

Parsons School of Design

HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

Modern Day Slavery

Coya Campbell

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Over the centuries, the minority groups in the United States have been subjected to many forms of unfair treatment. These marginalized sects of people have long endured one of the harshest most common forms of mistreatment existing in the United States dating back to the 17th century. During this time, African people were shipped to the United States and forced into nation development, planting the roots for the agricultural successes of their owners. They were subjected to harsh conditions, working for long periods of time without compensation. However, over 150 years ago, the United States government ratified the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished slavery¹ all throughout the entirety of the states that made up America at the time. Over a century later, the United States still holds the title as the freedom capital of the world; Yet, in reality, the freedoms and rights of minority populations is still under threat today. Which in some aspects has been and continues to be a truth that the country has kept a secret for many years. Amidst the gospel of equal opportunity and freedom for all humans, human trafficking is still prevalent in the American society. In fact, it is the most common representation of modern slavery². Thus, despite the perceived “freedom” for all, human trafficking remains prevalent in the United States, yet it is treated as a taboo within the political and cultural setup of the country.

In America, human trafficking is treated as a serious offense and or crime because it is a clear violation of human rights. The United States, though primarily hard to believe is one of the countries regarded as a destination and source for the inhuman practicing of human trafficking. Many reports from the relevant authorities indicates that the number of the victims seems to be increasing every year. Unfortunately, the most affected victims of the human trafficking are the

¹ Williams, Beth a. 2018. "Efforts to stop human trafficking." Harvard Journal Of Law & Public Policy 41, no. 2: 623-629. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed April 27, 2018).

² Ibid 624

people who belong to vulnerable groups like women, children specifically categorized as minority impoverished peoples. In fact, it is a perception among the people that human trafficking is the biggest problem that exists in third world nations. The reason behind the perception is associated with yearly reports indicating the women, children, and sometimes men who fall prey to traffickers either inside or outside of the country. Though these reports may be true, this does not take away from the fact that human trafficking is not limited to less developed nations.

In a quick move to combat the menace, the United States has stepped up its measures to find a solution to the problem spanning the last 18 years. The efforts have been both to handle the issue domestically and at the international level. Congress first saw such efforts in the year 2000³. Congress made an enactment called the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) whose intention was to build a bridge to create better systems in the Law that could combat human trafficking. The same efforts by the Congress were seen in 2015 when they enacted the Justice For Victims of Trafficking Act. The act was meant to help the United States better assist the victims of the human trafficking. The government has also moved to ban all goods entering the country or leaving the country if such goods have been made as a result of forced labor. Thus, the United States has made every effort to ensure that the human trafficking is combated at all levels. However, the big question is whether the efforts by the government are bearing fruits.

Today, reports indicate that almost 25 million slaves still exist around the world. As of the June 2017, according to the Paris Project, almost fourteen thousand calls were made through the national human trafficking hotline. The report includes those of potential trafficking and

³ Fish, Caroline a. 2017. "Extraterritorial human trafficking prosecutions: eliminating zones of impunity within the limits of international law and due process." *St. John's law review* 91, no. 2: 529-557. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed April 27, 2018).

others directly calling seeking assistance in escaping human trafficking. In the year 2016 alone, out of the cases reported of human trafficking, 2,000 victims of human trafficking involved US citizens. Statistics from this report are clear evidence that the efforts to fight the epidemic in the United States are yet to realize their full potential as the problem still exists in large volume⁴. The reports indicate the numbers of the victims who get involved in trafficking continue to increase year after year.

Factors such as unemployment, poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunities and resources in the home countries and gender inequality have been put forth as the biggest factors contributing to the increasing human trafficking rates. These issues however are not limited to the US alone but also worldwide. Most of the victims who fall for human trafficking have been found to have low level of education which in turn has led to an increase in unemployment rates and inadequate payment in comparison to the ever increasing cost of living even if they manage to find employment. These frequent occurrences lead to these groups living poor quality lives in turn forcing them to look for alternative sources of income. In the processes, they fall prey to the traffickers who use their vulnerability as an opportunity to take advantage of their inability to provide an adequate source of income for themselves and their families, convincing them that they have no other alternative option.

