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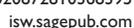
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Abstract

Despite conventional wisdom that slavery has been eradicated, this analysis of the human trafficking literature reveals that this form of violent coercion and economic exploitation persists. However, there is little agreement upon definitions, estimates and responses to this problem. Differing academic and policy definitions and estimates of slavery are reviewed, in which most emphasis is placed upon sexual trafficking, while other forms such as chattel slavery, debt bondage and contract slavery are often under-recognized. There are a range of policy options for ameliorating this problem, which include social services, community-based interventions, harm reduction strategies and legal and economic responses.

Keywords

forced labor, human rights, human trafficking, poverty, slavery

In the popular history, *Bury the Chains*, Adam Hochschild (2005) chronicles the rise of the British abolitionist movement and concludes on a triumphant note in 1833, implying that slavery ended with the ‘burying of chains’ and emancipation across the British empire. Today it is widely assumed that

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slavery is a vestige of the past. Few historians recognize its persistence or pervasiveness, and few scholars of inequality and oppression recognize that the abhorrent practice continues. Despite abolition's legacy, slavery endures around the globe, albeit in somewhat different guises, often shaped by the forces of globalization. The transition from ancient to contemporary slavery encompasses a rhetorical devolution from Aristotle's promotion of slavery as justified, necessary and beneficial, to an Orwellian doublespeak wherein it is forbidden everywhere, yet practiced nearly everywhere. Much of slavery, from ancient to modern times, has involved the forced transportation of people across political boundaries. This has been facilitated and accelerated through the recent rapid economic globalization; the increased flow of capital and people; and the extension of production and distribution networks around the world (Lyons, 2006).

The overwhelming scholarly emphasis on slavery is upon the historical transatlantic slave trade and the experiences of Africans in the American South. Largely neglected in academic research, only recently has the problem of contemporary slavery received attention from social scientists, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and in the social work literature (Cree, 2008; Desyllas, 2007; Hodge, 2008; Hodge and Lietz, 2007; Jones et al., 2007; Ray, 2007; Roby, 2005; Van Hook et al., 2006). Social work's mission of serving vulnerable populations places the profession in a unique position to raise awareness and advocate for the emancipation and care of those suffering in bondage. Contemporary slavery violates universal human rights as well as social work ethics. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 8 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibit slavery, forced labor, servitude and the slave trade. Article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights articulates the right to just and favorable work conditions, including fair remuneration, and safe and healthy working conditions (Reichert, 2003). Social work professional organizations support these human rights declarations, and social workers should strive to protect these rights among vulnerable and oppressed populations.

How can social work practice challenge this globalized system of oppression? Anti-oppressive social work practice incorporates radical social change efforts directly into social work practice (Baines, 2006). Social work practice should address structural inequalities across the globe that affects this population. Despite growing attention, there has not been a critical examination of divergent definitions and estimates of the problem. Furthermore, the focus has mainly been upon sex trafficking, to the exclusion of many other forms of contemporary slavery which may rival sex trafficking in scope (DeStefano, 2007; Ray, 2007). This article attempts to remedy this situation by comparing

various definitions and estimates, identifying several overlooked forms of the problem and outlining various policy responses.

Definitions and types of contemporary slavery

Defining slavery is problematic: if too narrow, vulnerable people are at risk of being excluded. However, over-broad definitions dilute intervention efforts, and the inclusion of multiple forms of social injustice, human rights violations and poor labor conditions renders the term meaningless. There is a need for specificity, accuracy and consensus in the definition of slavery, so that it may bear some practicality (Gozdziak and Collett, 2005; Payne, 2006; Quirk, 2008). This section reviews scholarly and policy definitions of slavery, and discusses the various forms in which contemporary slavery can manifest itself.

