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What's Our Responsibility? How Individuals and Organizations Can Proactively Address Human Trafficking

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What's Our Responsibility? How Individuals and Organizations Can Proactively Address Human Trafficking

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Roots of Trafficking

Human trafficking is regarded by Interpol as the second largest and fastest growing criminal industry in the world.¹ Trafficking of humans is a complex issue, and the strategies to address it require multi-faceted approaches. Tactics are greatly influenced by institutional culture, political considerations, and the unique views of both the problem and best practice responses to the problem. The existence (or absence) of anti-trafficking initiatives is confounded all the more by country-specific factors including, but not limited to, legislation.² Various nations' efforts and incentives to address trafficking must be evaluated and re-evaluated to better appreciate how and why certain response approaches are in place. Though rescue, rehabilitation, and prevention are all necessary tactics, rescue often takes precedence in the development of programs and anti-trafficking efforts. While prevention may be inherently less appealing because the outcomes are less measurable, a system of rescue and rehabilitation with a deliberate eye toward prevention is a vital step toward preempting the continuation of this hideous trade and restoring its survivors.

Often when communities and non-profits within them become acutely aware of the relevant issues of trafficking, the temptation may be to intervene quickly without regard for the complexity of issues involved. As such, tackling trafficking may be initiated with a "cowboy"-like brashness to solely "rescue" the victims. Such a temporary approach may be misleading and come at the cost of failing to provide longer-term solutions. Worse yet, the survivors of exploitation are sometimes overlooked as individuals with free will and with the capacities to assert their own human rights; indeed, they may need stronger supports within community systems to be buttressed so that they may be restored and reestablished within a healthy community. By emphasizing the need to simply remove those exploited from the sex industry, a lack of attention may be given to the restoration and empowerment of survivors. Additionally, stricter laws are needed to ensure that perpetrators of exploitation are not permitted to continue their corruption. When rescues occur without regard for the undercurrents or roots of trafficking, further harm is perpetrated; the continued marginalization of women and children is often the result of this damage.

Greed, poverty, and the intrinsic disenfranchisement of females and minority groups are pivotal to the existence of human trafficking.³ According to Caraway, the basic human rights of children, women, and minorities are vulnerable and at risk of being violated by “so-called rescue missions, despite the good intentions of would-be rescuers.”⁵ Some well-intended groups involved in treating trafficked persons perceive survivors as “passive victims unable to make rational judgments [who] must be rescued and rehabilitated.”^{2(p9)} Jordan⁶, Jana and others⁷ argue that trafficked individuals are truly hardy, resilient, daring people who have made conscious choices and applied their own agency in finding what they considered to be a “better life.” A human rights approach is essential for combating trafficking, particularly when interventions limit the choices of these strong individuals or when legislation serves to restrain survivors from moving forward in their lives.⁸ Sadly, such examples exist; Pearson describes the perpetual problems created when survivors are required to go to court to testify for social provisions to be instated.⁹

Other instances of skewed responses to trafficking occur when survivors are inappropriately or inadequately protected by laws.⁶ Jordan describes four far too common but wholly inadequate legal responses to trafficking: denial of the problem, objectifying victims and failing to consider their human rights, conflation of trafficking with undocumented migration, and improper definition of the crime.⁶ Additionally, Williams and Masika^{2(p8)} have emphasized the need for those who legislate on behalf of survivors and those at risk to incorporate a human rights approach to “eradicate gender discrimination if such exploitative practices are to end.” When interventions shift their emphasis to prevention and tackle the innate contributors to inequality, then the roots of trafficking and slavery can be firmly extirpated.

Challenges of Prevention and Aftercare

Certainly, prevention is a currently overlooked mission in the often overwhelming anti-trafficking process. As American Psychological Association (APA) representative to the United Nations (UN) psychologist Dr. Bryant-Davis suggests, a “balance of prevention and intervention strategies is needed...Looking at current research, there is data on child abuse prevention, sexual assault prevention on college campuses, and intimate partner violence prevention across age groups. There is less data on trafficking prevention” (email communication, August 30, 2010). While rescue of exploited youth carries some idealistic, even romantic sentiments, preventative and rehabilitative efforts require a better armed and measured investment of resources.