Signs indicating that the fight against human trafficking is becoming more of a challenge each day, all eyes switch to the technological advancement. In order to simplify the scouting process involved in human trafficking, the traffickers make use of the new technology to by using it to lure victims in with minimal work on the traffickers end. They use make their services

⁴ Ibid 535

known widely through the online advertisement; traffickers as well make use of the technology by developing new methods of recruiting the victims. This takes the form of using various means to lure and manipulate the potential victims⁵. Thus, the advancement in the technological platform is an issue that is making the fast contribution to prevalent practices of the human trafficking despite the fact that it has been made a taboo topic within the society.

The victims of the human trafficking have often fallen prey to the situation as a result of promise for better, steady employment, and good pay. In most cases, this is about the domestic working, a sector that has been growing rapidly due to the many job opportunities that the employers have for the potential employees. In this sector, most workers are the women and girls who go on working in private homes as the domestic workers. The nature of these jobs make it hard for any form of regulation to be managed or any law to reach the industry of domestic working. In this perspective, unlike in other industries, those working in domestic environments are often seen more as just the informal help. Even the location of the domestic working which occurs behind closed doors make these workers face isolation along with many other forms of inhumane treatment. In the process, those working in the domestic environment, more so those who had migrated become vulnerable to human trafficking⁶. There have been many cases of domestic workers getting themselves swept up into the hands of the traffickers even before they are employed for the 'job' they were initially supposed to. This is an issue that has become a shocking commonality in today's society; and there are quite many reports indicating the traffickers using such tricks to get people into slavery in the name of offering steady employment.

⁵ Logan, T. K., Robert Walker, and Gretchen Hunt. "Understanding human trafficking in the United States." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 10, no. 1 (2009): 3-30.

⁶ *Ibid* 21

The challenge again lies in the identification of the victims involved in human trafficking. It is one of the challenges that the advocates of the anti-trafficking organizations and the government face⁷. The reason behind this challenge is the fact that most exploited group of the situations are the people who are marginalized and are from the minority group. Therefore, seeking the identity of these groups becomes hard in the face of those looking for them. In other cases, the victims of human trafficking fear the unknown consequences of getting known; thus, the factors lead to the fight against human trafficking in the country becoming harder to manage.

With all odds seemingly stacked against finding a resolution to the problem it still remains an issue that, human trafficking for the most part is a hidden occurrence all across the country. When asked most people seem sympathetic however, sympathy does not warrant change; many treat the issue as something that just doesn't happen in their neighborhood this assumption however, is beyond incorrect. It is difficult for people to empathize with people who they see as unrelatable. This is why it is important to inform society using methods other than typical news articles or news coverage. One of these methods being conducting, reading, or watching interviews with trafficking survivors themselves. This method creates a greater more impactful relationship between the viewer and the topic because in some sense it allows them to experience the trauma and struggles themselves.

A victim of human trafficking when she was a young girl. The abuse began around the age of five or six years old when she was assaulted by a man who she trusted. Not ending there, following her traumatic experience, She was later sold into a child sex trafficking ring. Again, by an adult she trusted she was held captive and abused in more ways than one. Using used

⁷ Hepburn, Stephanie, and Rita J. Simon. "Hidden in plain sight: Human trafficking in the United States." *Gender Issues* 27, no. 1-2 (2010): 1-26.

psychological, sexual, and physical she was brainwashed into thinking there was no way out and nowhere she could possibly seek any form of help. Proving what she was made to think so many years prior wrong, today, she is a free woman who wears the title of survivor proudly. She shares her story with small intimate groups explaining how her healing is a result of her faith and willpower to always keep trying, despite the odds. Choosing to remain anonymous, the following interview is a transcript of first hand experience beyond the standard general information that makes it difficult for everyday people to empathize and take action towards solving the problem.

Interviewer (me): What has it been like sharing your story with others as a survivor of trafficking system?

