

Sex Trafficking in the United States

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Introduction

Twenty-first-century sex slaves exist for the benefit of men- shocking. Unfortunately, women who are mentally, physically, and socioeconomically vulnerable are coerced into the sex trafficking industry. Well of course most would agree that this is an issue, but you might not be able to recite a specific example of sex trafficking in your head. Meena Hasina, for example, is an Indian Muslim who was prostituted in a brothel run by the Nutt, a low-caste tribe that controls the local sex trade in Bihar, India where there is virtually nothing commercially available besides sex. The United States has a peculiar stance on prostitution, for it is typically viewed as an opportunity women divert to out of economic desperation. While that does occur, prostitution is not voluntary for all its workers. For example, Meena was only eight or nine years old when she was kidnapped and trafficked near the Nepal border and sold to a Nutt clan where she was kept in a rural house by the brothel owner with other prepubescent girls until the time seemed fit, they were able to attract a proper client base. Meena traumatically recalls her interaction with a first client where she fought and cried so much the male client was unable to complete his desired goal. Meena states, "I resisted so much that they had to return the money to him. and they beat me with mercilessly with a belly, with sticks, and iron rods. The beating was tremendous" (Kristof and WuDunn 33). She would be threatened death if she did not comply with clients, and the brothel owners drugged her drinks so they could rape her- sounds like the United States. Meena and her coworkers had 7-10 customers a day, 7 days a week. Fortunately, Meena is a free and healthy woman now.

Unfortunately, this scenario is all too common around the world, specifically for women. Innocent women will be followed, watched, and tracked, even in the public eye, where they will

be coerced and/or taken. Most young females would answer in agreement that they are aware and fearful of sex trafficking in casual public places.

Human trafficking is divided into categories- the predominant ones being labor and sex trafficking. Human trafficking currently enslaves over 24.9 million people worldwide (International Labor Organization 2017). 20.1 million of those are labor trafficking victims whereas 4.8 million are sex trafficking victims. Labor trafficking is when victims are forced to perform/ produce a task through coercion, force, fraud, etc. Human sex trafficking is considered a form of modern-day slavery that involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to perform in commercial sex and sexual exploitation in which others benefit from their service. In some sense, labor trafficking is often yet accidentally intertwined with the term sex trafficking, for sex trafficking work is/ can be regarded as labor. However, the main distinguishing factor is sex trafficking tasks are sexual in nature, while laborious tasks are not. Sex trafficking consists of the largest number of victims. Sex trafficking is currently the most rapidly expanding form of global criminal activity, and 98% of victims are women and children (Goz'dziak & MacDonnell 174). In the United States alone, an estimated 100,000 American children are victims of sex trafficking annually (Siskin & Wyler 269). The United States is ranked one of the worst countries in the world for sex trafficking. In fact, the United States continues to hold the trophy for being the second-largest consumer in the world of sex trafficking! (Cecchet and Thoburn 489). In 2020, over 10,000 instances of trafficking were reported to the U.S. National Human Trafficking. It is important to note, the majority of what is known regarding sex trafficking has been developed from the international realm of the industry, "there are virtually no scientific data detailing the processes by which American women and children are sold into slavery within our own borders" (Cecchet and Thoburn 482). In addition, current statistics estimate that there are 300,000

prostituted children in the United States (Cecchet and Thoburn 483). However, it is difficult for the United States to put a true number on the amount of sex trafficking victims due to a lack of reporting and accountability of underground illegal activity. In this paper, sex trafficking will be discussed and analyzed- not labor trafficking.

