

Human Trafficking

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This interactive sculpture addresses the global effects of human trafficking, including its past, present, and future impacts on society. I have attempted to recognize and analyze the ways in which society can prevent and counteract the trafficking industry's effects on the diverse worldwide population. The movable yarn and pegs are meant to consider the various components of human trafficking, and represent the many different lives people lead prior to human trafficking. I hope to call attention to the magnitude of the trafficking industry, and how it impacts so many lives, both in and out of the United States. My intention is to communicate the notion that there are so many people who are trapped and lost within the industry, that each victim is unique. There is no one solution and we must work to find pertinent solutions for all victims.

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Introduction

Throughout the world the human trafficking epidemic continues, ranging from forced labor on farms to sexual slavery it is apparent that the issue is very real and far more common than anyone would have thought. While all people are subject to being victims of human trafficking there are several groups more prone to being trafficked, the sex trafficking market consists of predominantly women and children. “Globally, the International Labor Organization estimates that there are 4.5 million people trapped in forced sexual exploitation globally.”¹ A question we must keep in mind as we go about our lives is how can the U.S. and the rest of the world prevent and counteract sex trafficking? As advocates for general human rights, it is the public’s responsibility to help prevent and educate our nation and world about human trafficking and how it impacts so much of our global population.

The History of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking has come to be known as the modern slavery, with it being such a huge industry many people wonder where it all started, and how. Throughout the 1800-1900’s there have been many different movements that address sex trafficking and prostitution, a notable one is the reformers working against the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs). The CDAs were a rule that said that women working in prostitution must be checked on a regular basis for STD’s. If they were found to have a disease they would be kept in a form of quarantine until they were deemed “better”. The singling out of the women working as prostitutes was extremely controversial, thus starting the movement against sex trafficking and the modern day slavery.

Internet Involvement

There is no one reason that people are brought into the sex trafficking industry, it can range from migrant workers in need of work within the U.S. to kidnappings from someone's driveway, one known factor is the involvement of the internet and social media. While the fact that we are capable of doing just about anything through a screen is incredibly innovative and productive there are also many downsides, one of the many being it is possible to buy a human being from a website. While certainly unintentional, there are many websites that make purchases and trading of people possible. With this modern technology, the sex trafficking industry has expanded more and more, by bringing in extremely large amounts of money and gaining power daily. One of the most notable and popular websites that have been linked to sex trafficking is Backpage, Backpage is a large ad/sales website similar to Craigslist. The website has a sex-ad page, which has been linked to many sex trafficking cases. A study found that Backpage had been “involved in 73 percent of cases of suspected child sex trafficking in the U.S.”² Knowing this it is obvious that some type of mediation is necessary. One of the largest issues that come with the mediation of Backpage is a law called Section 230, “Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which protects internet companies like Google (and The New York Times) from lawsuits — and also protects Backpage.”³ While the law is perfectly fine in retrospect it is the fact that Backpage is protected by Google that is problematic. While it is known that the website is linked to sex trafficking, prosecuting and shutting down the page is almost impossible. Apps such as Snapchat

¹ “Sex Trafficking.” *Polaris*, 26 Oct. 2017, polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/sex-trafficking.

² Kristof, Nicholas. “Meet a 21st-Century Slave.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 24 Oct. 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/opinion/sunday/meet-a-21st-century-slave.html.

³ Kristof, Nicholas. “Meet a 21st-Century Slave.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 24 Oct. 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/opinion/sunday/meet-a-21st-century-slave.html.

and Whatsapp have become more popular in the sex trafficking industry to lure people in, most often younger girls who frequent social media apps. Offers for money, care, or jobs are used in order to take advantage of the girls. Through this method, more and more people become involved in the industry. One statistic proved just how valuable the internet was to sex traffickers, “FAIR Girls said about 90 percent of the people it helped in Washington D.C. and Maryland had been sold online.”⁴ Social media apps have gained so much popularity over the years that traffickers have begun to use social media to connect with girls, while the apps aren’t doing anything wrong the large scale of them make tracking traffickers and identifying victims incredibly difficult. “Traffickers are using the scale and popularity of online services to essentially hide in plain sight.”⁵

