root causes requires comprehensive strategies that address poverty alleviation, improve access to education, and strengthen family support systems.
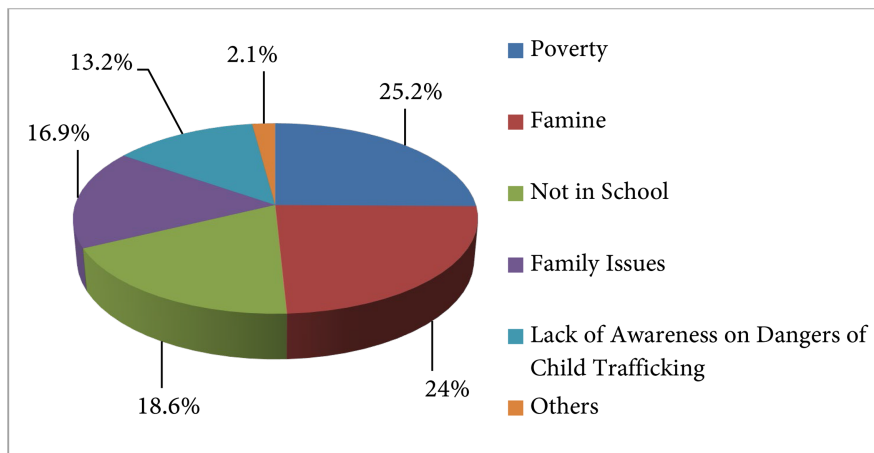
Figure 14. Formerly trafficked children's opinions on the factors that contribute to child trafficking in Napak district.

Additionally, respondents cited lack of awareness on dangers of child trafficking (13.2%) and other factors (2.1%) Lack of awareness about the dangers of trafficking and the rights of children leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Efforts to combat child trafficking must include initiatives to create employment opportunities for youth and raise awareness within communities about the risks associated with trafficking and the importance of safeguarding children's rights. Respondents further specified additional factors contributing to child trafficking, which further highlight the multifaceted nature of this issue. Factors such as drought, insecurity, and hunger underscore the complex interplay of environmental, social, and economic challenges that drive child trafficking in Napak district. Drought and lack of rain can exacerbate food insecurity, pushing families further into poverty and increasing the likelihood of children being trafficked. Insecurity in the region can also disrupt livelihoods and force families to make difficult choices to ensure their survival. Addressing these additional factors requires a holistic approach that addresses both immediate needs, such as food security and safety, and underlying structural issues contributing to vulnerability.

In addition to the above, the study reveals that poverty and economic vulnerability are the primary factors contributing to child trafficking in Napak district, with 77.1% of parents and guardians identifying this as the main cause. Other significant factors include orphanhood and abandonment (8.6%), conflict and insta-

bility, lack of educational opportunities, weak law enforcement, and cultural practices. Teachers and head teachers (96.2%) attributed child trafficking to a combination of these factors, emphasizing the complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and structural issues. Additional factors such as drought, family neglect, harsh climatic conditions, and peer influence were also noted, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the problem. Cultural attitudes and beliefs play a crucial role in perpetuating child trafficking. Forced marriages, bride price, and gendered expectations were identified as significant contributors. The study also revealed that external factors beyond Napak district influence child trafficking, with 66.1% of street children and former street children acknowledging their impact. These external pull factors include job opportunities in urban areas, the provision of free food and money by good Samaritans, and the perception of better life prospects outside the district.

Family problems were identified as a major contributor to child trafficking, with 92.2% of children respondents affirming their significance. Additionally, 35.7% of parents acknowledged specific community practices that contribute to child trafficking, including forced and early marriages, poverty, insecurity, and cultural practices such as bride price and dowry. The study underscores the need for comprehensive strategies addressing poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, and community empowerment to effectively combat child trafficking in Napak district.