It important is to further the understanding of human sex trafficking while attempting to determine the causes and recruitment and/or luring of human sex trafficking within the boundaries of the United States. The term "recruitment" has a connotation of voluntary participation, just as sororities recruit voluntary participants. However, the recruitment of sex trafficking victims is far from voluntary in most cases. Moreover, the effects of human trafficking on an economic and political scale will be analyzed in prevention and response, as well as the resources available to victims. There is a common finding from all studies- the majority of all sex trafficking victims are females who come from vulnerable situations and/or backgrounds and are generally recruited at a young age. Many of these victims come from physical and/or sexually abusive backgrounds making them vulnerable to immense control from their traffickers. However, it is important to note sex trafficking victims can be males, but there is minimal research and statistics regarding male victims. Consequently, being a victim of the sex trafficking industry resulted in these female victims suffering from psychological issues. The United States government is responsible for providing adequate resources for victims, and legal consequences for traffickers.

Because of the government's role, or lack thereof in prevention and response, sex trafficking has irreversible effects on the victim's psychological well-being and on an economic and political level within the United States. Sex trafficking is a human rights violation that ought

to be addressed in the United States. It is integral for the recruitment process of victims to be understood and halted to combat the issue of sex trafficking.

Causes

Many people are unaware of what sex trafficking is or what causes it. Sex trafficking is a term many do not understand or comprehend. Females are at a disproportionate risk to be a victim of sex trafficking, for 98% of victims are women and children. Women are affected in particular as they are significantly more likely to experience economic vulnerability due to a deficit in sustainable career options and a lack of educational opportunities which becomes more prevalent in economically unstable countries (Farr 25).

There are two main theories that are correlated to the causes of sex trafficking: the socioeconomic theory and feminist theory. However, these theories are prevalent in literature and studies but are not widely discussed.

The socioeconomic theory proposes there is a relationship between social standing and economics. In other words, the fact that every country's role in the sex trafficking industry is directly related to local and global economic environments, the country's poverty and employment rates, the level of human development, and per capita income (Farr 32). This means countries that are trafficking/ exporting women and children out of the country are likely to be more economically unstable than those who are receiving the victims. The United States is a country that often receives victims as we are considered an economically fortunate country. Countries such as Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh account for large exploitation of victims out of the country, and these are economically developing nations.

Consequently, related to the socioeconomic theory is the feminist theory. The feminist theory acts by examining the effect of woman's social class and class roles present in the economy and the power difference present between men and women. Regardless of the country of origin, and in this case, the United States, women almost always have a lower status, less economic opportunity, and less power and are less desirable than men in the workforce and community, which makes them an easy target for human traffickers (Farr 16). In addition, the lower the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood, the higher the exposure to legal prostitution such as strip clubs and adult stores. Although prostitution in some neighborhoods is legal, it creates a territory where female minors and women are harassed and approached by pimps and johns daily to be actively recruited into the sex trade. This emphasizes the theory/idea that women who are vulnerable whether it be mentally, physically, or socioeconomically are more likely to become a victim.

In addition, the economic prosperity surrounding the sex trafficking industry as one of the most profitable in the world allows for the continuation of sex trafficking. Well, globalization, the process by which people and goods move easily across borders, makes victims easy to obtain, transport, and exploit. However, globalization has caused its own headaches leaving tens of millions of individuals to be vulnerable to trafficking, particularly women and children. Mix vulnerable women and children with perverted men who purchase sex, and you have a recipe for disaster for victims, and heaven for these men.

Recruitment of Victims:

Ever wonder why the demand for sex slaves is so high? At least I do, I have assumed due to the digital age, and how pornography is accessible at the touch of a fingertip, why are so many

victims trafficked? Well, the sex- slave industry can be divided into three forces: male sexual demand, profit, and the elasticity of demand. Without the male demand for commercial sex, there would be no sex slave industry (Haney et al. 720). But only a small percentage of men are responsible for this horrible industry. So, it is important to understand that the vast majority of men have no correlation and contribution to this traumatizing industry. Whether these male users purchased sex once or multiple times a week, they are contributing to the economic prosperity of the industry.

