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HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

the flight to slavery and sexual exploitation

What Is Trafficking Exactly?

A good question, the answer to which would fill all the pages of this journal if answered properly. The UN defines trafficking as *“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 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 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.”*

The multiple clauses and contingencies in that definition illustrate one of the major problems with combating trafficking:

*In the West, we like to believe that the heyday of slavery is over. The reality is that, in many parts of the world, poorly-enforced international legislation has not reduced the allure for forced labour. According to the American Administration for Children and Families, human trafficking is the world's fastest growing criminal enterprise and is tied for second spot with arms trading behind the drug trade. Whilst many people are transported across national borders by road, rail and ship, there are significant numbers being sold into slavery or sexual exploitation that board international flights, especially in the era of the low cost carrier. To what extent is it a problem for the aviation security community? **Marcia Adair** reports on some of the trends and issues surrounding human trafficking.*

the term is almost impossible to define concretely. Cases involving children are fairly clear-cut because they are not able to consent. Classic examples are: children kidnapped from school and turned in to child soldiers; young, poor girls from rural parts of North Africa sent to work as maids for rich African families abroad in exchange for schooling that never quite materialises; parents selling or renting their children as beggars or mine workers.

It offends our Western sensibilities to think of children as assets that can be traded or sold but large, desperately poor families are much more pragmatic about taking advantage of what little resources they have. Whether that is right or wrong is a question for another time. As wealthy Westerners living among people of a similar socio-economic station (generally speaking) we often say that money doesn't buy happiness. While this may be true, what it does buy is the ability to choose – a commodity most of the world's population will never be able to afford.

Where trafficking gets murky is when adults are involved. They are able to consent to starting work or moving to another country and often times they do entirely within the confines of the law. The problem is what happens when they arrive at their new workplace.

Men often find that they are crammed into a room full of 20 others and forced to work 14 hour days without time off for months. If they rebel or look like they may leave, their employer will withhold payment. Not only does this curtail their plans to desert but it hurts the worker's family back home that is depending on remittances to survive.

Women often leave their village on the promise of a job as a nanny, housekeeper or other domestic work only to discover

on arrival that they have been sold into prostitution. Women are beaten and raped into submission and then forced to have sex with upwards of 30 men a day. Trafficked women who actually make it to a household, are expected to work up to 20 hours a day for little to no pay and often required to include sex as part of their domestic duties.

“...we often say that money doesn't buy happiness. While this may be true, what it does buy is the ability to choose...”

For both men and women, passports and other identity documents are usually confiscated, making it almost impossible for victims to run away.

The 6 Main Types of Trafficking

There is no limit to the trafficker's imagination in terms of what improbable stories they devise to trick the unsuspecting. However they are recruited, trafficking victims usually end up in one of the following situations:

Forced Labour – This is the most common type of trafficking and has become even more prevalent as a result of mass global unemployment due to the recession. Previously employed men desperate for a way to feed their families often go abroad to work in construction and other labouring jobs. When they arrive they find a situation resembling Victorian factories before labour laws were introduced.

Long hours, low pay, poor food and accommodation, dangerous working conditions and no time off are all par for the forced labour course.

Organ Removal – WHO estimates that 10% of the 70,000 kidneys transplanted each year originate on the black market. As the Western population ages, viable

Suspicious Signs

According to Steve Chalke's "Stop the Traffik", the following are signs, specifically related to travel, that might indicate a child is being trafficked:-

- A child who is travelling alone
- A child who does not seem to have many possessions but who has a mobile phone
- A child who is not travelling to meet his or her parent or guardian
- A child who is suspicious of adults
- A child who is very afraid of being deported
- A child who shows signs of inappropriate or sexualised behaviour towards men

Other general signs include:-

- A person showing obvious signs of being abused, such as bruises, cuts or mutilation
- A person who seems fearful of adults (especially law enforcers) or whose behaviour is jumpy

Stop The Traffik can be contacted at their London-based international HQ via info@stophthetraffik.org

“...low-budget airlines mean that trafficked workers heading to the US, the UK, Canada and Australia arrive most often via airplane...”

organs for transplant are becoming a big commodity. A common recruitment technique is to offer an unemployed man a job in a neighbouring city. The recruiter gives the man a ride and somewhere along the way knocks him out. When the man comes to, he is informed that someone has taken his kidney. Botched surgeries and unsanitary conditions mean a lot of these men die or are put even further in debt from medical bills.

