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Research Essay

                  Understanding and Combatting Human Trafficking

         Imagine being stripped of your freedom, forced into labor, or having your body sold for profit like a meaningless object. For countless individuals, this nightmare is a reality. A reality that is happening everyday globally. Worldwide, behind closed doors in nondescript areas, and even hidden within the internet, a sinister trade happens daily. Human trafficking. This modern-day form of slavery remains one of the most horrendous violations of human rights, that affects millions of victims across the globe. According to David A. Feingold's article "Human Trafficking" in Foreign Policy, no. 150 (2005), the International Labour Organization or the (ILO) estimates that over 12 million people were trapped in these situations of forced labor, sexual exploitation, or other forms of servitude, with human trafficking generating profits exceeding $44 billion annuity, written in Feingold's 2005 article. Those estimated numbers only got tremendously higher in recent years. The ILO estimated in 2022 49.6 million people fall victims to human trafficking, generating a profit of $150 billion. By providing valuable insights into the root causes, prevalence, and impact of this crime. Policy makers can develop more effective prevention strategies, improve victim identification, protection, and support services, strengthen law enforcement efforts, and enhance international cooperation. In this essay I aim to raise public awareness and foster a greater sense of urgency and collective responsibility to address human trafficking. Human trafficking is something that has been going on since early human history. I don’t believe this complex global issue can be erased completely. But I believe through widespread education, advocacy, and collective action, we have the potential to significantly reduce the number of men, women, and children who fall victim to this heinous crime.

   A big cause of human trafficking is the profit of trafficking, the demand for cheap labor and sex drives the trafficking industry. Industries such as agriculture, construction, factory work,  and hospitality rely on trafficked labor to cut costs, while the demand for sex fuels sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit this demand, trafficking victims for prostitution, pornography, and human labor. In the article written by Hannah Gold UNICEF USA. “What Fuels Human Trafficking?”,  she writes how trafficking is the second most profitable illegal industry right next to drug trade for many reasons, minimal legal consequences, low coast with high profits, and the fact that unlike drugs a human can be sold over and over again until that trafficked victim dies. There are many reasons why human traffickers may face less punishment and legal consequences, But it all ties into legal and policy constraints and corruption. Law enforcement agencies and judicial systems may lack the resources and capacity to effectively combat human trafficking. Limited budgets, understaffing, and other  priorities can weaken efforts to prioritize and address trafficking cases. Human trafficking commonly involves transnational networks that operate across borders, making it challenging for law enforcement agencies to coordinate investigations and prosecutions. Differences in legal systems, law issues, and extradition processes can further complicate efforts to hold traffickers accountable. In Louise Shelley’s "Transnational Organized Crime: Human Trafficking" no.(4) 2021, he writes that human traffickers understand this loop hole in the legal system and use it to their advantage for less possibility of prosecution. With lack of necessities and cross border challenges with legal authority it doesn't help that there is a immense corruption issue within law enforcement agencies, judicial systems, and government institutions can sabotage efforts to combat human trafficking. Traffickers may bribe officials or apply influence to avoid detection and prosecution. In Peter Sieberer article "Police Corruption and Human Trafficking: The Case of Nigeria" no.(69) 2018, Sieberer Draws on empirical data collected through interviews with law enforcement officials, government representatives, and NGO workers, the study explores how corruption within the police force undermines efforts to combat human trafficking and perpetuates impunity for traffickers. Peter writes that the corruption of law enforcement and government  is so bad within human trafficking, it makes it the most difficult industry to combat. Human trafficking, much like the drug trade, involves not only traffickers and dealers profiting from this illegal industry but also corporations and individuals leveraging it for personal gain. Im not talking about the stereotypical depraved and ruthless consumer. Im talking about those involved often with a lot of power and wealth. Enough power to corrupt institutions meant to uphold justice and the rule of law.

Its important to understand Human traffickers targets. Vulnerability and high demand. Traffickers usually target groups of people in poverty, women, and children. Of Course  any individual can be a victim of sex trafficking but there is reasons why the groups i listed are at a higher risk of being trafficked.  People living in poverty are often desperate for opportunities to survive and improve their lives witch can put then in dangerous situations, making them vulnerable targets for traffickers. In Helga Baitenmann’s research article "Understanding the Link between Poverty and Trafficking: Lessons from Northern Thailand"no(13) 2005 writing about Thailand which has been known to have high cases of human trafficking, particularly in the sex trafficking industry. Baitenmann explores how economic hardship and lack of opportunities drive individuals, particularly women and children, into situations of vulnerability where they may become targets for traffickers. Lack of education and economic opportunities further exacerbate this vulnerability, trapping individuals in situations of exploitation. This goes for children and women too, not having proper education opportunities in other countries to avoid this. Gender inequality plays a huge role in human trafficking. Women and girls are largely affected, often coerced into sex trafficking or forced labor due to discriminatory social norms and practices. Child marriage, and as I said unequal access to education leave them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. I am emphasizing these groups because it's crucial to recognize who is particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. By understanding this, we can effectively raise awareness and provide education to these communities, empowering them to protect themselves and prevent further victimization.

Given the prevalence of social media and the vulnerability of all individuals to human trafficking, it is so important that we, as a society, prioritize awareness of this issue. Many individuals may not fully understand the scope and severity of the human trafficking problem. Without awareness of the prevalence and impact of trafficking, they may underestimate the importance of advocacy efforts. Raising awareness is not only crucial, but it is also the most impactful action we can take to combat the alarming rise in trafficking victims each year. While social media provides a platform for anyone to amplify their voice, its true power lies in using our collective voices to advocate for those who have been silenced. Engage community leaders, religious organizations in efforts to raise awareness about human trafficking. Community-based events to help educate and mobilize local communities to take action against trafficking. Launch public awareness campaigns using various media platforms, including television, radio, and social media. I notice that the App TikTok is a great platform for, share survivor stories, and provide information on how to report suspicious activities, and what to look out for. Its so important to make use of these platforms for advocating for growing global issues and not just entertainment purposes.  Advocate for stronger laws and policies to combat human trafficking at the local, national, and international levels. Engage policymakers, lawmakers, and government agencies in efforts to strengthen legal frameworks, enhance victim protection measures, and hold traffickers accountable.

Raising awareness about human trafficking is about saving lives. Not just a few lives but millions of innocent lives. Every victim rescued, every survivor empowered, and every trafficker brought to justice represents a success over darkness. By shedding light on the realities of trafficking, we provide ourselves and others with the knowledge that can possibly save you or someone you know one day. Increased awareness can aid specialized training and funding among professionals like law enforcement officers, healthcare professionals, social workers, and other service providers  to  improve victim identification and access to better services. As a young woman who dreams of a world where all are treated with dignity and respect, a world where we don't have to constantly fear such a sinister reality. I urge everyone to join the conversation on human trafficking awareness. It's not just an important issue, it's possibly the most important one. Together, let's shine a light on the dark reality of human trafficking, raise our voices for those who have been silenced, and work tirelessly towards a future where human trafficking is but a distant memory.

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