Prevention

Many of the sex trafficking cases have very little to no trends of who is brought into the industry. “Reasons” vary greatly, some being the usage of social media or the internet, and others being kidnappings. Because of this solutions and prevention are incredibly difficult. However, attempts are being made. “The Bureau of Justice Assistance has also funded 42 Human Trafficking Task Forces to bring together federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities, government agencies, and nongovernmental victim-service providers in a multidisciplinary approach to identify human trafficking crimes, assist human trafficking victims, and prosecute human trafficking cases.” The Bureau of Justice’s attempts to bring together many different agencies and authorities is a step in the right direction. Resources such as hotlines are available to report sex trafficking and help victims, many programs and campaigns exist in order to make help more accessible. “Since 2010, the Department of Homeland Security has been launching the “Blue Campaign”- a program designed to coordinate and enhance anti-human trafficking efforts.”⁶ The Blue Campaign helps include and encourage American women as well as immigrants to get help and get educated on sex trafficking. Social media is being used for good by campaigns such as the Public Awareness Campaign which encourages the general public to become educated and aware of sex trafficking. The campaign has been aired on social media, newspapers, and televisions in order to get the entire public's attention. Unfortunately, after a victim has been rescued from the sex trafficking industry it is common to be psychologically (and physically) traumatized. Efforts have been made by offering services such as counseling and protection.

The Economy of Human Trafficking

With the growth of sex trafficking over the last several years the economy of it has grown as well. One source found a global estimate of the sex trafficking industry, “Though the figures vary from state to state, it is apparent that the economy sustained through sexually and psychologically traumatizing victims is a multibillion-dollar industry, an estimated \$28 billion

⁴ Reuters. “How Traffickers Use Social Media to Lure Vulnerable Teenagers into Sex Work.” *VentureBeat*, VentureBeat, 15 Nov. 2015, venturebeat.com/2015/11/15/how-traffickers-use-social-media-to-lure-vulnerable-teenagers-into-sex-work/.

⁵ Reuters. “How Traffickers Use Social Media to Lure Vulnerable Teenagers into Sex Work.” *VentureBeat*, VentureBeat, 15 Nov. 2015, venturebeat.com/2015/11/15/how-traffickers-use-social-media-to-lure-vulnerable-teenagers-into-sex-work/.

⁶ “About the Blue Campaign.” Department of Homeland Security, 29 Aug. 2017, www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/about-blue-campaign.

globally.”⁷ While there are many reasons the industry is so profitable, a notable one is based on the economy in the victim’s home country. With the hope of obtaining a better life economically, victims are often more susceptible to manipulation on the traffickers part. Job offers and empty promises are often ways that traffickers lure victims into the sex trafficking industry. Once trapped they are used for economic benefit to the traffickers. The value of the human life holds little substance to most of the traffickers. “If victims become sick, are no longer needed, or their use is no longer profitable, they can be abandoned, or even killed.”⁸ Discarding of a human life is common and strictly business in the trafficking industry. Studies show that in two states (Georgia and Colorado) there was a \$330 million revenue, sex trafficking is something that occurs in every state and most countries, making it one of the most profitable human trafficking businesses there are. Many of the trafficking bank accounts remain under the radar, working and producing money illegally under perfectly legal banks. In one case that a trafficking account was discovered it was found to be bringing in an insane amount of money on a monthly basis, “A declaration by a detective from a Sheriff’s Office stated that *“the investigation revealed the human trafficking ring profits approximately \$40,000 to \$50,000 per month and had been operating for at least 4 years.”*”⁹

Geographical Involvement in Human Trafficking

While the sex trafficking industry affects most countries in the world, some are more susceptible to involvement with the industry. A study was done that researched some of the countries that had the highest population involvement in the sex trafficking industry. The Global Slavery Index found that, “Mauritania had the highest ranking for slavery, with as many as 4% of its population enslaved in 2014. The next most severely affected countries were: Uzbekistan (3.9%), Haiti (2.3%), Qatar (1.35%) and India (1.14%).”¹⁰ The countries involved in the study are of Asian, Middle Eastern, or African territory. More research shows that there are trends of countries with high involvement in the sex trafficking industry. “The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates the minimum number of persons in situations of forced labor (including in the sex industry) as a result of being trafficked to be 2.5 million at any one time; of these 1.4 million are in the Asia-Pacific region, 270,000 in industrialized countries, 250,000 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 230,000 in the Middle East and North Africa, 200,000 in countries with economies in transition (such as the Central Asian Republics), and 130,000 in Sub-Saharan Africa.” Countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia continue to show up in studies and reports. This knowledge brings up the question of how much geography and demographics have to do with the sex trafficking industry. In a study done in India, it was found that 3 large components and contributors to the sex trafficking industry are poverty, migration, and affluence. “Many

⁷ Utley, Tori. “The Trauma Economy: The Demand For Sex Trafficking And The Fight To End It.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 27 Jan. 2016, www.forbes.com/sites/toriutley/2016/01/27/the-trauma-economy-the-demand-for-sex-trafficking-and-the-fight-to-end-it/#4698e23476af.