A broader allocation of resources could address the issue of sex trafficking earlier in this underestimated, complex process. Comprehensive programs within such places as schools, residential treatment, and detention facilities necessitate wide-ranging approaches, including trafficking prevention programs, higher education and employment opportunities for youth. Often by the time much of the psychological, physical, and sociological damage is done to a person forced into trafficking, much more time and money must be invested in their rehabilitation. Rehabilitation of survivors requires an expansive range of resources, including: medical care, education, substance detoxification, counseling, job skills, and residence.¹⁰ Rehabilitative programs also involve addressing health care, safety, and mental health effects, including such problems as STDS, HIV/AIDS, abortions/pregnancies and PTSD symptoms.¹⁰ Resources also are needed to protect those who have been trafficked, as well as to prosecute pimps and traffickers. At a recent conference in Portland, Oregon, a U.S. city with an escalating trafficking problem, Senator Wyden (OR) noted, "every dollar spent on prevention is a dollar less spent on the uphill battle to counter trafficking."¹¹ Prevention paired with intervention programs can give anti-trafficking donors a good return on their investment, particularly when programs incorporate a human rights-based strategy as previously noted.²

As noted at a recent APA Convention, preventative efforts should entail education, policy development in the government, corporate social responsibility, restoration of justice, community development, resource development, and restorative justice.⁴ One comprehensive empowerment organization is called Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS). GEMS is the only organization in New York State specifically designed to serve girls and young women who are at risk or have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking.¹² Preventative services include building alternatives to incarceration, educational initiatives, and prevention and outreach programs in schools, residential treatment, and detention facilities.¹² Youth development programs provide recreational, educational, and therapeutic groups, a Youth Leadership Program, and a Youth Employment Program/Youth Fellowship Program. Court advocacy, holistic case management, trauma-based therapy, and clinical support are fundamental to the survivors' restoration and recovery.¹² Further, transitional and supportive housing is offered in addition to defender-based alternative sentencing services and support for young survivors of commercial sexual exploitation.¹² Those involved with GEMS are helped in family court on matters related to prostitution, related arrests, and child protective concerns.¹²

Assisting rescued children and women through preventative training, protection and resources is intensive and costly. However, the funds needed are sometimes misconstrued or grossly underestimated. Some donors may perceive that an abundance of resources is already allocated.¹³ Many programs are often financially unsustainable; for example, in 2008, the annual individual grant budget for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in the US was roughly \$153,000.⁸ This amount is merely sufficient funding for discrete activities but inadequate to sustain long-term change.⁸ Chen, Garrett, and Waldrop suggest that governments administering fewer, larger grants would diminish the bureaucratic burden and afford an opportunity to advance sustainable systems and structures, permitting practitioners to concentrate on program outcomes.⁸

Current Response Strategies

Unquestionably, the fight against human trafficking must also include contending with the discrepancies in governmental action and inaction. While most legislators will acknowledge the need for preventative action, not all legislation is effectively addressing the issues of trafficking.¹³ Current policies in many nations are equally ineffective in ensuring protection of survivors, or there is a complete absence of policies.² A number of underlying inconsistencies in governmental legislation are linked to an inherent denial of trafficking problems, according to Jordan: "For a government to admit its inability to cope with this societal issue is self-defeating and embarrassing."^{6(p30)} Indeed, this lack of awareness leaves survivors unprotected and traffickers flagrantly unprosecuted. Thus, the potential for making changes is drastically underestimated, particularly when those involved in decision-making resolve that there is nothing to do, abandon hope for those enslaved in captivity, or resort to looking outside of their own backyards to other communities. Sweden shocked the world in 1999 by changing its laws in order to decrease prostitution.¹⁴ No longer was it illegal to prostitute oneself, but it was illegal to sell someone else or to buy sex. Essentially, the prostitutes were appropriately treated as crime victims while the johns and pimps were justly prosecuted as criminals.¹⁴ Shocking to many other governments, this legislative act did, in fact, reduce the amount of street prostitution and the number of people being trafficked into the Sweden.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the focus in some nations has been on prosecution of traffickers for their crimes over protecting the interests of those who have been harmed.⁸ In many countries, protection is offered to survivors only when they assist in the prosecution of traffickers. Particularly within

