

DIGGING DEEPER

Human Trafficking

People are not commodities, yet the trade in human beings is thriving.
Our fight is for freedom and the dignity of humanity.



Photo: Nikki Denholm

Introduction

Human trafficking is an organised criminal activity that deceives and coerces people into slavery. It is a very profitable industry¹. The International Labour Organisation estimates that forced exploitation generates NZD230 billion in annual profit through human trafficking and slavery².

Human trafficking is an abuse of a person's humanity. It tears families apart. Sometimes parents are in circumstances that compel them to sell their children, or are manipulated into giving their children up. Even when an individual is freed from trafficking, they are not necessarily reunited with their family. Sometimes the stigma surrounding the victim is so great that it is extremely difficult for them to return to their home and family. Returning home may actually result in the individual being re-victimised or taken further advantage of because of their vulnerability.

Trafficking is a truly terrible form of exploitation, and it is rife in our world. Tearfund is passionate about tackling this injustice. To do this effectively, we first have to understand what it is we are dealing with.

Definitions

Today, it's common to hear the words 'slavery,' 'exploitation' and 'trafficking' used interchangeably when discussing this subject. Let's take a look at what these terms mean.

Trafficking

In our present culture, trafficking has become an umbrella term that includes slavery, exploitation and the forced movement of people. However, trafficking has a specific meaning. It refers to the illegal recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring and receiving of people for the purpose of exploiting them³. The trafficker often has power or control over the victim through threats, coercion,

1. www.gfintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Transnational_Crime-final_exec-summary.pdf

2. www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm

3. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>

abduction, deception or blackmail. Some countries, like New Zealand, define illegal people movement as trafficking only where it involves cross-border activity. However, this view of trafficking is too narrow as much trafficking happens within national borders in many instances.

Exploitation

Once trafficked, individuals often become victims of exploitation. At its most basic, exploitation means treating someone unfairly to your own advantage or in order to benefit from their work (Reference: Cambridge & Oxford dictionaries). The United Nations states, “Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”⁴

Slavery

Following on from the broader idea of exploitation, slavery is a specific type of exploitation to which a person may be subjected. According to the Slavery Convention of 1926, a slave is a person who is owned. Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.⁵

Who gets trafficked?

Human trafficking involves power imbalances. The imbalance becomes obvious when looking at the profile of victims. Gender, age, and economic status are common factors. Often these are combined, with young women from impoverished communities being highly susceptible to trafficking and exploitation.

In 2016, most of the victims identified across the world were female—mainly adult women, but increasingly girls⁶. The vast majority of the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are

4. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>

5. [www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/SlaveryConvention.aspx#:~:text=\(1\)%20Slavery%20is%20the%20status,right%20of%20ownership%20are%20exercised.](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/SlaveryConvention.aspx#:~:text=(1)%20Slavery%20is%20the%20status,right%20of%20ownership%20are%20exercised.)

6. www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2018/GLOTIP_2018_BOOK_web_small.pdf (p 10)



Photo: Nikki Denholm

female. Furthermore, 35% of the victims trafficked for forced labour are female, both women and girls. On the other hand, more than half of the victims of trafficking for forced labour are men.

Sexual exploitation is the exercising of the power of males against females. Women and girls make up 99% of the victims in this area. Unsurprisingly, most traffickers are identified as male. Studies show that, where females are perpetrators, they are particularly active in the recruitment phase of trafficking but not so much at the higher levels.

Alongside gender, age, and economic status, the U.S. Department of State recognises marginalized ethnic minorities, undocumented immigrants, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities as being susceptible to trafficking and slavery.

Causes of Trafficking

In the world that many of us experience, it can be hard to understand how people can be trafficked in the first place. Why would people sell their children? Or why would someone simply go with someone else because they are promised work? How could such lies be so easily believed?

Poverty is the main contributor to human trafficking, as it makes people vulnerable to exploitation⁷. Poverty gives rise to the debt that individuals or families can't get out of. It makes people susceptible to lies about jobs for themselves or family members that result in people unwittingly being trafficked. Traffickers prey on vulnerable people, such as families who can't afford to provide for all their children and who are forced to withdraw their children from school so that they can find work. The same desperation to get out of debt can cause parents to be willing to sell a child.