⁸ <https://psychweb.chbs.jmu.edu/Graysojh/pdfs/Volume090-humantrafficking.pdf>

⁹ “U.S. Court Case: 9 Banks and 50 Bank Accounts Exploited by Human Trafficking Ring.” *Verafin*, 27 Sept. 2017, verafin.com/2017/02/u-s-court-case-9-banks-and-50-bank-accounts-exploited-by-human-trafficking-ring/.

¹⁰ <http://freedomfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015-Addressing-the-Mental-Health-Needs-in-Survivors-of-Modern-Slavery.pdf>

vulnerable women and girls are lured by promises of employment, and some parents are desperate enough to sell their daughters to traffickers.”¹¹

Addiction and Mental Health

Following victim involvement in the sex trafficking industry, it is not uncommon for victims to have drug addiction issues. In some cases, victims are forced into use of drugs so that the trafficker has more control and power of their victims. “Traffickers are using the desperation that accompanies addiction to their advantage, fueling a criminal enterprise that creates enormous profits from the exploitation of the vulnerable - primarily women.”¹² Using addiction as an advantage for traffickers brings them more power over their victims, and ultimately more profit. Once women are out of the industry, it is common that they are addicted to drugs, making rehabilitation difficult because of their reliance on drugs. In addition to addiction issues mental health is a large component that a lot of victims struggle with, “Fifty-four percent had mental illness as defined by the criteria; 36% had PTSD, 13% had depression without PTSD and 6% had another anxiety disorder.”¹³ Many refuse treatment or therapy following their experience in the industry. Rehabilitation becomes extremely difficult for victims based off of instability and refinement of treatment.

Substance abuse, addiction, and mental health issues are all things that many victims experience. Reintroducing a life outside of trafficking can be difficult, and going back to a “normal” or safe environment isn’t always what victims want. A study found that many victims choose to stay silent following their life in sex trafficking, traumatic experiences can cause them to create an attachment to their captor. This happens for many reasons, but a large and highly notable one is that they are so used to depending on their captors to keep them alive that they become attached or dependent on the captor. “Often, there can be a type of Stockholm Syndrome - where due to unequal power, victim's create a false emotional or psychological attachment to their controller.”¹⁴

Conclusion

The human trafficking industry is huge, so huge that it is the second largest illegal industry following drug trafficking.¹⁵ As our world progresses technologically and socially the demand grows, as does the industry. There are so many components of the sex trafficking industry, such as the economics, geography of it, the mental effects of the victims, prevention, and media involvement. In order to address the main idea of how can the U.S. and the rest of the world can prevent and counteract sex trafficking it has become apparent that while the goal of finding a single solution would be considered ideal, there is no one feasible solution for an issue that is so widespread. The sex trafficking industry is so diverse both socially and geographically that

¹¹ Board, The Editorial. “Sex Trafficking in India.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 15 Oct. 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/10/16/opinion/sex-trafficking-in-india.html.

¹² <http://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/addiction-crisis-fuels-human-trafficking,490518>

¹³ “Mental Health Issues in Survivors of Sex Trafficking.” *Taylor & Francis*, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2331205X.2017.1278841.

¹⁴ Bradley, Michael. “Human Trafficking: Why Do so Many Victims Refuse Help?” *BBC News*, BBC, 17 Oct. 2013, www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-24548143.

¹⁵ Fisher, Nicole. “Human Trafficking Is In Plain Sight. Are You Supporting It Without Knowing?” *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*, 28 Sept. 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/nicolefisher/2017/04/24/human-trafficking-in-plain-sight/#5b39294951f8.

finding one way to fix or help the issue is nearly impossible. With more knowledge on the topic, the demand for multiple solutions has become apparent, the fact that no one situation or case with a victim is alike multiple options is what would be most beneficial. The involvement of addiction, mental health, and location are all contributors that make each victim unique. Some of the possible solutions include increased victim support, safer or more legitimate job offers, and more regulation of problematic websites.

The knowledge that has been gained on victim mental health calls for more support in terms of providing resources that victims can talk to and get needed help from. Poverty and economic imbalance have led to victims accepting job offers from people that promise to help get the victim's back on their feet. While the reason for debt or poverty in a victim's life could range drastically many traffickers choose to use this as a way of baiting victims. Finding a way to provide further regulated and safer job options to victims could help by stopping this way of manipulating victims. While many people are aware of websites that are linked to sex trafficking there has been little action taken to actually disable or regulate the problematic websites. While the lack of action may be due to other reasons, a known reason is that of laws in place that protect some websites. If the damaging laws and websites were more regulated the involvement of the internet in sex trafficking may start to decline or at least be less accessible to traffickers.

There is no way of reversing what has already happened in the sex trafficking industry, to say that the issue is out of control would be an understatement, but attempting to both regulate and provide different resources may help with further prevention. Until there is more action and regulation against the sex trafficking industry it will continue to become more powerful and more dangerous.