

Presentation for DevNet conference 2014 – 20 mins

Thursday 27 November

Introduction

Slide one: Title slide

Hello, my name is Lauren Brown and I am completing my Masters in International Studies this year at Otago University. The research component of the degree is a dissertation that analyses an issue in a global context, and is to be submitted in February 2015. It is a predominantly desk-based research, and I have not completed writing it as I have a couple of months yet to work on it. The working title for my paper is “Agency and Development in a Globalised World: A Relationship between Sex Trafficking and Microfinance in Cambodia”.

Slide two: Presentation overview

- Research issue and questions
- Theoretical framework and background to the issue
- Methodology and case study (Cambodia)
- 3 key points that situate my argument that there is a positive relationship...
 - Key point: Agency and Development are central to the issue of trafficking
 - Key point: NGOs have a unique place in the sex trafficking debate
 - Key point: Microfinance programmes are a step toward countering the harmful cycle

Whilst the extent of success of this relationship is debated in literature and has varying results in practice, the primary recognition of the prospect and its progression is a valuable starting point for future research and intervention.

Slide three: Video

Before I begin I'd like to take you to Cambodia, to meet a girl called Ka. (*Run video until 2:30mins*).

- Child trafficking in Cambodia (World Vision USA):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0tby-4F0Qs>

Slide four: Human trafficking

Despite criticisms that the human trafficking trade has been exaggerated in academic literature over the last two decades, it is one of the world's largest organised crime industries. The International Labour Organisation estimates that over 4 million people are victims of sex trafficking – that's about the population of NZ.

What has brought me to this issue and to pursuing it for my research was initially a personal motivation. Having spent some time with an NGO in Cambodia four years ago, working alongside women and children in vulnerable communities, I have a firing desire to see them rise up from their perceived vulnerability to traffickers. Experiencing life with them for a short time brings to life the smells, sights and sounds of the world around them, in different ways to our own. As an intern with World Vision New Zealand I am also fascinated by the way in which global NGOs are responding (to not only issues of disaster relief and healthcare but these emerging issues too).

Beyond my personal interests, there is also wider relevance. ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) has proposed to foster an economic community post-2015 that aims to deepen and accelerate regional economic integration like the EU, but only protects skilled labour in free movement across borders. It's easy enough at the moment for traffickers to move people across borders in Southeast Asia.

Slide five: Poipet, Cambodia

For example, the cross-border trade in Poipet, a town on the Cambodia - Thailand border, attracts many migrant families from other parts of Cambodia. However, the lack of actual job opportunities has led to high unemployment rates and widespread poverty, with most residents earning one dollar a day or less.

In 2010, the UNODC supplied a border liaison office and equipment in Preah Vihear province in an attempt to mandate threats posed by transnational crime groups to cross borders. But attention also needs to be given to what can be done with intra-country trafficking and the root causes before these women and children even get to the border. So as the current chair of ASEAN, Cambodia has the opportunity to incorporate a human rights aspect that will protect unskilled labour movement, and therefore perhaps has the potential to decelerate cross-border movement of trafficking victims.

Slide six: Research questions

Academically, I have found there to be **a gap in scholarly literature and a need for analyses that contextualises into time and place the information that is frequently generalised**. In addition, there is a **lack of attention for “agency”** in relation to female mobility and vulnerable status that is missed due to the dominant perception of female powerlessness with regard to trafficking.

At the heart of this is the overarching research question: **‘How can common narratives of women vulnerable to traffickers be modified to empower women, counter the cycle of sex trafficking, and aid development?’**. I then have four sub-questions to unpack the issue:

- What are the effects of an International Political Economy on gendered violence and the development agenda?
- How has a globalised society conceptualised and mediated vulnerable women, particularly with regard to sex trafficking and agency in the global South?
- What is unique about the way in which sex trafficking is manifested in the Cambodian context?
- How can programmes endorsed by global non-governmental organisations better address sex trafficking in Cambodia in a more effective and efficient manner?

