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**On "Trafficking and Health"**

Dominique Stewart

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the article "Trafficking and Health" by Joanna Busza, Sarah Castle, and Aisse Diarra. Human trafficking is unfortunately addressed by many political systems as a migration issue -- to be dealt with by restricting the rights of migrants, tightening border controls, etc. However, as we see in this article it is more of a health and human rights issue than anything else. Addressing a problem with the wrong diagnosis does nothing to solve it and oftentimes exacerbates it, and human trafficking is no exception to this. But with the right approaches, the damage caused by trafficking can be mitigated -- and we can remain optimistic that it can be largely eliminated from our global society.

**Keywords:** human trafficking, health, healthcare, sex-trafficking, sex worker, prostitution, child labor

**Central Argument and Reasoning of Trafficking**

Trafficking women and children has become a global public health issue. Trafficking is characterized by force, threat, fraud, and the intent to exploit individuals. According to Dictionary.com the definition of trafficking is "to trade or deal in a specific commodity or service, often of illegal nature". Trafficking is not only illegal, but it is associated with many serious health risks. Psychological trauma, injuries from violence, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, and substance abuse are only a few of the risks trafficking directly involves. According to an article titled "Health and Trafficking" written by authors Joanna Busza, Sarah Castle, and Aisse Diarne, these risks are an effect of the lack of public services in a foreign country, language barriers, as well as isolation, and poor or hazardous working conditions. The "Trafficking and Health" article, along with a few more articles, give some interesting and slightly surprising insights on the act of trafficking as well as the health risks associated with it and how those risks affect the people involved.

According to "Health and Trafficking" many multinational, governmental, and non-governmental groups misread the causes of trafficking. These groups most likely view trafficking as a general migration problem. The laws made to solve the "general migration problems" such as border controls and criminalization have only worsened the health conditions of those who have been trafficked because it became much harder for them to get the services they needed. These laws are generalized for all migrants, both forced and voluntary, and it is difficult to distinguish between the two. Those migrants who were forced into the situation are reaping the same consequences of not being able to receive health services as those who are voluntarily breaking the law.

In a study responding to non-governmental organizations an estimated 15,000 Malian children have been trafficked to the cocoa plantations in the Ivory Coast, where child labor by kidnapped or tricked children from neighboring countries is prevalent. In another study of 1,000 Malian children, only 4 had claimed to be wrongfully trafficked in an area that many agencies believed to be in high risk (Busza, Castle & Diarra, 2010). The other children had simply volunteered to migration for the opportunities among other things. The incentives offered were an attention-grabber in the migration process that many children bought into. The study proved to many non-governmental organizations that trafficking is not exactly in the places that people would expect. It also showed that migration was not something that everybody was forced into, some actually wanted it. The success of a migrant is often based on intermediaries, often family members, to help with everything such as jobs, purchases, and even finding a spouse. Intermediaries also help with negotiating with corrupt authorities that demand bribes at the international borders (Busza, Castle & Diarra, 2010).

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To claim that the crossing of the border is "trafficking" is watering down the meaning of something that is much deeper. In an effort to solve the general meaning of trafficking many anti-trafficking laws have been put in place, but have not necessarily helped to stop the complex dynamic of trafficking but instead just make it harder to be safely assisted with trafficking. It has become too difficult to distinguish between a person migrating children for exploitation, versus a person facilitating a young migrant's journey to success. Current trafficking laws at a national level require all children under 18 years old to have a traveling passport with them while crossing the border. The issue at hand with the document is that it is difficult to obtain, which allows officials the opportunity to take extra bribes at the border. Many child migrants have also left home on their own free will (Busza, Castle & Diarra, 2010). These kids are then less likely to seek out health care, but are more likely to ruin their current state of health by trying again and again to cross the border.