Unfortunately, the demand for sex with children is steady, and profits for traffickers and pimps have increased. Thus, these factors have contributed to the further recruitment of victims. Traffickers/ pimps prey on and groom vulnerable youth to enter the life of sex trafficking. Traffickers in the United States range from teenage boys, young men, and men and women ranging from those who work for older white male pimps to organized criminal sex trafficking rings within and out of state and border lines. Technology has also increased the accessibility and rate of accessing a wider client base. These traffickers manipulate victims and abuse them mentally, emotionally, and physically to show who is in control. Those who purchase services for sexual benefits from pimps/ traffickers are known as solicitors, buyers, and "johns." However, not all solicitors/ buyers are always aware that these "performers" may be underage, but that does still not make it okay to partake (Glover 35)!

Effects of Trafficking on Individuals (Specifically Psychological)

Unfortunately, it is no surprise victims of sex trafficking suffer from psychological trauma due to their experiences in the industry. While assumptions can be made, that majority if

not all victims' mental well-being is negatively affected, there are limited data studies examining the psychological experiences of survivors, specifically of child sex trafficking in the form of prostitution in the United States (Cecchet and Thoburn 482). Despite the limited data and research, it is paramount to increase awareness and understanding of survivors' psychological experiences to effectively develop and promote the appropriate services for victims.

A qualitative research study interviewed 6 female survivors of adolescent and child sex trafficking over the age of 18 to, “assess factors that influenced their ability to survive, leave the sex trade, and reintegrate back into the community” (Cecchet and Thoburn 482). Only women participated in this study due to the disproportionate number of women involved in sex trafficking. Additionally, all 6 participants were victims of sex trafficking in form the of child prostitution- hence a victim before 18 years of age. The study occurred in the state of Washington between March 2011 to May 2011; all participants were United States citizens and spoke English as their first language. All participants were female, and ages ranged from 22 to 55 years ($M = 45.5$); four participants identified as African American, one participant identified as Caucasian, and one participant identified as Mixed (Cecchet and Thoburn 485). The common thread between these women is not only did they enter the sex trade as children, but they also all survived into adulthood.

All participants reported numerous factors or influences in their childhood that made them more vulnerable than their peers in their community. The concept of "predisposing vulnerability is comprised of the category child abuse and its two themes, sexual abuse and absent father" (Cecchet and Thoburn 486). Every survivor/participant of the study disclosed sexual abuse as a child, and/or having an absent father. Thus, this bridges a connection between abusive childhood and vulnerability to being recruited into sex trafficking.

Consequently, the study/project constructed the vulnerability to sex trafficking recruitment into four themes: a desire to feel loved, being in love with the pimp (a man who controls prostitutes and arranges clients for monetary gain), a family member being involved in prostitution, and prostitution in the neighborhood. All participants recounted a deeply rooted desire to be loved that likely stemmed from their childhood experiences of sexual abuse and an absent father figure (Cecchet and Thoburn 486). There is a correlation between abuse as a child to vulnerability and in turn recruitment of sex trafficking while all being in a negative psychological state. Vulnerable beings will be groomed to become a member/victims of sex trafficking. All participants were in severe psychological distress while being a victim whether they were always conscious of it or not.

One victim recounted, "I was 19. He made me strip and put my feet on the dashboard and grab my toes and sit like that with a gun to my head. Then he made me get out of the car, naked... He had the gun to my head, and he made me perform oral sex. I vomited. I just wanted to live, let me live" (Cecchet and Thoburn 487). Subsequently, in order to cope and numb themselves to the traumatic encounters they endured, all participants admitted to being stoned.

Another victim, outside the scope of this research study, recounted that she was regularly starved, tortured, and forced to undergo painful abortions whenever she became pregnant. The victim stated, "We worked six days a week and twelve-hour days. We mostly had to serve thirty-two to thirty-five clients a day. Weekends were worse. Our bodies were utterly sore and swollen. The bosses did not care . . . we worked no matter what. This included during menstruation which we had to hide" (Kara 186).