Scholarly definitions

Patterson (1982: 17) has defined slavery throughout history as ‘the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons’. There is widespread agreement among scholars and legislators that violence or the threat of violence for the control of another person is the central element of slavery. This violence supports a relation of domination (Patterson, 1982), an extreme power differential marked by decentralized violence (Bales, 2007). Natal alienation refers to the forced loss of ties of birth and blood to both ascending and descending generations. All rights and claims of heritage are severed, as the slave becomes a socially dead person who ‘ceases to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order’ (Patterson, 1982: 35). This civically excommunicated person is now only socialized through the master–slave relation of domination.

Bales (2007) defines contemporary slavery similarly, if more simply, where people are forced to work through violence for no pay. Bales maintains that the most significant difference between contemporary and historical slavery is that slavery is no longer legal. Fueled by overpopulation primarily in the global South, the historical shortage of slaves has been replaced with a surplus. This increased supply of slaves has resulted in a decrease in their cost; slaves are cheaper today. The duration of enslavement has decreased; whereas historically most slaves were bound for a lifetime, the bondage of contemporary slaves is temporary, perhaps as short as between two and five years (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008; Human Rights Center, 2005; Tsutsumi et al., 2008). The greater availability and decreased cost of slaves has resulted in a disincentive for the slaveholder to maintain the health and survival of the slave. Just as the cost of procuring and maintaining slaves has decreased,

the profits they generate have grown. Economic vulnerability puts individuals at a greater risk for slavery than racial or ethnic differences. Where ethnic differences exist in modern slavery, they often reflect deeper economic disparities. However, whereas historical slavery existed primarily in the context of racism, modern slavery is less tied to race and color and more to economic deprivation and vulnerability (Bales, 2007; Patterson, 1982).

Policy definitions

International policy definitions remained consistent through the early part of the 20th century, incorporating elements of the above definitions and delineating specific categories of slavery. The first international consensus of the definition of slavery was recorded at the League of Nations Slavery Convention of 25 September 1926, although the types of slavery included had been outlined by the League's Temporary Slavery Commission of 1924: serfdom, debt bondage and adoption or marriage for the purpose of slavery. In the 1932 Convention Concerning Forced Labor (No. 29), the International Labor Organization defined slavery as involuntary work or service conducted under threat of penalty. In 1956, the United Nations returned to the earlier categories in the Supplementary Convention on the Abolishment of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery by defining slavery as including serfdom, debt bondage and adoption or marriage for the purpose of slavery.

The terms 'human trafficking' and 'slavery' have become synonymous. Trafficking originated as a policy definition as an extension of drug trafficking and arms trafficking, primarily referring to cases of slavery wherein victims cross international political boundaries. Therefore, some scholars preferred the term 'slavery' to include forced labor in cases where victims were never transported across state borders, but were exploited inside their country of origin. Additionally, many prefer the term 'slavery' to 'trafficking' as the former serves to both connect the current problem to the historical context of forced labor and to highlight the brutal reality and human suffering. The term 'trafficking' can reflect a sanitized version of this problem.

Contemporary policy definitions employ the term 'trafficking', which, as noted above, originally referred to cases of slavery that crossed state borders (Guinn, 2008). Eventually, definitions of trafficking have been expanded to encompass different forms of slavery, regardless of where they occur. The 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also known as the 'Palermo Protocol') employs the phrase 'trafficking in persons' to mean sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery and the removal of organs. The 2000

United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act (reauthorized in 2008) uses the phrase 'severe forms of trafficking in persons' to include sex trafficking, peonage, debt bondage, involuntary servitude and slavery.

These definitions explain trafficking as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, transfer, provision, obtaining or receipt of a person. Both emphasize that human trafficking is essentially about violence (the use or threat of force, including abduction, coercion, deception and physical restraint) for the purpose of exploitation. US law defines coercion as 'any scheme, plan, or pattern' that causes someone to believe another person would be harmed or restrained, and applies to cases where women have been forced into prostitution at the threat of harm to their children or families (United States Department of State [USDOS], 2008). The Palermo Protocol has helped in removing an obstacle to the prosecution of human trafficking by expanding the definition of coercion to add that force or the threat of force 'to achieve consent of a person' is still a form of coercion (Hodge and Lietz, 2007).