Child Labour – The recruitment of child soldiers happens in all regions of the world. The UN stated in 2008 that there are 57 groups actively recruiting child soldiers – up from 40 in 2006. One of the newest hot spots for child soldiers is the mountains of Pakistan. Afghani parents think they are sending their sons to Muslim school but the truth is they are being trained as extremists.

What kind of labour a child does is largely cultural. African children are employed as domestic servants in upper class houses or in the mines while Roma children in Eastern Europe are often rented out as beggars.

Involuntary Domestic Servitude – This happens to adults or children but almost always to women. Often promised a chance to start over in the UK or the United States as nannies, maids, babysitters etc., women who are poor and powerless routinely end up as de facto slaves. We assume that it is wealthy white people abusing their power yet again but, in fact, the recipients of the trafficked girl are often relatives or from the same village. In a culture where girls are not given the opportunity to learn skills that would allow them to earn a living, this sort of arrangement is very common.

Parents see it as a way for their child to be provided for before they get married.

Prostitution – For trafficked girls from South East Asia and Eastern Europe, prostitution is the most common destination. What makes the prostitution scenario ethically and legally more complicated is that in many cases, the girls have already worked in the sex industry at home and are migrating abroad to make better wages in order to repay family debt. They already know what it's like to work in a brothel and through their network of contacts, have a good idea of what sort of situation they will likely encounter. This knowledge does not in any way excuse the inhumane conditions they are subjected to but it certainly does cloud the issue.



Debt Bondage – Rarely an end in itself, debt bondage is the icing in the trafficking cake so to speak. The standard scenario is that once the trafficked person is sold and delivered to their final destination, they are informed that they must repay the travel expenses they incurred as well as any room, board and clothing they consume while employed. Anyone familiar with the way pimps work knows that this kind of set up never ends well.

Uzbeki labourers are charged up to \$1200 for a job placement in the United Arab Emirates that pays between \$120 and \$130 per month. In other situations,

trafficked workers are gouged for room, board and clothing expenses in addition to their travel debt, which ensures they never have enough money to leave.

Smuggling vs Trafficking

Airports have security measures in place already to prevent human cargo or stowaways from boarding an aircraft but trafficked people are extremely difficult to detect because – in the case of adults at least – they don't know they've been trafficked until arriving at their destination. People who are smuggled arrange the covert transport themselves and pay up front. Smuggled persons are aware that they will be illegal in the new country and are left to their own devices in the new country rather than indentured until the travel expenses are worked off.

Perhaps the biggest difference is that smuggling requires travel across borders while trafficking can occur in the same town or city. In many cases it does result in cross-border travel but it is not a requirement.

How Trafficking Works

Cases of kidnapping excluded, the trafficked person usually doesn't realise what they are going to encounter upon arrival. They are going willingly, so there is no need for secrecy or the forging of documents on the part of the recruiter.

In order to keep profit margins high, recruiters naturally choose the most economical method of transport. Geography and low-budget airlines mean that trafficked workers heading to the US, the UK, Canada and Australia arrive most often via airplane. Labourers, sex workers and domestic workers are the most mobile.

Passports and their accompanying tourist visas can be real or fake. Because flying from one country to another is not technically illegal, there is no big motivation for forging passports aside from time. One can imagine that it might take some time for someone from a remote village to produce a birth certificate and photo identification. Another consideration is that while the wheels of administration move at an almost imperceptibly slow speed in the West, elsewhere any forward momentum is a miracle.