Each participant had the motivation to exit the sex trade and did so successfully; all correlating their motivation to the same reason- pregnancy. In other words, all participants

reported they had a child with their pimp and/or drug dealer, and becoming pregnant was the chief catalyst of their decision to leave the sex trade. There are multiple factors and components as to why/how pregnancy affected each of these females to gain the courage and strength to leave the sex trade. These factors include but are not limited to the custody of the child, the number of abortions, and mental health. Some of the participants reported their pimps took custody of their child, fueling the desire for the women to provide a better life for their child free of the sex industry as well as refusing to abort the unborn child. A participant stated, "I have a daughter, she's almost 4, but I don't have custody of her, her dad does. He's a pimp" (Cecchet and Thoburn 488). The participant wanted a better life for herself, her child, and future children, and felt compelled/motivated to leave the sex trade industry. Concerning abortion, the participants relayed how impactful the impending decision to have an abortion(s) affected their mental health crucially. Most participants reported having more than one abortion because of pregnancy from their pimp and/or pimp's clients, while others reported upward of 3 or more. Abortion is certainly arguably the most personal and difficult decision a woman could have to make, and involvement/presence of the sex trade community only amplifies the decision, especially as a minor.

These women were trapped in a society where they were powerless and subjected to violence, rape, and death threats at the mercy of their pimp. Hence, women from the study reported severe mental health issues during their involvement in the sex trade, as well as during their recovery. All participants disclosed they suffer/ed from severe mental health issues as well as intense detachment and numbness of their feelings and social interactions. Therefore, sex trafficking has had irreversible psychological effects on the participants from this study, and these women stand as a symbolic representation of all past and present sex trafficking victims. Despite the trauma and hardship suffered by these victims, these women were able to persist and

not only keep up their determination to live but also their strength to ensure their survival exemplifying resilience.

Economic Effects

Sex slavery is a profitable business which is why it will probably never end. The obtainment, movement, and exploitation of sex slaves create an industry within a profit margin larger than quite frankly any other industry in the world. The business of the sex slave was analyzed and segmented into three parts: the overall size and growth of the industry in the number of victims, revenue, and profits from the sale of victims to exploiters, and revenues generated by the exploitation of sex slaves (Kara 16). While this was projected in 2009, there was a 3.5 percent projection growth for the next five years.

In terms of the number of sex slaves, profit margin estimates have been generated regarding the exploitation of victims. From an international perspective, two numbers were suggested for the annual profits generated by the entire human trafficking industry. The U.S. State Department projected \$9.5 billion and a whopping \$31.7 billion by the International Labour Organization (ILO)- a hell of a lot of money! On a smaller and more intricate level, in 2007 a sale of trafficked victims to owners of brothels and pimps generated a revenue of \$1.0 billion. On an individual level, it calculates to an average sale price of \$1,895 per sex slave (Kara 19). On a personal note, I do not like to use the term slave, but multiple articles and studies refer to trafficking victims as modern-day slaves.

The total revenue due to the exploitation of sex trafficking victims is horrifying coming from a study in 2007, and sex trafficking is only on the rise. While these are rough estimates,

they will certainly appall you. The sale of victims generated approximately \$600 million in profits, while commercial exploitation generated over \$51 billion in revenue. In simple terms, commercial exploitation is the result of millions of horny disgusting men purchasing sex slaves daily. At the end of the day, these repulsive exploiters generated \$36 billion in profits, with an average of over \$29,000 per slave (Kara 19).

One question you may have is why there is such a high supply of sex slaves. Well, globalization as mentioned in the “causes” section of this paper describes sex trafficking as easy and profitable. There is minimal effort needed to maintain sex trafficking victims; these victims will be sold and overworked for sex services thousands and thousands of times generating immense profit before replacement. While this paper is in the scope of the United States, for perspective, a brothel owner in Western Europe can purchase a sex slave ranging anywhere from \$2000-\$8000 with a guaranteed return of over 1000% per year.