Types of contemporary slavery

Contemporary slavery takes many forms, including sexual slavery, child slavery, chattel slavery, debt bondage, domestic servitude, contract slavery, religious slavery and state slavery (Bales, 2007; Jones et al., 2007). Sexual slavery involves forcing women to engage in sex work, and usually entails the trafficking of women into prostitution. Child slavery can take the form of child soldiers, child domestic workers or sexual slavery. These forms of slavery have received significant attention in the media and the literature (Beah, 2007; Cadet, 1998; Cree, 2008; Desyllas, 2007; Guinn and Steglich, 2003; Hodge, 2008; Hodge and Lietz, 2007; Roby, 2005; Weitzer, 2007). There are, however, other forms of contemporary slavery that have received far less popular attention. This section draws attention to the lesser publicized forms of slavery.

Chattel slavery

This is the complete ownership of one human being by another. It is the type of slavery that most Westerners are familiar with, as it closely resembles historical slavery. Chattel slavery consists of a person being captured, sold or born into permanent servitude, as the master's property (Bales, 2007). The largest example of contemporary chattel slavery persists in Mauritania, despite having been banned three times (Miers, 2003). Smaller-scale examples exist throughout North Africa and the Middle East as remnants of the trans-Saharan slave trade.

Debt bondage

This is characterized by enslavement due to debt to a moneylender, usually in the form of forced agricultural labor (Ray, 2007). Typically people borrow money to pay for a wedding or cover the costs of a family member's illness, and then pledge themselves to labor to repay the debt plus an unspecified interest rate. The borrower's labor then pays off the interest, but not the original debt, which can be passed on to children. The debts of many laborers carry very high interest rates, sometimes as much as 60 percent, or even 100 percent in extreme cases (Skinner, 2008). Illiterate laborers are made to sign contracts and account books verifying their debt. Faulty accounting is often used to manipulate the debt so that laborers can never break even. A deceptive structure of debt, costs and low earnings preclude the chance for bonded laborers to exit from debt. This characterizes much of modern slavery in South Asia (Upadhyana, 2004).

Contract slavery

This refers to contracts that guarantee employment which lure job seekers to remote locations. Once a worker arrives at the place of promised employment, he/she is violently coerced into labor without pay. The contracts may later be produced to mask the slavery as a legitimate work relationship (Bales, 2007). This common type of modern slavery is widespread around the world, and often occurs in industries such as mining, logging, coffee and chocolate plantations, fishing, cattle farming and factories. This mechanism may also be used in sexual slavery.

State slavery

This is government-sponsored slavery, where the state captures and forces its own citizens to work. Often this work is in military campaigns against indigenous populations or on government construction projects. State slavery mainly occurs in Myanmar and North Korea.

Domestic servitude

This usually involves women and children being forced to serve as domestic workers in a household. They are held at force, isolated from the outside world, never allowed outside. They are strictly controlled within the households, and are forced by violence to provide service (Anderson, 2004; Black, 2002; Cadet, 1998; Okafor, 2009; Pflug, 2002).

Religious slavery

This refers to when religious institutions are used to maintain slavery. In western Africa, young girls who are virgins are given to local fetish priests to atone for the sins of their family members. This is culturally believed to appease the gods for the crimes committed by male relatives. In India and Nepal, poor families will in effect sacrifice a daughter by having her marry a god, becoming a *devadasi*. She becomes a slave to the temple, under the control of the men who work there, often forced to work as a prostitute (Bales, 2007; Miers, 2003).