The enrollment data in **Figure 15** for Napak district reveals a concerning situation, with only 37.6% of children regularly attending school, while a significant 62.4% are either not in school or attend irregularly. This low enrollment rate has serious implications for child trafficking vulnerability. The qualitative findings provide crucial context, highlighting multiple barriers to education including poverty, lack of scholastic materials, household responsibilities, and geographical challenges. Specifically, children often face competing demands such as babysitting, childcare, and assisting with family tasks in urban areas like Kampala, which interfere with their schooling. The prevalence of hunger and lack of essential resources like books further compounds the problem. Head teachers and teachers corroborate these issues, citing lack of scholastic materials (43.6%), poverty (41%), and distance to schools (11.5%) as primary factors keeping children out of school. This complex interplay of economic, familial, and logistical challenges not only hinders educational access but also potentially increases children's vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address both immediate educational needs and underlying systemic issues.

4.5. Community Awareness on Child Trafficking in Napak District

Figure 16 reveals the respondents' awareness of child trafficking, with 57.8% indicating they have heard about it before, while 42.2% never heard of it. The fact that a significant majority of respondents have heard about child trafficking sug-

gests a level of awareness within the surveyed population, which is crucial for addressing and combating this issue effectively. However, the percentage of respondents who have not heard about child trafficking underscores potential gaps in awareness and understanding among a notable portion of street children and returnees, highlighting the importance of targeted education and awareness campaigns.
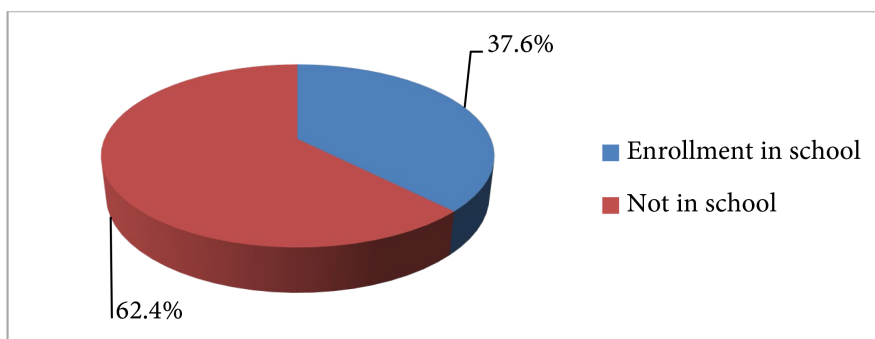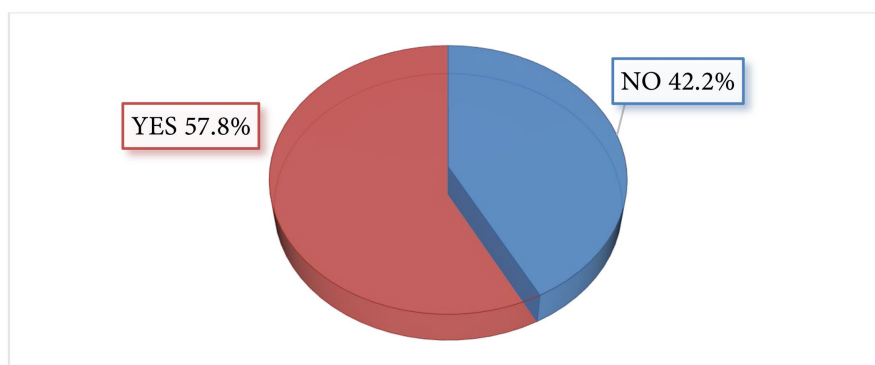

Figure 15. Enrollment rate.

Figure 16. Awareness of child trafficking among parents and guardians in Napak district.

In addition to the above, some respondents also mentioned specific instances or methods of child trafficking, such as stealing children, forcing them to beg, or transporting them to urban areas for exploitation. The range of descriptions reflects the complexity of child trafficking and the multifaceted ways in which children may be exploited or harmed. Common themes include the pursuit of economic opportunities, the vulnerability of children to manipulation and coercion, and the importance of addressing root causes such as poverty and lack of opportunities. These descriptions underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address the underlying drivers of child trafficking while also providing support and protection to vulnerable children.

