Human Trafficking – A Geographical Perspective

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Introduction

Human trafficking is the second largest illegal industry globally, behind the drug trade. Before 2000 there was no internationally agreed definition of human trafficking. This changed in 2000 when the United Nations drafted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Human Trafficking, Especially Women and Children (also known as the Trafficking Protocol) in Palermo, Sicily. The Trafficking Protocol was one of two Protocols signed at the time under the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Crime (the other was the Protocol on Smuggling of Human Beings) (United Nations 2000).

This was an important time because it lead to a huge amount of interest in the problem of human trafficking by many governments and non-government organisations around the world. Many governments and other organisations, including in Australia, recognised the problem and began thinking about ways to address it for the first time in 2003 when the Trafficking Protocol came into effect.

The definition laid out in the Trafficking Protocol states that human trafficking is:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of 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’.

To simplify this definition we can say that human trafficking normally involves three interconnected elements; means (how trafficked persons are recruited), mode (how trafficked persons are moved) and purpose (exploitation of the persons trafficked at the destination).

Most governments and international organisations base their definition of trafficking broadly on the one set out above by the United Nations. It is hard to know exactly how big the problem of human trafficking is since it is a clandestine activity; trafficked persons are usually described as ‘hidden populations’ meaning that they are kept out of sight in inaccessible locations (such as in private homes or on fishing boats) or they are under the control of someone else even if they are publicly

Figure 1: Human Traffickings Global “Epicentres”

Source: http://untotheleastinternational.org/images/_44425220_human_traffick_416map.gif
visible (such as being watched by someone whilst on the street begging or selling flowers, for example). Moreover, the profits from human trafficking often go through a process of money laundering making it hard to trace activities of traffickers. Despite these problems, some international organisations working on the problem have come up with some estimate to help establish the scale of human trafficking globally and within various regions of the world. Some of these (taken from the UN-GIFT 2008) include:

Numbers of trafficked persons:

- The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates the minimum number of persons in situations of forced labour (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 industrialised 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.

- According to a United States government sponsored research project (2006) approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across borders globally at any one time. This does not, of course, include those who are trafficked internally and whose numbers may be equally as large or greater.

- The non-government organisation (NGO) Free the Slaves estimates that 27 million slaves exist in the world today. According to them, more than 1.3 million people are enslaved in Latin America and the Caribbean, nearly 1 million in Africa and the Middle East, and 24 million in Asia.

Profits:

- The ILO estimates that globally USD 31.7 million profits are generated annually from the exploitation of trafficked persons, half of which (USD 15.5 million) is generated in industrialised countries.

Scale:

- No region or country in the world is deemed to be immune from human trafficking but South Asia, Southeast Asia and Eastern/Southern Europe are considered ‘epicentres’ of human trafficking (see Map One, below).

One of the problems with the way human trafficking has been discussed is the overriding focus on women and girls trafficked into the sex industry (for example, Skinner 2008, Kara 2009). Consequently much more information for all regions globally exists concerning this particular dimension of human trafficking. In an effort to reduce human trafficking a lot of resources have been put into prosecuting traffickers with other areas of counter – human trafficking not given quite so much attention. This means protecting victims of trafficking (for example by providing them with adequate shelter and psycho-social services) and preventing human trafficking (for example by educating poor and vulnerable communities or by providing vulnerable groups with income earning opportunities to reduce their poverty) fall behind efforts to prosecute traffickers.

I now turn to human trafficking through the following studies which help illustrate the geographical reach of human trafficking, excluding cases of the sex industry. In the conclusion of the paper I briefly review what these different trends mean for the way human trafficking is understood and expressed.

**STUDENT ACTIVITIES**

1. Provide definitions for the following terms: human trafficking; International Labour Organisation (ILO); non-government organisation (NGO); modus operandi.
2. Outline the three elements that make up human trafficking.
3. Why was it important for the United Nations to recognise (and provide a definition for) human trafficking?
4. The article provides several estimated figures for the amount of human trafficking. What are the sources of data in each case and how do they compare? What is the difficulty in obtaining accurate data for this global problem?
5. Study Figure 1 [world map] showing the distribution of reported human trafficking. Describe the pattern shown on the map.
6. What other factors might help explain this pattern? Work in groups of four. Refer to an atlas and look at world maps showing the following information: GDP, population density, human development index, access to safe water and sanitation and literacy. Each group member should look at one or two maps and describe the spatial association between human trafficking and other selected global patterns. Write a conclusion summarizing your group’s findings.

**Human Trafficking: A Complex Issue**

The following three brief case studies highlight some of the different manifestations of human trafficking that occur outside the sex industry. These are: boys trafficked from South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan) to the Middle East (United Arab Emirates) as camel jockeys; men trafficked internally in the Philippines for removal of their kidneys; and the trafficking of disabled persons into a range of industries.