The scope of contemporary slavery

Estimating how many slaves exist in the world today is difficult. The illegal nature of slavery renders it practically invisible; a severe lack of data impairs meaningful counts. Often, the victims of slavery are isolated within households, small factories, remote mines or farms and brothels. There is not a clear methodology for investigation; most research is descriptive (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2006; Savona and Stefanizzi, 2007). The estimates discussed below are no more than approximations of the extent of the problem (Laczko and Gramegna, 2003).

In 1984 the UN Working Group of Experts on Slavery estimated that there were 250,000 chattel slaves in the Sahara (Miers, 2003). Human Rights Watch estimates there are 15 million bonded child laborers in the world (HRW, 1996). In 1999 the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery estimated that some 20 million people are held in bonded labor, the greatest concentration being in South Asia. Bales (2007) estimates that there are 27 million slaves in the world today, which is the estimate most widely cited by advocacy organizations. Bales estimates that the majority, 15–20 million slaves, live in South Asia. He developed his count by totaling the best estimates of slave populations for every country and region, collecting estimates country by country. The International Labor Organization estimates that 8.4 million children suffer in slavery, including debt bondage, prostitution, as child soldiers, domestic servants and other forms of forced labor (ILO, 2005).

The US government estimates that 800,000 people were trafficked internationally in 2006 and a total of 2–4 million people were trafficked intra-country. It also states that 70 percent of those trafficked internationally are women. They estimate that 14,500–18,500 people are trafficked into the USA annually (USDOS, 2008). The United Nations also uses the US estimates of 800,000 people trafficked each year into forced labor, emphasizing

prostitution. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) supports the estimate that 4 million people are trafficked both within and between national borders (IOM, 2005).

There appear to be two camps of estimates (advocacy and government); neither is completely clear on their methodology or sources (Kelly, 2005). The exception is Bales (2007), who utilized semi-structured interviews with slaves and slaveholders. There may be political motivations that lead to different estimations. The advocacy camp, using Bales' (2007) 27 million figure, includes non-governmental groups working to build a campaign and a movement to abolish slavery. Advocacy group numbers may over-inflate in an effort to draw attention and support to their cause (Quirk, 2008; Weitzer, 2007). The government camp centers on the 800,000 figure (Payne, 2006; Tsutsumi et al., 2008; USDOS, 2008; Yen, 2008). Government numbers may be under-inflated, in order to minimize their domestic problems and their responsibility in addressing this issue (Guinn, 2008). Accurate counts of contemporary slavery would strengthen our understanding of the problem, facilitating more effective policy responses (GAO, 2006).

Policy responses to contemporary slavery

There are a wide range of policy responses to combat the problem of contemporary slavery. These range across varying levels of intervention, from the local to international and modes of interventions, from social services to legalism (Van der Anker, 2004). These have not been categorized as responses to specific types of slavery; little is known about which responses are effective for which forms of slavery, and there is an assumption that multiple levels and modes of intervention are required for each type of slavery.

Social service responses

Prevention, protection and rehabilitation services are often administered and funded by independent NGOs that must operate in a climate of cooperation with the police and government agencies (ILO, 2009; Van Hook et al., 2006). Drop-in centers are a popular intervention because these do not confront the slave owner nor threaten the status of the slave, while at the same time providing access to medical care and social support. Examples of NGOs that run drop-in centers include the Ain O Salish Kendra NGO in Bangladesh and Casa de Panchitas in Peru (Black, 2002). These centers typically offer services such as legal aid, basic skills like cooking and typing, and therapeutic counseling (Charle, 2003; Shigekane, 2007; Van Hook et al., 2006). Education programs are offered in schools and also

publicly accessible settings like marketplaces. Vocational skills, literacy and numeracy are often taught (ILO, 2009).

Community-based interventions

Prevention programs are also often run by NGOs, and focus on raising awareness, education and outreach. Thai activists have especially argued for interventions in the community of origin for people who are trafficked or taken from their home, to raise awareness of the risks of being recruited (Pflug, 2002). WAO Afrique, in Togo, focuses on educating parents and families to reduce children's vulnerabilities. Sumapi is a Filipino organization run by teens that outreach to other teens, and then make referrals to local social workers. The National Child Domestic Workers movement in India, in partnership with the College of Social Work, conducts outreach with the children of employers, who often are aware of and have access to child domestic workers (Black, 2002).