Well from a business perspective, as you minimize costs, specifically labor, you increase profit. Brothels at the end of the day are a business. These owners fill their brothers with prostitutes/ sex workers and “pay” these workers a portion of the price each male client pays. But these brothel owners pocket most of the price tag clients pay for sex and pay their laborers close to nothing. If you are wondering how much a "session" with a sex slave costs? The answer is not that much, yet the economic profit is astonishing. In the United States, it is around 1.4 hours a week of work. Americans work an average of 40 hours a week, so to many what is not even 2 hours of work for sex, seems worth it to them. Therefore, this industry will only continue to thrive, and that is not the only reason. Despite law enforcement, governmental politics, etc., the reason the sex industry thrives is short and simple: incredible profits with minimal risk.

The term "minimal risk" seems bizarre to say the least. You can thank the failures in legal and law-enforcements approaches to sex trafficking for an absence of real risk. Although this seems ridiculous, one failure is confusion over the definition of sex trafficking as there are further emphases on the transportation and movement of victims rather than their exploitation of them. In addition, there is corruption within law enforcement, US border patrol, and government judicial systems, lack of teamwork and coordination in investing, and in turn proper prosecution of victims. This is just a brief synopsis of why sex trafficking continues to be profitable.

Unfortunately, the United States might be the richest country in the world, but they have spent an average of only sixty million per year on anti-trafficking efforts since the year 2001. Take this statistic with a grain of salt, "This sum is three hundred and thirty-three times less per year than the twenty billion dollars spent annually to fight the war on drugs" (Kara 195). The U.S. anti-trafficking spending calculates to around \$22 per trafficked slave in the world. The war on drugs is incredibly important and that statistic by no means is to make the war on drugs inferior to sex trafficking. In my opinion, there should not be that great of a disparity in spending between sex trafficking and the war on drugs; they ought to be held to the same standard or at least similar, not 333 times less. With respect to another war, over \$200 billion were spent yearly starting from 2003 to aid Iraq's 26 million citizens which calculates to \$7,700 per Iraqi per year (Kara 196). While opinion on the United States spending and treatment of foreign countries is not relevant to the purpose of this paper, 22 dollars compared to 7,700 dollars is ridiculous.

Governmental Effects

The United States plays a crucial role in combatting and protecting sex trafficking victims in the United States. The United States federal legislation in place acts to combat sex trafficking as a federal crime. The federal legislations include The Mann Act, Section 1591 of

Title 18 of the United States Code, and the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000.

The Mann Act prohibits prostitution and illegal sexual activities that involve both foreign and national travel. The Mann Act includes three primary substantive sections. Interstate or international transportation of a person for prostitution or illegal sexual behavior is prohibited by Section 2421. Section 2422 forbids the use of coercion or enticing someone to travel interstate or internationally for prostitution or illegal sexual activity, using a means of interstate communication to coerce or entice a child in such a manner. Section 2423 criminalizes both foreign and interstate travel related to prostitution, "illicit sexual activity," or unlawful sexual purposes (Glover 2). Section 1591 and various sections of the Mann Act overlap. Therefore, at times, one may be prosecuted for violation of one or more of the Mann Act offenses and Section 1591.

Section 1591 of Title 18 of the United States Federal Code makes it a federal offense to knowingly traffic a minor as someone under the age of 18. In other words, "Section 1591 makes criminal several of the activities associated with the creation or operation of a commercial sex trafficking enterprise which uses children or coerced or deceived adults. It also proscribes profiting from such an enterprise or obstructing the investigation of its activities" (Glover 3). Punishment for violating Section 1591 includes imprisonment for a minimum of 15 years, and a minimum of 10 years if the offender is less than 18 years of age and the victim is above 14 years old. Federal courts also have the authority to demand that offenders pay restitution to victims under numerous statutes. This is the least that can be done considering how much trauma and abuse an offender inflicts on their victims. The victims also have the right to bring upon a civil suit to recover damages and reasonable attorney fees. Sadly, in some cases, this comes within 10-

year statute limitations which is frankly not a lot of time considering how young some victims are trafficked and the duration of trafficking. Thankfully, one who "aids, abets, counsels, commands, induces or procures" a crime is treated as if they committed the crime themselves" (Glover 9).