Slide seven: Theoretical framework and background to the issue

I have found that the phenomenon of sex trafficking is situated within power relations over the body, an international political economy (IPE), and is exacerbated by the negative effects of globalisation.

Power relations have an immediate hold upon the 'body'. Foucault (1997) writes that they "invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs". Even as human rights continue to gain an international advocacy and scope it is important to recognise that they are not 'natural' or 'universal', but are enveloped in international power relations within gendered expectations, cultural norms, and societal institutions.

Thinking about the background of an IPE means thinking about the relationship between this power and the division of labour. An IPE of sex, then, operates in terms of demand and supply including the impact of rural impoverishment and urban unemployment, and the low status of women as a resellable commodity.

Slide eight:

An example of a scholar that has put a lot of resources and time into human trafficking research is Louise Shelley. She has found that:

- Women and children have been among the largest losers of globalisation in the global South
- Common narratives of trafficking include victimisation, it is only the poor uneducated who are targeted, and women are culturally not accepted to do anything but sex work after rescue
- It is exploitation by both men and women
- There are a variety of contributing causes, such as poverty, debt, armed conflicts, and tourism
- Asian trafficking and crime groups operate differently to the rest of the world (this emphasises the need for contextual analysis)
- No region or nation is left untouched

Slide nine: Methodology

The method I am using to gather the main data is qualitative analysis and literature review, with a Cambodia case study. As this research is ongoing until February, I am still in the process of analysing, and writing. Over the next month I am hoping to conduct interviews with staff members of NGO-based in New Zealand as a personal addition to scholarly literature and to their organisation's public claims. These interviews will be carefully considered and conducted for a number of reasons including: the cross-cultural nature of my research, using qualitative research as

the main source of information, and the potential for vested interests of myself in the posed questions and results.

Cambodia itself is a source, transit, and destination country for sex traffickers, so the issue is a triple threat. Trafficking there consists of socioeconomic, kinship, and political facets. Cambodia has a broken past, under-development by multinational corporations, and political agendas, and so you have a lot of broken people - and severely limited options in regards to income generation. This quickly leads to viewing children as small income generators for the family, as Ka experienced, in a culture that is of a collective mind-set, and puts them at further risk of being trafficked.

Every year the USA Department of State prepares a Trafficking in Persons Report as a metric to measure the scope of the international crime. Tier rankings reflect an assessment of issues like: enactment of laws; criminal penalties prescribed; proactive victim identification measures; and government funding and partnerships with NGOs.

In the 2013 report, Cambodia sits on the Tier 2 Watch list: Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards, but are making efforts to bring themselves into compliance AND: a) The absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; b) There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year.

Slide ten: Key point: Agency and development are central to this issue

I argue that ‘agency and development’ are key to this issue.

Sex trafficking is a multibillion dollar global industry that strips women and children of their fundamental rights to security, to freedom, and to not be held by slavery or servitude. Yet its female victims are constantly perceived with a gendered emphasis on passivity, ignorance and force.

More than half of Cambodia’s population is under 25 years of age and job creation hasn’t been able to keep pace with the number of young people entering the job market. Therefore traffickers are able to exploit the opportunity, for example women and girls are targeted for risky forms of employment like domestic or restaurant work far from their homes, which sometimes leads to being trafficked across the borders.

Recent literature suggests that if trafficked women are given the means to reintegrate into community in a way that supports them emotionally, physically and financially, (and if they were

even perceived as empowered to begin with), that their level of poverty and risk to traffickers would decline. When they take development into their own hands, they are able to cater sustainability to their own family, culture and needs. After all, it is well documented that when the woman of a household has power in financial issues and when children go to school regularly in countries where abject poverty exists, that their livelihoods will be more dependable than when the male holds full control.

Slide eleven: Key point: NGOs have a unique place in the sex trafficking debate

Non-governmental organisations (NGO) have a unique place in the sex trafficking debate, and a crucial role to play in changing the narrative and aiding localised development:-

Many arrange their programmes around the ‘3 P’ approach: Prevention, Protection, and Prosecution. They have the ability to work alongside women and children once they are out of the traffickers’ control, and to also integrate with both the government agencies and community to see through their recovery.