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Where Does Trafficking Happen?

In trafficking jargon (academic trafficking jargon at least), countries are classified as: origin, transit and/or destination. Origin countries are obviously those where trafficked persons come from and destination countries are where they arrive. Transit countries are intermediary countries where trafficked persons are temporarily held before heading to their destination. Reasons for using transit countries are usually to do with ease of crossing borders.

For example, many people who are meant to be trafficked into the United States are brought to Canada first because that border is much easier to cross than flying straight into America. In Africa, Algeria is often used as a transit country. People enter Algeria illegally from Sub-Saharan Africa and then proceed on to mainland Europe with legal identity documents.

Origins, Destinations & Routes

Origin Countries: most of North, Central and West Africa, China, New Guinea, Malaysia, Burma, Cambodia, Russia, Latvia, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Albania, Bulgaria, Uzbekistan, Iran Iraq, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Argentina, Venezuela, Guatemala, Columbia and many others

Destination Countries: Thailand, Japan, Israel, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Yemen, Qatar, Burundi, the US, the UK, Australia and others

Sample Routes:

- Eastern Europe and South East Asia: prostitution in the UK, America & Australia
- Moldova, The Stans: forced labour in the UAE, Saudi Arabia etc.
- Iraq, Iran: prostitution in Syria (refugees and widows mainly)

Trends in Trafficking

The global economic collapse and the ever widening gap between the richest and poorest means that supply has far exceeded demand in the trafficking market. This is an extremely worrying development. People who are absolutely desperate for employment will suffer through the most abject and humiliating work conditions, which gives recruiters and the employers they work with even more of an advantage.

The American Department of State estimated that 12.3 million people were forced into bonded labour or commercial sexual servitude in 2008/09. It sounds a lot but to put the figure into perspective, over 33 million people worldwide currently are infected with HIV/AIDs and approximately 350 million are expected to contract malaria each year. That's a ratio of roughly 1:3:30. Despite the inequality in figures, anti-trafficking sentiment has become a touchstone issue for feminists and other women-positive NGOs.

While there have been major strides forward in recent years in terms of legislation and UN involvement, overall trafficking remains a low priority for most Western law enforcement agencies. The reasons for this are varied and complicated but the two most important are: most abuses take place on private property which is difficult to search without just cause and often victims do not identify themselves that way and refuse to take legal action against their employer.

Current best practice is to take a victim-centred approach to convicting traffickers and while this works sometimes, it often as not backfires completely. Many trafficked workers see the opportunity to reduce indebtedness and improve their lives economically as worth all the physical and emotional strain. Labour laws common in the West are completely foreign to most trafficked persons, so there is a huge paradigm shift required for them

“...12.3 million people were forced into bonded labour or commercial sexual servitude in 2008/09...”

to even embrace the idea that what they are experiencing is not normal.

And For Airport Security?

The short answer is: nothing. Aside from detecting forged passports and doing the usual due diligence, there is not much else airport security personnel can do to stop human trafficking from happening.

People so focused on getting ahead and starting a better life that they are willing to work a menial job in another country would rarely, if ever, resort to violence while on an airplane.

Even if you suspect a passenger may be taken advantage of, what someone intends to do or not do once they cross the destination border is the responsibility of local law enforcement. In some cases, like in Australia or The Netherlands, what a girl may be *planning* to do after arrival is actually legal - no crime has yet been committed. Working in a licensed brothel would be a violation of the tourist visa stipulations but this is almost never enforced. It is estimated that over 70% of the sex workers are foreigners.

Unless someone tells you that their companion is forcing them to travel against their will, the best course of action for airport security personnel is to do what you always do. ■

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The author is a freelance journalist.



Hamburg's Reeperbahn is a magnet for red light district punters and prostitutes, many of whom might be victims of trafficking.