Parents and guardians were asked whether they believe child trafficking is a prevalent issue in their communities; the majority (63.6%), indicated that they believe child trafficking is a prevalent issue in their community. This high level of concern among community members underscores the urgency of addressing child

trafficking through collective action, community engagement, and targeted interventions aimed at prevention, protection, and prosecution of perpetrators.

4.6. Community Acceptance of Child Trafficking in Napak District

Parents and guardians were asked to give their opinions regarding whether they think child trafficking is good or bad and the overwhelming consensus, as evidenced by the multitude of responses, is that child trafficking is regarded as unequivocally bad. The reasons provided by respondents shed light on the multifaceted negative consequences associated with child trafficking. The most cited reasons for considering child trafficking as bad include the suffering endured by trafficked children, ranging from lack of accommodation and food to exposure to accidents and diseases. Many respondents expressed concerns about the safety and well-being of trafficked children, highlighting instances where children do not return safely or are mistreated at their destination. Additionally, there is a prevailing sentiment of loss and grief among parents who have experienced the disappearance or death of their children due to trafficking.

One parent emphasized the dire consequences for trafficked children, stating, "*Children suffer a lot in that they don't have accommodation, food and they're prone to accidents since they are very young.*" This highlights the immediate hardships faced by children subjected to trafficking, including basic needs deprivation and physical dangers. Moreover, respondents highlighted the detrimental societal impacts of child trafficking, such as the spread of diseases, increased crime rates, and erosion of family values. Trafficked children are often exposed to exploitation, sexual abuse, and forced labour, contributing to their physical and psychological harm. Furthermore, the loss of respect for parents and the erosion of community cohesion are cited as additional negative consequences of child trafficking. One parent lamented the loss and suffering associated with child trafficking, remarking, "*Reason being we lose children.*" This sentiment reflects the profound emotional toll experienced by families who have lost children to trafficking, underscoring the devastating impact on parents and communities alike.

Conversely, a few respondents expressed ambivalence or even perceived benefits associated with child trafficking, such as economic opportunities or financial support for families left behind. One parent highlighted economic benefits, stating, that "*Good because when they provide food for the family when they are there, they send money.*" This perspective reflects the notion that children who engage in trafficking activities may contribute to the financial support of their families, particularly in contexts of economic hardship.

Another parent emphasized the potential economic opportunities afforded by child trafficking, remarking, "*Good, because it creates job opportunities, shelters, and food.*" This viewpoint suggests that child trafficking, in some instances, may be perceived as a means of generating employment and addressing immediate needs within communities. However, these perspectives are in the minority, with the overwhelming consensus being that child trafficking has profoundly negative

implications for children, families, and communities.

The responses from parents and guardians regarding their stance on child trafficking highlight a range of perspectives, reflecting the diverse socio-economic and cultural context of Napak district. Many respondents express a strong desire for child trafficking to be stopped, citing various reasons related to the well-being of children and the community. Some parents emphasize the need to halt child trafficking to safeguard the welfare of their children and to prevent them from being separated from their families. For instance, one parent stated, "*It should be stopped since most children go and end up dying there*," highlighting the alarming risks associated with trafficking. Another parent echoed similar concerns, emphasizing, "It should be stopped so that children help their parents or even get scholarships to study," underscoring the importance of education and family support.

Additionally, several respondents highlighted the detrimental effects of child trafficking on the community, including the loss of valuable human capital and the erosion of cultural values. One parent remarked, "*It has to stop to give room to young children of school-going age to study*," reflecting concerns about the impact on educational attainment and community development. Another parent emphasized the need to preserve cultural values, stating, "Yes because culturally we have lost value," suggesting that trafficking undermines traditional norms and practices.

