

Human trafficking: a transnational problem

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



Human Trafficking: A Transnational Problem Human trafficking is the world's oldest form of slavery. Since biblical times, men, women and children have been sold across borders into slavery. Human trafficking today is a growing business. Human rights groups estimate that the number of modern slaves exceeds that of the Atlantic slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (ProQuest Staff). In the modern world, globalization has made it easier to mobilize these victimized individuals. Human trafficking is a recognized problem worldwide that is brought on for various reasons and the methods to end trafficking have, thus far, fallen short. First, it is important to understand precisely what human trafficking is. According to Diaz, human trafficking is as follows: " the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum,... the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (UN, 2000, art. 3). " While it seems unlikely that here in the 21st century slavery still exists, it is a growing concern. In fact, it has grown to " epidemic" proportions as the forces of globalization have made human trafficking a highly profitable and virtually risk-free enterprise (Kara). While exact statistics are elusive due to human trafficking's clandestine nature, the U. N. reported that 2. 4 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking (ProQuest Staff). Internationally, about 600, 000 to 800, 000

people are trafficked each year. In the US alone, 14, 500 to 17, 500 people are trafficked annually. Of all trafficked, half are children and approximately seventy-five percent are women. And of all females trafficked, seventy percent are trafficked for sexual purposes (Hodge). In the United States, victims were identified from more than 40 different countries of origin spanning the globe (Hodge). Whether for commercial sex, construction, domestic work, carpet weaving, agriculture, tea and coffee, shrimp, fish, minerals, dimensional stones, gems, or numerous other industries investigated, human trafficking touches almost every sector of the globalized economy in a way it never has before (Kara). Moreover, just behind the drug and arms trade, human trafficking is estimated to be the second highest source of revenue for criminals(Hodge). Of all forms of slavery, sex slavery is one of the most exploitative and lucrative with some 200, 000 sex slaves worldwide bringing their slaveholders an annual profit of \$10. 5 billion (Leuchtag). " Trafficking in persons" is primarily understood as the movement of persons across international boundaries for a variety of forms of exploitation. The crime of trafficking, of course, is not essentially about the movement of the person but about the exploitation. Trafficking is the denial of freedom (Goodson). Regardless of the trafficker/trafficking industry, they each share three common practices: Acquisition of persons, movement of said persons and the exploitation of said persons (Kara). Acquisition is completed in a variety of ways, but the common thread between them is deceit. The first method for enticing potential victims is through false-front agencies. These consist of elaborate organizations that promise work and help to those who seek it (Hodge). However, they do not intend on giving

these services. Instead, they trap these women and children into a binding contract. Usually something along the lines of " you live here, you do as I say. " This is to say that they are promised jobs like an au pair or secretary, but instead they are forced to sell themselves to cover expenses. The victims are then forced into prostitution or forced labor (Zoba). The next method of acquisition is through the means of local sex industries. That is to say, women currently involved in harmless sexual careers of their own volition are offered a new position. They are told this position will be a promotion but turns out torturous. Now, they are forced in prostitution. Thirdly, traffickers target destitute, downtrodden families when acquiring new bodies. Here, the traffickers simply promise the families a better future. Often times they will get parents to surrender their children by telling them they will bring them to America for a prosperous future. This is never the case, however. Instead, they take these poor, naïve individuals across national borders. Then, the traffickers force them into prostitution, forced labor or another form of exploitation. Similarly, traffickers will resort to the extreme to keep their market flowing. That is to say traffickers will flat out abduct individuals. No false agencies or open ended lies. The traffickers flat-out steal these individuals from their respective homes and traffic them, continuously, worldwide (Hodge). Typically, trafficked persons are transferred from place to place. The United States, Germany, and Italy are the top three destination countries, with the Netherlands and Japan close behind. It is noted that most destination countries are developed nations. Also, the victims are sent to " transit countries", such as Mexico, to make it easier to get them across national borders of the aforementioned destination countries (Zoba). This is