Western Europe, law enforcement has been known to engage in behavior that may serve to increase trafficking survivors' susceptibility to discrimination and violations of their rights."^{2(p9)} In the Ukraine, for example, Anti-slavery International has reported that corrupt police given the task of "protecting" have instead extorted women for money by threatening to shame them with their family.⁹ Belgium and the Netherlands have focused their protection of those exploited on ensuring the rights of trafficking survivors to stay within the country temporarily and then longer-term, once they agree to testify against their perpetrators.⁹ However, it should be noted that for their protection to be wholly effective – whether in their country of origin or destination – the time for protection should extend beyond the court process and should involve building supports for the survivors.⁹

A Responsible Approach

Addressing the issues of prevention and rehabilitation involves shifting priorities. Taking the reins to address the inequities and complexities of trafficking requires more than a "cowboy" approach to rescue. Certainly, rescue of survivors is a necessary reality to the anti-trafficking process. However, instead of allocating resources in a reactionary manner, a proactive framework should include a comprehensive investment in both prevention and rehabilitation. While some organizations and individuals involved in anti-trafficking efforts may be inclined to "saddle up" and move in to rescue survivors of trafficking, a responsible effort addresses the intrinsic complexities of these crimes against humanity. Understanding cultural implications and the root causes of trafficking are necessary to conscientiously address this problem.

Building resources should start from *within* a community and should include *sustainable* support for women's and children's freedom and sense of empowerment.³ Raising awareness of the less noticeable yet susceptible individuals is essential. To facilitate awareness in communities, anti-trafficking groups—whether governmental, non-governmental (NGO), or U.N. groups—can work together and collaborate to provide consistent services that do not duplicate trafficking services already in place.⁸ Donors can partner with existing education systems, health systems, and child protective systems within individual nations to increase the capability to assist trafficking survivors at a more reasonable cost.¹² For example, the NGO GEMS has been using peer-led workshops to inform young females at risk of exploitation of the realities of the commercial sex industry.¹² Another program, Breaking Free, offers support and recovery for sexually exploited youth and adults.¹⁵ This

organization is venturing to fulfill its greater outreach possibilities through collaboration with other local youth services, so they can work together in relationships toward completion of all services.¹⁵ A cooperative system of care for survivors allows for longer-term, more sustainable solutions, and provides benefits to both the clients and the community programs.⁸

Sustainability involves challenging the status quo, including various societies' views of girls and women. While many groups are investing resources in advocating and training, successful agencies are not submitting to cultural and gender inequities but are empowering those exploited or at-risk to use their voices for positive alternatives. Individuals who have been trafficked need to be empowered to find freedom *themselves*; this concept is particularly relevant yet culturally complex where residents are enslaved young women who live in societies in which they have a low social status.³ Those susceptible within these communities include daughters sold by their parents; wives rented by their husbands; disenfranchised, widowed or divorced mothers with limited career options; captives of war or piracy; or women bought for soldiers. Communities require more accountability through advocacy and legislation, while status quo shifts need to permeate further to individuals within societies. Training programs and poverty alleviation proposals are needed to empower those disenfranchised and to help cultivate confidence from within themselves. Once again, they need not be seen as defenseless objects in need of being rescued and transformed, but understood to be individuals with human rights.²