However, amidst these calls for action, some respondents expressed reluctance or ambivalence towards stopping child trafficking. Some cited economic pressures and the perceived role of trafficking in alleviating poverty as reasons for their hesitation. For example, one parent stated, "*No, because it's evading hunger, financial constraints*," highlighting the complex interplay between economic necessity and ethical considerations. Nevertheless, the overwhelming sentiment among parents and guardians is a desire to end child trafficking to protect children's well-being, preserve community cohesion, and promote socio-economic development. These responses underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address the root causes of trafficking while providing support and resources to vulnerable families in Napak district.

Figure 17 offers insights into how child trafficking is perceived within the Napak district community according to teachers and head teachers. The overwhelming majority of respondents, constituting 76.9%, indicated that child trafficking is viewed as a means of ending financial burdens, a method of survival, a cultural norm, or a pathway to a better life. This finding suggests that within certain segments of the community, there may be a normalization or acceptance of child trafficking as a coping mechanism or even as a societal expectation. However, it is encouraging to note that a significant minority, comprising 23.1% of respondents, recognize child trafficking as a harmful practice that requires intervention and support for victims. This indicates a level of awareness and acknowledgment of the detrimental effects of child trafficking, highlighting a potential foundation upon which to build efforts to combat this issue. Furthermore, respondents sug-

gest that there are individuals within the community who condemn child trafficking as a reprehensible act, underscoring the diversity of perspectives within Napak district regarding this issue.
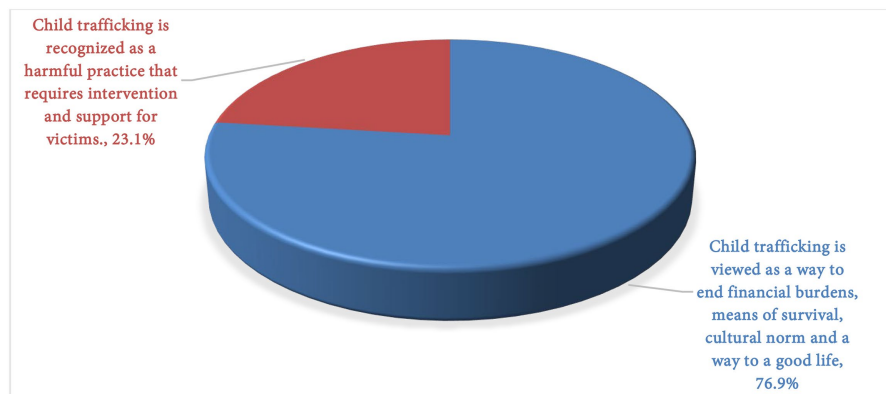

Figure 17. Community members' view of child trafficking in Napak district.

Figure 18 indicates that most respondents, comprising 71.8%, are unwilling to stop child trafficking and only a few (28.2%) expressed willingness to engage in initiatives aimed at addressing child trafficking within the district. This indicates a high socially acceptable level of child trafficking among parents in Napak district. Parents further provided insights into why they are unwilling to engage in initiatives aimed at addressing child trafficking which included the fact that they are benefiting from the act. In addition to the above, many parents lacked knowledge of what exactly happens to children when they are taken to Kampala as they believe that they get good jobs since they are sometimes able to support their families back home. These findings suggest a complex interplay of socio-economic factors influencing community attitudes towards efforts to combat child trafficking. This underscores the multifaceted nature of the challenge and highlights the importance of addressing various cultural, social, and economic factors to foster community acceptance and engagement in anti-trafficking efforts. In support of most teachers and head teachers, constituting 76.9% (**Figure 19**), reported that child trafficking is viewed as a means to end financial burdens, a method of survival, a cultural norm, or a pathway to a better life in Napak district. This finding suggests that within certain segments of the community, there may be a normalization or acceptance of child trafficking as a coping mechanism or even as a societal expectation.