**Child Camel Jockeys in the Middle East**

Asghar (2005: 37) has documented the way boys from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are recruited around five years of age to be camel jockeys when they are normally sold by their parents to agents. The agents go around villages and towns in poor districts and provinces in these countries and offer to take male children away to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to work as camel jockeys. They tell parents that the children will earn large sums of money, some of which will be sent home to the families. However parents are deceived about the conditions of work and are normally lead to believe that the children are going to good jobs and that they will have a better future than if they remain at home. Most of the children themselves do not know who is taking them abroad or for what purpose. None know they would become camel jockeys.

Upon arrival children are transferred to azbas (camel training complexes) in the desert. The children are subject to several forms of abuse during their sojourns including lack of food and electric shocks as punishment. Lack of food is common as their owners try to maintain their weight at less than 20 kg for racing purposes. Deaths and injuries of children during racing is another major concern. If children die as a result of an accident during a race they are usually buried straight away so as to avoid police investigations of the death.

Children also do not leave the complex. They sleep on cardboard boxes and are therefore prone to scorpion bites. The children rise at 4 am to begin exercising the camels. Every day they take the camels for rides until 11 am and then allowed to rest for two hours before feeding and cleaning the camels and...
then exercising them again until nightfall. The children are supposed to be paid for their work but almost always the agent takes the salary and keeps it for him/herself without passing any on to either the child or his family.

Running away is a virtual impossibility for children deployed as camel jockeys since the azbas are usually in remote desert locations. Usually children leave when they become too old and/or heavy and are no longer considered suitable for camel racing purposes. Other children are sent home because they become seriously injured whilst racing. Police or immigration rescues are virtually unknown in the azbas.

**Internal Trafficking in the Philippines for Selling Organs**

The Philippines has been dubbed one of the ‘top five’ organ trafficking nations in the world, according to the World Health Organisation, with the others including China, Pakistan, Egypt and Columbia. In 2002 the Philippines government issued the ‘National Policy on Kidney Transplantation from Living Non-Related Donors (LNRDs)’ that recommends living ‘donors’ undergo counselling and medical evaluations. It was this law that opened the way for a lucrative underground kidney trade.

One example was in 2007, when the Philippine police uncovered a trafficking ring that involved recruiting adults (mainly men) by offering large sums of money for the sale and removal of their kidneys. Two victims gave sworn statements and provided detailed information about the *modus operandi* of organ trafficking. Victims were recruited by being offered large sums of money (in this case PP300,000 or USD 7500 each). After agreeing they were brought to a hospital for a check-up then back to the province where they came from. Three days later they were brought to the NKTI (National Kidney Transplant Institute) for more tests then asked to wait in the kidney broker’s house. After two weeks they were brought to a different hospital and the operations were performed. The kidney providers then went back to their homes three days later and were paid only PP 100,000 instead of the promised PP300,000. Victims/providers almost always stay at the house during this process.

*Figure 2: A Child Camel Jockey In The UAE*

*Source: Ansar Burnley Trust Website*


*Figure 3: Filipino Men Who Have Sold Their Kidneys To ‘Transplant Tourists’, Manila, The Philippines*

*Source: Author’s own photo*
of the broker between the time they have the tests and the time they are scheduled for the operation. In this way it becomes difficult for the provider to change their mind or ‘escape’. Providers are ‘reminded’ that the broker has already spent a lot of money on them for transportation, completion of forms, tests, and food/accommodation. This makes it difficult to back-out of this arrangement.

In this case there were a range of different actors involved in the organ trafficking process including the recruiter, his assistant (who accompanied the donors to hospital for check-ups), the driver of the van who ferried the donors, the boss running the supply of organ providers, his mother who owned the house where the victims stayed, and the transplant surgeon and his team who organized the sale and removal (themselves operating through internationally organized operators connecting with patients in demand countries).

The scope of the problem in the Philippines and elsewhere is largely unknown and rests on anecdotal and piecemeal evidence. One Philippine NGO data gathering exercise carried out in three districts of Batangas province, Southern Luzon, over six days for example, located more than 200 providers. From information they provided it was revealed that 6 hospitals were involved in the removal of the organs, and that many of the donors did not receive the full amount promised to them. The recipients in these cases were mainly wealthy Japanese and Arabs who travelled to the Philippines as ‘transplant tourists’. Early media reports on the issue also cited evidence that prisoners were selling kidneys in order to have their sentences reduced (see Yea 2009).