Poverty is often compounded by a lack of education. This decreases both the work opportunities available to an individual and their knowledge of their rights. Both these factors lead to increased vulnerability to traffickers.

Our goal is to combat Modern Slavery in all its forms.

Traffickers exploit people seeking opportunities for a better life. Political instability and the lack of legitimate economic opportunities push many people living in poverty to go in search of different opportunities. Sadly, a lack of safe migration options for these people often means they are prime targets for traffickers. Both the journey and the destination can be perilous. Over the last decade, we have all become familiar with sickening stories of boats filled with migrants capsizing or sinking in the Mediterranean Sea. Since 2014, more than 18,000 people have drowned or disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to reach Europe. Many of these people have enlisted the help of traffickers to help them make the dangerous journey. For those who manage to reach their destination, vulnerabilities still exist if the methods of travel were illegal. Without proper work permits, individuals are vulnerable to forced labour or to becoming trapped in bonded labour owing large debts to traffickers or labour brokers who promised to provide permits or similar. This is just one example of human trafficking; there are many other trafficking routes in different locations around the world.

Traffickers often prey on those who are impacted by conflict or natural disasters. Such events create ideal conditions for traffickers, as they often result in economic instability and lead to human rights abuses. Conflict forcibly displaces people, which makes them vulnerable to traffickers as they look for work or transport. The disruption caused by natural disasters creates a chaos in which traffickers prey on vulnerable individuals. A shocking example of this can be seen in what happened after the devastating Boxing Day Tsunami that hit South East Asia in 2004. In the carnage immediately after the disaster, traffickers were some of the first people to arrive, ready to find and sell children who had been separated from their families or orphaned by the disaster.

7. 10 Causes of Human Trafficking: <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/10-causes-of-human-trafficking/>

Demand

A major factor sustaining human trafficking is demand. Without the demand for people to be escorted illegally to Europe, or the demand for child pornography, or the demand for sex tourism in Thailand, there would almost certainly be a decrease in human trafficking.

A key focus of Tearfund's work is commercial sexual exploitation. In order to survive and thrive, sexual exploitation needs an environment where the commercialisation of sex is both accepted and demanded. Consequently, sexual exploitation, the trafficking of women and girls, prostitution, and pornography are all intimately linked.

Every day, there are 116,000 internet searches for the term 'child pornography.' Over 100,000 websites offer illegal child pornography. It is known that traffickers use pornography as a means to desensitize their victims to commercial sex and to train them on what paying clients will want⁸. Pimps and brothel-owners are also increasingly subjecting their victims to the filming of sex acts (sometimes unknowingly), with the material then being provided on the internet. With the proliferation of free pornography online, there is no guarantee that the consumer is not watching material that involves trafficking victims.

Sex tourism is a significant industry which plays a major role in the economies of countries like Thailand. The global demand for prostitution is high and many people travel to places like Thailand specifically to engage in commercial sex, often doing so with people who have been trafficked—whether the user is aware of it or not. Sadly, many also travel with the express purpose of engaging in sexual activity with minors.

By all definitions, sex—whether paid or not—with a trafficking victim is an act of rape. Watching pornographic material that contains a trafficking victim is a serious act of exploitation.

Sex workers have reported being shown pornography by clients in order to demonstrate what they wish to do. A culture of normalised commercial sex creates the environment needed for trafficking

for sexual exploitation to occur. Customers of prostitutes and consumers of pornography unwittingly play a strategic role in the chain of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Without the demand for commercial sex (prostitution or pornography), there would be no profitability in trafficking for sexual exploitation and the industry would die.

Conclusion

Understanding the vulnerability factors that contribute to individuals becoming victims of trafficking brings the issue squarely into the domain of organisations like Tearfund. The communities Tearfund works with always have several vulnerability factors present. For this reason, we use an end-to-end approach in our fight against human trafficking. To find out more on how we work in this space, check out our other resources, especially *An Introduction to Modern Slavery* and our study booklet *Church Mission and Modern Slavery*.

8. www.covenanteyes.com/2011/09/07/the-connections-between-pornography-and-sex-trafficking