An estimated 10,000 Vietnamese women are sex workers in Cambodia. In another study proposed by the authors of "Health and Trafficking" many women already knew and had the ambition to engage in sex work. This process is called "debt bondage" which means the brothel at which the women worked would pay any loans the families owed (Busza, Castle & Diarra, 2010). In this study many women expressed their dissatisfaction with the working conditions they were placed in. Many men would refuse to use condoms or simply be violent in their actions towards these women. To help with the conditions, non-governmental organizations as well as the police would perform raids. Within the raids, the organization would take the women to rehabilitation centers to get help while the police would arrest the men involved. Unfortunately many women would go back to the brothel as soon as they could, not really caring for the help at all. This had become their home and really all they knew (Busza, Castle & Diarra, 2010).

In the end, the article "Health and Trafficking" suggests taking a more realistic approach to trafficking instead of forcing migrants to work underground only making health conditions worse. They believe that there are ways to make migration safer with a few changes. First, public officials should recognize migration as a socioculture with incentives and work towards safe migration for health reason rather than solely corrupt migration. Officials should also find a way to help occupational hazards and give migrants the ability to access to health and social care. Then, programs that want to help migrants should not assume all intermediaries are "traffickers." Migration causes many health risks, but is currently a big business and should be slowed down and then stopped.

### **Broad Importance of Trafficking**

According to the article "Human Trafficking and Health: A conceptual model to inform policy, intervention and research" by authors Cathy Zimmerman, Mazedra Hossain, and Charlotte Watts, trafficking has become a huge problem within the last decade for men, women, and children. Not only is sex trafficking an issue, but labor trafficking as well and both types are not good for a person's health. Trafficking occurs in the following stages: Recruitment, travel and transit, detention, exploitation, re-trafficking, integration, and re-integration (Zimmerman, Hossain & Watts, 2011).

In the recruitment stage, a person's health is characterized personally and related to their home country. This includes any pre-existing health conditions, history of abuse or deprivation; social or environmental influences; health behaviors and available care (Zimmerman, Hossain & Watts, 2011). During the travel and transit stage a person's health is at risk because they are more vulnerable to rape and initial mental trauma. Exploitation is the next process in the trafficking process and includes some of the most common health risks associated with trafficking in general. During this stage a person can be exposed to sexual abuse, labor abuse, harsh work conditions, and psychological trauma as well (Zimmerman, Hossain & Watts, 2011). These same health risks and conditions are also carried into the last few stages of trafficking. Authors Cathy Zimmerman, Mazedra Hossain, and Charlotte Watts concluded that people object to trafficking because it is harmful, yet the health aspects of trafficking are neglected. These health risks are serious, and would be carefully considered when handling trafficking problems.

An editorial written by PLoS Medicine Editors titled "Human Trafficking: The Shameful Face of Migration" expresses the health implications of those who have been trafficked. The PLoS Editors proposed that "Individuals

face enormous barriers in many countries in accessing health services and other forms of support, and many health problems or risks arise directly from marginalization, insecurity, and difficulties obtaining care" (Editors, 2011). Trafficking has become one of the largest criminal industries around and an extremely profitable one at that while global entrepreneurship is at its worst. Intermediaries are more than often uninterested in the bad conditions, but more so in the money involved. Trafficking is so complex that it is hard for one to see beyond the criminal act and into the health of trafficking. This complexity only increases when placing in all the factors that contribute to a migrant's health. The country a migrant is from, including how they traveled and the type of trafficking they are participating or forced into are only a few aspects relating to the health of a trafficked person (Editors, 2011).

Human trafficking and health go hand-in-hand. Trafficking can lead to many unwanted health concerns that should be taken into consideration when implementing anti-trafficking laws and policies. Human trafficking is certainly not a good thing; therefore, people in any industry involved should seek ways to stop or at least help better the situation. An important step in the process of eliminating trafficking is to recognize it and this begins in the health care setting. In an article title "How to Recognize Human Trafficking in a Health Care Setting" the author Brittney Thomas explains the meaning of human trafficking, the role of a nurse, and how to recognize a victim of human trafficking.