**Trafficking of People with Disabilities**

Disabled people, especially in the developing world where social welfare services are fewer, are often prime targets for traffickers. They are often deployed in begging or in brothels, but recent reports found trafficked disabled people in factories as well. In many cultures disabled people are seen as a shame or burden on their families and are therefore easily recruited by traffickers from their families (World Vision Asia-Pacific 2009, p. 40). In Thailand, UNICEF has claimed that many brothel owners deliberately target deaf girls and women because they are less able to communicate their situations to clients, police or others who might be in a position to help them (cited in World Vision Asia-Pacific 2009, p. 40).

People with disabilities are also demanded by organised begging rings in Asia, Latin America, Africa and Southern Europe. Because they are thought to generate more sympathy – and therefore more money – traffickers often target children born with disabilities and disfigurements and send them to the streets to beg where they are constantly watched by an overseer. In India and Bangladesh this is very common with many previously healthy, normally developing children thought to also have been deliberately mutilated and disfigured by traffickers.

One report in India suggests joints of the bones of children who are abducted or sold are injected with bleach which produces infection and, eventually, amputation. Afterwards the children are sent to the street to beg, often for upwards of 15 hours a day. Often these children are bought from impoverished parents with false promises that the children will be provided with work and an education. Tourism is thought to fuel this business since disfigured child beggars are usually deployed in areas where there are high numbers of foreign tourists who tend to be highly sympathetic to the plights of these children, not knowing the circumstances that lead to their begging (see Child Right 2006).

In China in 2007 more than 1300 people were rescued from forced labour in brick kilns in a number of government-initiated rescues. Many of them were children and around one-third were disabled. The trafficking of disabled children into brick kilns was discovered after hundreds of parents posted ‘missing person’ signs outside railway stations where they thought their children may have been abducted from (Asia News, 18 June 2007).

### Conclusion

The above case studies provide just a few examples to illustrate the complex nature of human trafficking globally. Other sectors where trafficking has been documented include for begging (for example, Surtees 2005), domestic servitude (for example, Anti-Slavery International 2006), in the mining, fishing, agricultural and construction sectors (for example, OSCE 2009), and in small factories and sweatshops producing goods such as garments.
Through the case studies it is possible to see that human trafficking is an issue that goes well beyond the stereotypical understandings of women and girls in the sex industry. Trafficking happens equally to men and boys as it does to women and girls, and often the sectors into which different populations are trafficked are gender and age specific. Similarly, in geographical terms trafficking occurs both internally (within a country, as in the cases of organ trafficking and disabled person trafficking illustrate) and transnationally (between two or more countries, as the case of the child camel jockeys illustrates).

When various governments began to enact laws against human trafficking and slavery after the UN Protocol was signed in 2000 they nonetheless focused on the sex industry and women and girls, leaving some of these other types of human trafficking out. The large number of prosecutions globally for ‘sex traffickers’ may fuel the perception that the sex industry is numerically the most important sector where trafficking occurs and that it is a female-specific phenomenon but the picture is more complex.

**STUDENT ACTIVITIES**

7. The three case studies (boys trafficked from South Asia to the Middle East as camel jockeys; men trafficked internally in the Philippines for kidney removal and the trafficking of disabled persons into a range of industries) provide some insight into the age and gender of those involved. Provide a summary diagram for each case study showing the links between those being trafficked and the people involved in the trafficking. What is the overriding reason for these injustices being performed?

8. Photo analysis. Study the three photos by completing the following for each:
   a. Copy this table into your notes and describe your observations in detail.

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<thead>
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<th>People</th>
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   b. Use your observations and describe four things that you infer from the photograph.
   c. Now list all the questions that the photograph raises for you. Share these with others in the class.
   d. How could you get answers to your questions?

9. Describe the main difficulties in overcoming this global problem.

10. Outline what the UN is trying to do to combat this problem. Go to <http://www.no-trafficking.org/> and summarise some of the strategies being implemented.

11. Go to <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> and read the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Identify the articles that are being contravened in the case studies described in this article.

12. Take action! Use the websites listed to develop an awareness campaign at your school about the issue of human trafficking. What other action can you take regarding this issue?

**Further Reading**


Further Information and Resources:


**References**


**Further Information and Resources:**

UN-GIFT: <http://www.ungift.org/>,

International Organisation for Migration (IOM): <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/748>,

UN-IAP (United Nations – Inter-Agency Project in the Greater Mekong Sub-region): <http://www.no-trafficking.org/>,


Save the Children International: <http://www.savethechildren.org/emergencies/protection/?WT.mc_id=1109_hp_main traffickinghumanbeings>.


**Further Information and Resources:**

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Save the Children International: <http://www.savethechildren.org/emergencies/protection/?WT.mc_id=1109_hp_main traffickinghumanbeings>.
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