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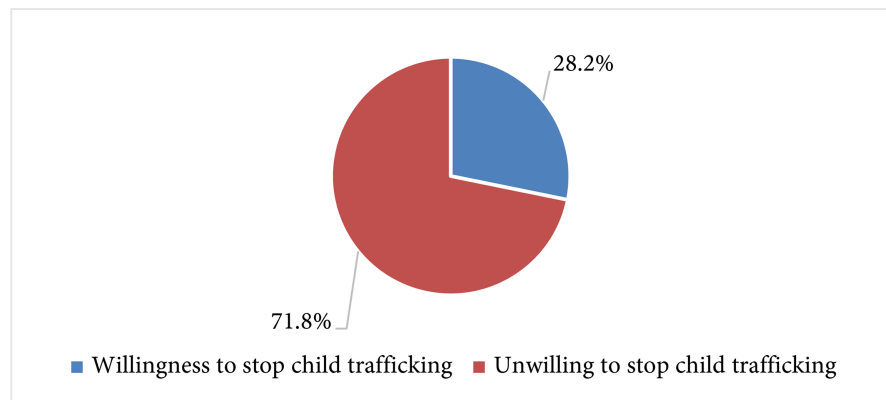
       132

Figure 18. Parents and guardians' acceptance to prevent and combat child trafficking in Napak district.
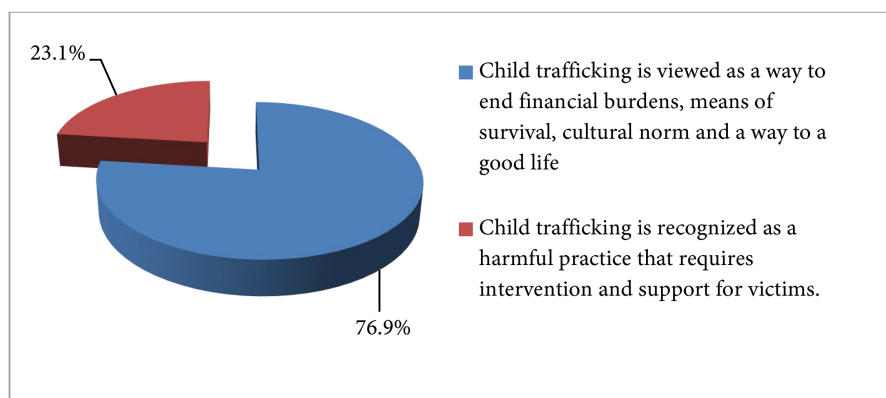

Figure 19. Communities' perceptions about child trafficking in Napak district.

5. Summary and Discussions of the Findings

The study aimed to assess the current state of child trafficking into the worst forms of child labour in Napak and Kampala districts, Uganda. The specific objectives included assessing the nature and dynamics of child trafficking in these districts, identifying key contributing factors, evaluating community awareness, and assessing community acceptance of child trafficking in Napak district.

5.1. Summary of Findings

The study findings revealed that child trafficking is a serious problem in Napak district, with 14% of children experiencing trafficking over a four-month period. The nature of trafficking includes various forms of exploitation such as adoption trafficking, forced labour, sexual exploitation, and organ trafficking. The dynamics of trafficking involve deceptive recruitment strategies, with promises of a better life, jobs, and education being common tactics used by traffickers. The study indicated that 52.2% of child respondents reported the use of force, intimidation, or deception in recruitment. Family members, particularly parents and guardians, played a significant role in facilitating child trafficking, with 64.4% of children reporting being convinced or influenced by family members to relocate. Poverty

and famine were cited as primary reasons for parental consent to child trafficking.