Thomas describes trafficking as "activities involved when one person obtains or holds another person in compelled service." There are more than 17,500 people per year being trafficked in the United States, and that does not include those who have not yet been found. A nurse should be able to identify victims in order to help them in the best ways they can. There have been many cases in which the nurse or health care provider does not recognize the signs of trafficking and lives that could have been saved are not. There are many signs to look out for in a trafficked human being. Their stories tend to be inconsistent and they rarely self-identify themselves. A potential victim may be accompanied by a person who seems controllable and talks in place of the patient a lot. Victims may also lack proper identification and are not able to give a proper business address (Thomas). All of these along with many others are signs that a patient could be a potential victim of trafficking and need help.

### **An Opposing Viewpoint**

Trafficking is seen as a negative act across the globe. The only opposing viewpoints would come from victims themselves in the beginning of the process. CBS News presented an article on "The Realities of Human Trafficking." The article explained the reasons many victims were ready to migrate in the first place. Many of them were promised new lives. In some cases they were to come to the United States and make more money, and live a better life than they had lived in their previous country. Children felt they would gain from all of the opportunities they would be exposed to in a new place with new surroundings. Many teens figured they were gaining independence by moving on. Women also went after their own independence and new economic promises such as the "debt bondage" package. Men are more so involved in labor trafficking and want to be able to make money and work, and support their families.

On the other hand, the person doing the trafficking is in it for the money. The CBS article exclaims "How easy it is to make lots of money, how universal the demand, how difficult is it to prosecute. Human Trafficking is a low-risk, high-profit enterprise, and because it looks to the casual observer -- and even the cops -- like garden variety prostitution, it is tolerated. And worse, it is growing" (Kennedy, 2009). Traffickers are thinking by these words when they get into the business. Most of the times they are out for the money and sex traffickers are out for both the women and the money. Both traffickers and people being trafficked see some sort of opportunity for success in their reasoning for being a part of the process. Whether it is an abstract or concrete gain, there is some sort of perceived gain. Trafficking by no means is a good thing, but the people involved would be the first to say otherwise.

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### **Concluding Discussion**

Trafficking is a cruel and frankly unusual act. No matter the amount of money being made, there should not be any need to exploit other people. These people suffer from physical conditions and mental conditions that frequently can never be healed. It is a rough world out there and that is a known fact, but the need to hurt other people in the process of gaining for one person is a selfish act, albeit a prevalent one the world over. Who wants to be doing hard labor and working long hard hours all the time? Who would find the need to give up their body to total strangers'? Who would want to be locked up without the freedom we are guaranteed as citizens? Few to no people would want to do any of the following things for obvious reasons. One of those obvious reasons is that all of these actions take a serious toll on your health. Trafficking and health go hand in hand in a negative way. People who are trafficked report all types of injuries and long term illnesses. Many report broken bones, gastrointestinal problems, rashes, scabies, weight loss, and dental problems. Many are practically starved and going through many psychological trauma as well. Women are forced into sex trafficking are also forced into drugs and alcohol use so that they can take on more clients and work for longer hours.

Trafficking and globalization work closely together because trafficking takes place all over the world. Trafficking is a business and capital flows to places that can most easily exploit cheap labor. So once the assets from trafficking exploits are depleted, those assets can be obtained more cheaply in other markets. Trafficking exploits people by taking them from one place to another (usually across national borders) and that itself is a part of globalization. In conclusion, as the included articles explain above, the anti-trafficking laws implemented should begin to include rules and regulations that increase the power of a victim to get help. The health conditions involved in trafficking seem to be endless and there are people dying every day due to trafficking because they could not receive the help they needed. Health care providers should become more informed on how to recognize a victim of trafficking which could in turn only help decrease the number of unknown trafficked people in the world. With the necessary laws to make health care available and the means for a health care provider to recognize the harms characteristic of trafficked people, there is a possibility that trafficking can be slowed down and stopped around the world, and that alone could save many lives.

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