Such an empowerment approach should be developed within these communities and should assist trafficked persons in recapturing control over their lives. Instead of women and children viewed as vulnerable and passive objects, incapable of reasoned judgments, their choices and rights as humans cannot be emphasized enough.⁸ Safe Horizons,¹⁶ an NGO like Breaking Free¹⁵ and GEMS,¹² provides support groups and assistance to address the multifaceted needs of individuals and their families who have been victims of exploitation. Their mission is "to move victims of violence from crisis to confidence."¹⁶ Each of these NGOs provide intensive education groups to examine prostitution as a slave-based system and to explore the impact prostitution has had on the victims' lives, as well as to understand issues related to addiction and recovery.^{12,15,16} Those served by these organizations are also provided case management, counseling, support groups, housing assistance, linkage to other services, and help with legal representation.^{12,15,16}

While some NGO groups may respond to the problem of trafficking by focusing on rescuing over the protection and rehabilitation of the

survivors, various NGOs and missions' organizations are proactively responding to the injustice of human trafficking. The International Justice Mission, for example, is a faith-based organization working throughout the United States to increase awareness of trafficking worldwide.¹⁷ IJM's casework model addresses victimization and violence on the preventative level by networking and building supports within the local community justice systems of poor countries where advocates are needed for the disenfranchised.¹⁷ They continue to build associations with social service, aftercare and other government providers to safeguard long-term care of clients.¹⁷ Additionally, the Catholic Church as a whole has taken a very active stance in prevention and awareness of trafficking needs. Prior to the World Cup in South Africa, the Christian Brothers Investment Services, managing \$3.8 billion for Catholic institutions worldwide, requested the CEOs and owners of eight hotel chains in South Africa to take action to prevent sexual exploitation of children and other human trafficking crimes.¹⁸ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Children, sustains efforts for children's rights, their survival, development, and protection.¹⁹ UNICEF contributed to trafficking prevention efforts at the games by providing "Child-Friendly Spaces" with 1000 social workers, child and youth care workers, and trained volunteers to provide child protection services, emergency care, and child-appropriate activities.²⁰

Advocates and proponents of the outlined "human rights approach" must move toward protecting victims' rights at the national legislative and domestic levels. In addition to developing prevention programs, functional and appropriate anti-trafficking responses can involve promoting advocacy and prevention in larger community systems. Organizations, when supported by community partnerships with individuals, can have a marked impact. While global U.N. protocols have become more supportive in the protection of survivors in the last decade, the actual incorporation of these new practices with deliberate attention to these procedures within community agencies has not always been easy to facilitate.²¹ Various programs worldwide can seek to widen the scope of country-specific anti-trafficking measures to address these issues less as isolated incidents and rather as symptoms of a larger systemic problem in communities.⁸ The organization End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, And Trafficking of children (ECPAT) advocates for the "criminalization of traffickers without criminalizing the victims."²² As a "global network of organizations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children," they maintain their work with the government by offering training for those in

law enforcement on issues of sex-trafficking as well as other awareness and support programs.²²

By taking a vested interest in all areas of trafficking – prevention and rehabilitation, in addition to the rescue of survivors – a broader and more effective use of resources can be implemented. When preempting the effects of trafficking with a more thoughtful and enduring approach, communities are likely to have a more extensive impact in the fight against this hideous crime. Not only should the focus be on implementing services that approach all areas of trafficking, but further study and evaluation is needed. Extensive program evaluations both in the United States and abroad should be developed to allow for further assessment of current resources. Additionally, research should continue to ensure that best practices are being utilized with regard to prevention, rescue, and rehabilitation. Because of the broad array of issues contributing to the operation and consequent effects of sex trafficking, awareness needs to be sustained over time. Increasing knowledge of the comprehensive nature of problem will not only allow for outlets in the applicability of research, but will improve services and resources provided, as well as build upon the relationships between and within communities universally impacted by this atrocity.

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