Survivor: Well, it isn't easy. I am constantly reliving my past, by sharing my child abuse and child sex trafficking traumas however; the more I talk about it the stronger I become and the more people I help. So I guess it is worth it. I use my voice so that other victims feel a sense of companionship and pride in knowing they too were strong enough to make it through. Through faith there is always hope and help, they are valuable. We are not voiceless; therefore it is important that we change the fact that we are often not heard.

Interviewer (me): Who was the man who abused you? Why was it so difficult to get away from him?

Survivor: The man who first abused me and then sold me into sex trafficking was a close family friend, so close, that he was a part of my everyday life. I was very young and he was my caretaker so I had no other option but to trust him. He was so good at manipulating me. It was very weird we became very close but I was still terrified of him. He conditioned me using different forms of abuse which made it even more difficult to break free.

but I refuse to let them stop me from being my best self and living my life. They are hurdles, and I work with them so that they do not define my life.

Interviewer (Me): After you escaped, how did you cope and assimilate back into everyday life?

Survivor: After I escaped though I was physically free I was still enslaved mentally. The trauma I experienced has left me in what I can most nearly explain as a psychological prison. I felt like everything was a result of something I caused. Initially, I was drowning in a sea of symptoms. I suffered from and still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, peripheral neuropathy, and gastroparesis, which are all a result of my experience. I used to feel a great amount of guilt but by the grace of God and my therapist I am doing a lot better. I am now able to accept the fact that the guilt is not mine to have and I was taken advantage of by someone who had no right to do so. Finding solace in church has helped me drastically and I am now strong enough to speak my truth and I can only thank God for that.

Interviewer (Me): Do you have any advice for others who are dealing with what you had to deal with?

Survivor: All I can say is that there is always help when they are ready. As a person still trying to move on myself I can't make any promises but I just want them to know they don't deserve to be mistreated. Abuse is not love and you are strong enough to make it through no matter how dim the light at the end of the tunnel may seem. You are worth it.

In conclusion, it is evident that as a modern form of slavery, human trafficking has taken root and is prevalent throughout American society despite the subject being treated as taboo in the cultural and political setup. The situation exists in the United States despite the many efforts by the government and the related bodies including the Congress to combat human trafficking. Statistics indicate that the victims involved in the trafficking of people in recent years have increased and this number is likely to go up even as measures are put in place. Various factors can be attributed to this prevalence in the US including poverty, unemployment, limited resources, and education among others. Other factors have identified technology and unregulated sectors like domestic working as the challenges that the anti- traffickers face in fighting human trafficking. Thus, the government and other anti- traffickers need to develop other means of combating this menace including using modern technology and stricter laws.

References

Fish, Caroline a. 2017. "Extraterritorial human trafficking prosecutions: eliminating zones of impunity within the limits of international law and due process." *St. John's law review* 91, no. 2: 529-557. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed April 27, 2018).

-This article is explains the laws and due processes involved with human trafficking.

Hepburn, Stephanie, and Rita J. Simon. "Hidden in plain sight: Human trafficking in the United States." *Gender Issues* 27, no. 1-2 (2010): 1-26.

-This source is an article that explains forced labor, Bonded labor, Child labor, Modern day slavery, Debt bondage, and Slavery Indentured servitude.

Logan, T. K., Robert Walker, and Gretchen Hunt. "Understanding human trafficking in the United States." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 10, no. 1 (2009): 3-30.

-This article has five main goals: (a) to define what human trafficking is, and is not; (b) to describe factors identified as contributing to vulnerability to being trafficked and keeping a person entrapped in the situation; (c) to examine how the crime of human trafficking differs from other kinds of crimes in the United States; (d) to explore how human trafficking victims are identified; and, (e) to provide recommendations to better address human trafficking in the United States.

Williams, Beth a. 2018. "Efforts to stop human trafficking." Harvard Journal Of Law & Public Policy 41, no. 2: 623-629. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed April 27, 2018).

-This study provides insight into the government position behind what can be done to solve the issue of human trafficking.

Interview with a victim of human trafficking at the Graffiti Church.

-I used this primary source as a way to understand the continuous cycle of human trafficking.