both to maximize profit by keeping a constant, fresh supply of women as well as to keep the victims disoriented. While in transit and on the job, those trafficked are exploited incessantly. Most frequently, the individuals are forced to sell themselves with little to no compensation. Slave exploiters often re-sell trafficked slaves to new exploiters. If the slaves do not escape, their cycle of exploitation may never end. Even if they do escape, they often return to the same conditions of poverty or vulnerability that led to their initial enslavement, resulting in one or more instances of re-trafficking (Kara). For those sold into sexual trafficking, they are forced into malicious sexual acts. During this "career", the individuals have little say as to what types of sexual acts they are willing to do. If they are to refuse, they may be raped or their pimps or "owners" would beat or threaten them. This does not end there. Pimps will threaten to harm the prostitute's family if she becomes unmanageable. Even more so, women may be beaten, stabbed or possibly murdered. Pimps will continue violence to keep them in line, to exert their dominance and humiliate these women, whenever they deem necessary (Hodge). As a result, the average life span of a prostitute is 34-years old and the career has the second highest homicide rate, just behind liquor store workers (Benetts). The women and children that received the deplorable treatment suffer greatly. Injuries are common amongst the victims but negative psychological effects are much more prevalent (Hodge). Often the prostitutes have drug dependencies and mental illness, along with malnutrition (Benetts). Many of the prostitutes experience shame, panic attacks, depression, low self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder (Hodge). The list goes on to include disease and stunted growth, often with

permanent effect. Victims of sex trafficking may also face exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, permanent damage to reproductive organs, and, depending on the age at which they are trafficked, missed critical opportunities for social, moral and spiritual development (Birkenthal). By age thirty, these individuals are both physically and emotionally disabled (Hodge). To make matters worse, prostitutes that manage to escape human trafficking are commonly treated as criminals. In fact, for every buyer caught purchasing a prostitute, 50 prostitutes are arrested. This negative view towards the victims prevents some individuals from seeking help from law enforcement (Benetts). Human trafficking has a variety of different causes. In other words, societies have many different "push" factors that are more likely to result in more people being trafficked. In the countries of origin, trafficking is commonly caused by poverty, a lack of political, social or economic stability, a shortage of legal job opportunities, situations of oppression and armed conflict, domestic violence, lack of a family structure, gender discrimination and limited access to education. Destination countries, however, have "pull" factors that are known to cause human trafficking. These include the costs of paying legally hired workers, an increased demand for cheap labor, and a rise in the sex industry. Other factors that cause human trafficking, not particular to either the origin or destination countries, include the following: a lack of public awareness, lack of understanding of the dangers of trafficking, the high profit potential for those involved in criminal activity, the sophisticated networks formed by the traffickers, a lack of effective legislation and enforcement opposing human trafficking, global economic policies that continually exclude marginalized

members of society, a lack of or faulty social protection networks and corruption of political figures or groups (Birkenthal). Human trafficking is a well-known problem in modern day. However, it is elusive. Human trafficking is rooted in criminal secrecy. Due to the minimal risk of trafficking human beings, criminals involved in drug and arms trading are beginning to look into the trafficking of humans; one of the few commodities that can be sold more than once. These criminals then form complex organized crime to get these trafficked victims from place to place. Frequently, criminals involved in trafficking will bribe corrupt public officials. Corruption enables human traffickers to operate successfully, whether through bribes to public officials or collaboration of officials with criminal networks. Officials holding key positions have used their authority to provide protection to those engaged in criminal activities by ignoring the illegal activities or blocking proposed legislation to end the illegal activity (Diaz). There have also been documented links between human trafficking and terrorism. Profits from trafficking and prostitution have been used to support terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. In addition, terrorists use the transportation networks of smugglers and traffickers to move operatives (Birkenthal). In the globalized world, everyone must take steps to end human trafficking. The global effort to combat human trafficking is organized around prevention, prosecution, and protection. Preventing the occurrence of human trafficking as well as remedying its past harms will require a global partnership of countries and governmental/non-governmental organizations. Sending countries should be the focal point of prevention strategies. Economic development, with a special emphasis on women and girls, constitutes perhaps the best long-