Three examples of NGOs in Cambodia are: NVader, Hagar, and Daughters. Both NVader and Hagar have strands based in New Zealand. Daughters’ and Sons’ of Cambodia is locally based, and since its establishment in 2007 has opened safe houses and facilities where young women and children are counselled and taught a new trade to sustain a living: from sewing to cooking. This is an example of how the common narrative assumption of trafficked survivors as only being accepted in society as sex workers is challenged.

In the short 4 years since I was in Cambodia, there has been a noticeable change in awareness raising and collaboration, seen when my younger brother went earlier this year on the same trip that I went on. Global NGOs are now beginning to work alongside grassroots organisations; and government agencies and non-profit professionals are cooperating to provide the best care and support for trafficked women and children. There are always things to improve upon and mistakes made, but it is encouraging for global supporters and local communities to see this progress.

These kinds of operations not only provide a hand up to victims of sex trafficking, but also have the potential to counter trafficking in the first place.

Slide twelve: Key point: Case-sensitive microfinance programmes are a step toward countering the harmful cycle

As an example of this, microfinance programmes initiated by global NGOs are a step toward the redefinition of social, economic, and political factors that advance the sex trafficking trade.

There is both debate and consistency in scholarly literature of the effectiveness of microfinance programmes in relation to sex trafficking prevention and rehabilitation. Over the past 20-odd years there have been different models with strengths and weaknesses (from the Grameen Bank to arguing that it's not best for the poorest of the poor), and it's not a full cure for the prevalence and risks of trafficking.

There are a bunch of assumptions built into the why and how of a relationship between sex trafficking and microfinance institutions; for example that it creates alternative livelihoods to the jobs promised as part of traffickers' deception (and the truth of these assumptions is sketchy at times). However, as Getu (2006) suggests, it is a programme that can go beyond the symptoms of the globalised setting and to the root causes of the crime's business. When they are intentional and context-specific, they can promote education, skills training, family wellbeing and advocacy.

World Vision and its partnering Microfinance Institution called Vision Fund International for example:

- They do things a bit differently to small-scale MFI because your money isn't a loan; it's a donation that is given to another candidate when the first's small business is sustainable. Candidates in Cambodia are often in World Vision's Area Development Programmes
- Cambodia has a 98% repayment rate, with over 200,000 jobs and 900,000 children impacted since 2003
- 94% of its entrepreneurs in this organisation are female, and its programme quality and client outreach is rising each year

There is hope here, through microfinance, to address the debt and agency aspects of sex trafficking.

Slide thirteen: Conclusion

What I have attempted to do here, is contextually analyse scholarly literature on sex trafficking within the case of Cambodia. From this, I have come to look at microfinance as one means of

countering the trade there, which recognises the nation's specific needs. In particular, for secure finances, sustainable living, and meeting fundamental needs.

This research included assessing the position of Cambodia's sex trafficking evidence with scholarly literature, and the theoretical background in which it sits – which I haven't had time to cover sufficiently in today's session.

Through this research I have come to believe that it is possible for the scale of sex trafficking in Cambodia to be underestimated and for microfinance through global NGOs to aid agency and counter the cycle. This is because my research indicates that organisations like World Vision work deliberately to understand local culture, aspirations, and ways of working.

My hope is that this case research builds upon existing literature, and brings to the front of our minds an accelerating aspect of reality in our world. I hope that it may provide some hope for those whose role may fit into the spectrum of sex trafficking, ASEAN's governance, ever-changing policies, protocols, research and practical works.

Thank you.

Slide fourteen: References for presentation

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Daughters of Cambodia: www.daughtersofcambodia.org

Hagar: www.hagarinternational.org/new-zealand

Nvader: www.nvader.org

World Vision New Zealand: www.worldvision.org.nz

Vision Fund International: www.visionfund.org