The study findings indicated a mixed level of community awareness regarding child trafficking in Napak district. While 57.8% of parents and guardians reported having heard about child trafficking, a significant 42.2% had never heard of it, highlighting gaps in awareness. Regarding community acceptance, the study revealed a concerning level of acceptance of child trafficking among some community members. The findings showed that 71.8% of parents and guardians were unwilling to stop child trafficking, with some viewing it as a means to end financial burdens or a method of survival. Teachers and head teachers reported that 76.9% of the community viewed child trafficking as a means to end financial burdens, a method of survival, a cultural norm, or a pathway to a better life. This high level of acceptance underscores the complex socio-economic factors influencing attitudes towards child trafficking and highlights the need for comprehensive interventions to address root causes and change community perceptions.

5.2. Discussions of Findings

The findings from this study on the nature and dynamics of child trafficking in Napak and Kampala districts provide valuable insights that both align with and expand upon existing literature. The study's revelation that 14% of children experienced trafficking over a four-month period in Napak district is supported by global estimates, which suggest that around 27% of all trafficking victims are children (International Bureau of Labour Affairs, 2019). This highlights the severity of the issue in Napak, suggesting it may be a trafficking hotspot requiring urgent attention. The various forms of exploitation identified, including adoption trafficking, forced labour, and sexual exploitation, are consistent with global patterns described in the literature. However, the study's emphasis on organ trafficking adds a crucial dimension often overlooked in existing research, addressing a gap in our understanding of trafficking forms in this specific context. The dynamics of trafficking revealed by the study, particularly the use of deceptive recruitment strategies and the significant role of family members in facilitating trafficking (64.4% of children reported being influenced by family members), align with the complex nature of trafficking described by Triandafyllidou and Maroukis (2012). This finding provides a more nuanced understanding of the local trafficking landscape, addressing the need for region-specific research highlighted by Klabbers et al. (2023). The high percentage (52.2%) of children reporting the use of force or deception in recruitment corroborates the U.S. Department of State's (2023) observations on Uganda, while also providing more precise local context. These findings underscore the intricate interplay between poverty, family dynamics, and trafficking in Napak and Kampala, offering a more detailed picture than what is typically presented in broader, less localized studies.

The findings regarding community awareness and acceptance of child trafficking in Napak district reveal a complex and concerning picture that both aligns with and diverges from existing literature. The study's finding that 57.8% of par-

ents and guardians were aware of child trafficking indicates a moderate level of awareness, which is consistent with the emphasis on community awareness in literature by Smith (2016) and the EU (2022). However, the significant percentage (42.2%) who had never heard of it highlights a persistent gap in awareness, underscoring the need for more targeted and effective awareness campaigns as suggested by Klabbers et al. (2023). The most striking divergence from the literature is in the area of community acceptance. While studies like those by United States Department of State (2021) and Meredith et al., (2022) acknowledge the normalization of trafficking in some communities, this study's finding that 71.8% of parents and guardians were unwilling to stop child trafficking reveals a level of acceptance that far exceeds expectations. This high acceptance rate, coupled with the perception of trafficking as a means to end financial burdens or a method of survival (reported by 76.9% of teachers and head teachers), starkly contrasts with the previous initiatives to sensitize communities about the dangers of child trafficking (MGLSD, 2018).

5.3. Limitations of the Study

The study faced several limitations, including potential underreporting of child trafficking cases due to fear and stigma, time constraints that could have limited the depth of data collection, challenges in ensuring sample representativeness across diverse contexts, and varying reliability of secondary data sources. To overcome these challenges and ensure the reliability and validity of findings, the study employed a multi-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods for data triangulation. The research team prioritized key locations and stakeholders based on trafficking prevalence, leveraged local partnerships, and implemented careful sampling techniques such as stratification and cluster sampling to enhance representativeness. To address time constraints, an experienced research team was employed to expedite the process without compromising data quality. The study also engaged in community awareness campaigns to encourage participation and cross-referenced secondary data from multiple reputable sources to enhance reliability. These strategies collectively helped to mitigate the identified limitations and strengthen the overall validity and reliability of the study's findings.