term approach to combating human trafficking. At the same time, there is a great need for educational outreach programs to alert individuals and communities to the tricks traffickers use and the dangers of being trafficked. Anti-human trafficking education must be offered repeatedly if it is to have lasting effect (Diaz). Equally important, trafficking must not only be universally criminalized, but traffickers must be effectively prosecuted for the crime (Birkenthal). Breaking up trafficking networks and imprisoning traffickers stops the recruitment and movement of trafficked persons. Unfortunately, it has been the most difficult of the three strategies to develop and implement. In countries with weak legal systems and corrupt police and courts, investigation of human traffickers is a rare occurrence, and conviction even rarer. Even in countries where the environment for investigation, prosecution, and conviction is favorable, the results have been disappointing (Diaz). In the United States, the national success rate in solving murder cases is about 70 percent; about 11, 000 murders are solved each year. Nevertheless, the annual percentage of trafficking and slavery cases solved is less than one percent. Therefore, if 17, 500 people were newly enslaved in America, the Department of Justice would only bring charges against merely 111 people for human trafficking and slavery (Bales). The ugliness of human trafficking dates back centuries. Even though it was agreed 150 years ago as a human civilization that slavery is unacceptable, it is more pervasive and expansive today than it was centuries ago (Kara). The forces of globalization have made human trafficking a highly profitable and virtually risk-free enterprise (Diaz). As a matter of ensuring basic human dignity and freedom, the global community must utilize every resource

available to combat traffickers and slave exploiters by elevating the real risk and cost of the crime, while eliminating the immense profitability that human traffickers and slave exploiters currently enjoy (Desyallas). The persistence of human trafficking is an insult to human dignity and a denial of morality by modern civilization. The time is long overdue for the world to come together to deploy the kinds of sustained interventions required to eliminate this evil forever.

Works Consulted

Bales, Kevin. "Winning the fight: eradicating slavery in the modern age." *Harvard International Review* 31. 1 (2009): 14+. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

Bennetts, Leslie. "The John Next Door." *Newsweek*. 25 Jul 2011: n. p. SIRS Issues Researcher. Web. 11 Dec. 2012.

Birkenthal, Sara. "Human trafficking: a human rights abuse with global dimensions." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Rights Law Annual* 2011: 27+. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

Desyllas, Moshoula Capous. "A critique of the global trafficking discourse and U. S. policy." *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 34. 4 (2007): 57+. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

Diaz, Mariel, et al. "Globalization and human trafficking." *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 34. 2 (2007): 107+. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

Goodson, Jennifer. "Sex Trafficking Threatens the United States." *Prostitution and Sex Trafficking*. Ed. Louise Gerdes. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2006. Opposing Viewpoints. Rpt. from "Exploiting Body and Soul: Sex Trafficking Is Big Business Around the World—and the Root of That Business Is Closer to Home than You Might Think." *Sojourners* 34 (Sept.-Oct. 2005): 20. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

Hodge, David R. "Sexual Trafficking in the United States: A Domestic Problem with

Transnational Dimensions." *Social work* 53. 2 (2008): 143-52. ProQuest Discovery. Web. 11 Dec. 2012. Kara, Siddharth. " Supply and demand: human trafficking in the global economy." *Harvard International Review* 33. 2 (2011): 66+. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 12 Jan. 2013. Leuchtag, Alice. " Sex Slavery Must Be Eradicated." *Slavery* Auriana Ojeda. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2004. At Issue. Rpt. from " Human Rights, Sex Trafficking, and Prostitution." *The Humanist* 63 (2003): 10-16. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 14 Jan. 2013. Today. Ed. ProQuest Staff. " Human Trafficking Timeline." *Leading Issues Timelines*. Sept. 11 2012: n. p. SIRS Issues Researcher. Web. 09 Dec 2012. Siagian, Sandra. " Celebrity Power Boosts U. N.'s Anti-Trafficking Blitz." *Global Information Network*. 27 Nov 2011: n. p. SIRS Issues Researcher. Web. 12 Jan 2013. Zoba, Wendy Murray. " Ignorance and Complacency Promote Sex Trafficking." *What are the Causes of Prostitution?* Ed. Louise Gerdes. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2007. At Issue. Rpt. from " The Hidden Slavery." *Christianity Today* 47 (Nov. 2003): 68. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.