Before 2000, U.S. laws were believed to be inadequate for dealing with sex trafficking. However, The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) is a federal statute signed into law by President Clinton and the United States Congress. Under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), "the primary law that addresses trafficking, sex trafficking of children is a federal crime—even if a child is not removed from his or her community" (Glover 43). Under federal law, regardless of whether a child is suspected to have consented to sex or if the child represents himself/herself as an adult, the child is considered a trafficking victim. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (encompasses both labor and sex trafficking), regarding sex trafficking, it states, "[s]ex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age" (Glover 41). The TVPA provides services to victims and several agencies within the government have programs and grants available to victims as they begin their new chapter of life. Thankfully the TVPA views juveniles who are involved in commercial sex acts to be victims of these crimes. Because unfortunately that was not always the case and there has been anger regarding that, and rightfully so. Minors who are victims of sex trafficking, so clearly under the age of consent, at times have been labeled as prostitutes and/or juvenile delinquents and treated as criminals rather than victims. In some cases, children have been arrested and placed in juvenile detention centers instead of being placed in facilities with proper services and resources to treat their mental,

emotional, and physical health due to their brutal endeavors. As if they haven't been psychologically tormented enough, it is appalling and infuriating to think child victims have been placed behind bars.

The TVPA since its enactment in 2000 has been reauthorized in 2003, 2006, 2008, and 2013, each time increasing focus on U.S. citizens and services available to victims, specifically children. Congress is actively considering demand reduction strategies as well as increasing public awareness for signs for healthcare workers, teachers, social workers, etc. to spot. In addition, Congress is acting to increase investigations and prosecutions of sex traffickers and buyers "johns." Luckily, the TVPA and the Department of Justice's Office for Victims (OVC) provide emergency services for victims such as temporary housing, medical care, counseling, and legal assistance after victims have been properly identified and cleared by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (Glover 87).

There is still much work and strides to be made by United States Government, but they are headed in the right direction. Viewing child victims as criminals rather than innocent victims is disappointing and are certainly still happening in the United States. The United States ought to increase awareness, services, and resources for victims, as well as punishments for traffickers. On the bright side, the United States government passed The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act in 2014 to require state child welfare agencies to develop and execute procedures regarding the identification, documentation in agency records, and determining applicable services for child victims and potential victims (Haney et al. 734). Agencies will then be required to report to law enforcement in the U.S. HHS to protect and provide resources to such victims. This is a step in the right direction, but further laws and actions ought to be signed into legislation.

Conclusion

Sex trafficking is a worldwide epidemic where young women particularly will be preyed on and coerced for the benefit of horny men. Sex trafficking is difficult to comprehend and hard to track statistically, but it is happening around us. Unfortunately, it is a cycle that is tough to break as women have been viewed as inferior and vulnerable compared to men since the beginning of time. Some men do and will continue to use this as an opportunity to complete whatever sexual desires they may dream of. But at what price? Sex trafficking victims are physically, emotionally, and mentally harmed and/or tortured, subject to substance abuse, impregnated, then told what to do with their unborn child, and those who have the opportunity and courage to flee, carry their scars with them.

While it is impossible to change the past, it is crucial to paving the pathway for a better future. With the availability of enhanced resources for victims, increased training of healthcare, law enforcement, and the ordinary citizen to identify victims, and increased government awareness and effort, the halt of sex trafficking can occur. It is certainly difficult for the United States to combat sex trafficking in other countries, but they can continue and heighten their efforts on U.S. soil.

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