5.4. Conclusion

The nature and dynamics of child trafficking in Napak and Kampala districts reveal a severe and multifaceted problem. With 14% of children experiencing trafficking over just four months, Napak district appears to be a significant trafficking hotspot. The various forms of exploitation, including the often-overlooked issue of organ trafficking, demonstrate the complex nature of this crime. The high involvement of family members in facilitating trafficking (64.4%) and the prevalent use of deception in recruitment (52.2%) highlight the intricate social dynamics at play. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that address

not only the act of trafficking itself but also the familial and social contexts in which it occurs.

The identification of key contributing factors to child trafficking in these districts points primarily to poverty and famine as the driving forces. The fact that parents and guardians often consent to trafficking due to financial pressures reveals the desperate circumstances many families face. This suggests that any effective anti-trafficking strategy must incorporate broader economic development and food security initiatives. Additionally, the use of deceptive promises of better lives, jobs, and education by traffickers indicates a need for improved access to legitimate opportunities for children and families in these areas.

Community awareness of child trafficking in Napak district shows a concerning gap in knowledge. While 57.8% of parents and guardians reported having heard about child trafficking, a significant 42.2% had never heard of it. This split awareness level suggests that current awareness campaigns are reaching some but not all community members. There is a clear need for more comprehensive and far-reaching education efforts to ensure all community members understand the realities and risks of child trafficking.

The level of community acceptance of child trafficking in Napak district is alarmingly high and presents a significant challenge to anti-trafficking efforts. With 71.8% of parents and guardians unwilling to stop child trafficking, and 76.9% of the community viewing it as a financial solution or survival method, it's evident that economic pressures are overriding concerns about child welfare. This high acceptance rate indicates an urgent need for interventions that not only raise awareness about the dangers of trafficking but also address the root causes that make it seem like a viable option. Changing these deeply ingrained perceptions will require a multi-faceted approach that combines education, economic support, and cultural engagement.

5.5. Recommendations

To address the nature and dynamics of child trafficking in Napak and Kampala districts, it is recommended to: 1) Establish a specialized task force to focus on child trafficking, given its prevalence in the region. 2) Implement stricter monitoring of family-based recruitment, potentially through community-based child protection committees. 3) Develop targeted interventions to address deceptive recruitment tactics, such as community education programs on recognizing false promises of jobs and education. 4) Strengthen and support law enforcement capacity to identify and respond to various forms of child exploitation, including adoption trafficking and forced labour.

To tackle the key contributing factors of child trafficking, it is recommended to: 1) Implement poverty alleviation programs specifically targeting families at high risk of trafficking their children. 2) Develop sustainable agriculture initiatives to address food insecurity and reduce vulnerability to famine-driven trafficking. 3) Create legitimate employment and educational opportunities for youth in traf-

ficking-prone areas to counter the appeal of false promises. 4) Establish microfinance programs to help families build economic resilience and reduce the likelihood of resorting to child trafficking as a survival strategy.

To improve community awareness of child trafficking in Napak district, it is recommended to: 1) Launch a comprehensive, culturally sensitive awareness campaign using multiple media channels to reach the 42.2% of the population unaware of child trafficking. 2) Integrate child trafficking education into school curricula to ensure long-term awareness among younger generations. 3) Train local leaders, religious figures, and community influencers to become anti-trafficking advocates, leveraging their influence to spread awareness. 4) Develop a mobile outreach program to bring trafficking awareness to remote or hard-to-reach communities within the district.

To address the high level of community acceptance of child trafficking in Napak district, it is recommended to: 1) Implement community-based programs that challenge the perception of trafficking as a viable economic solution, highlighting its long-term negative impacts on children and communities. 2) Develop alternative livelihood programs that provide families with sustainable income sources, reducing the perceived need for child trafficking. 3) Create support groups for parents and guardians to discuss challenges and alternatives to trafficking, fostering a community-led approach to changing attitudes. 4) Collaborate with cultural and religious leaders to reframe child protection as a cultural value, countering the normalization of trafficking.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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