Harm reduction

Recognizing that the wholesale historical attempts to ban slavery have failed, some scholars support a gradual change perspective rather than the abolitionist perspective (Black, 2002; Blagbrough and Glynn, 1999). The gradualist approach aims for incremental improvements in the lives of slaves, similar to the harm reduction model, where the undesired behavior is not the focus of the intervention, but the context and conditions associated with the behavior that cause additional harm are the subject of intervention. Citing examples of treaties that have been ratified the world over, but not enforced, these scholars advocate engaging with slaveholders. Black (2002) argues against the use of sensational accounts that manipulate public outcry but fail to connect with the slave holders. Instead, Bales (2007) calls for sensitization and public awareness campaigns to attract attention to the plight of enslaved peoples through various media, such as radio and billboard advertisements, documentary films and television shows (Ray, 2007; Yen, 2008).

The strategy of engaging with slaveholders might lead to efforts to introduce modest payments, improved working conditions and perhaps even better working hours. Shoishab is an NGO in Bangladesh that works with 'employers' in order to gain access to this population (Black, 2002). Given the high level of social acceptance of slavery in countries such as India and Mauritania, interventions that work within accepted cultural practices may be effective. Indeed some NGOs negotiate with slaveholders to allow their slaves to attend educational classes (ILO, 2009). This does present ethical

dilemmas for social workers, as there is a danger that this line of intervention may lead to sanctioned forms of exploitation.

Legal responses

Using the rule of law to approach the issue, legal interventions presuppose the existence of impartial and functional judicial apparatuses, an assumption often invalidated by the high incidence of corruption. As every government has outlawed the practice of slavery, but it remains a crime that is rarely prosecuted, enforcement of the rule of law is the major obstacle. Prosecution of these crimes is essential to creating a legal and moral climate where perpetrators cannot engage in slavery with impunity. However, due to significant obstacles to making a case against traffickers and slaveholders, prosecution – even in the global North – is a very difficult endeavor that has yet to make a significant impact (Jones et al., 2007). A primary obstacle surrounds the issue of the victim's consent, as many perpetrators claim victims voluntarily were trafficked and sought work. The victim may have family vulnerable to the perpetrator in their country of origin, and is often traumatized by their experiences, both of which are factors that can limit their cooperation with law enforcement's prosecution (Shigekane, 2007).

Economic responses

Rapid economic growth may represent the greatest potential for change, since it undermines archaic and feudal customs and practices. This position is supported by both neo-liberal economists and classical Marxists alike. Progressive social policies may also foster this goal. For example, Dowling (2004) proposes implementing the Tobin tax in order to regulate currency speculation and to generate funds for poverty alleviation. Kyle and Koslowski (2001) maintain that strengthening the institutions of civil society along with the state will promote the good governance required to tackle problems such as contemporary slavery.

Recent social changes, including the technological modernization of agriculture and governmental anti-corruption efforts, have diminished the pool of new bonded laborers in South Asia. Rising standards of living in South Asia, accompanied by the economic security of an emerging middle class, threaten the traditional oppressive arrangements of bonded labor (Skinner, 2008). Sustainable, socially responsible development, balancing market forces with social investment, holds promise for improving social conditions and meeting the multiple needs of populations vulnerable to slavery

(Midgley, 2000; Payne, 2006; Ray, 2007). Social development strategies that enhance the ability of survivors of contemporary slavery to generate income also reduce their vulnerability to be re-enslaved and facilitate their recovery (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008).

Globalized economic systems entail the rapid movement of capital across the world and the rise of powerful multinational corporations. To the extent that these systems operate across and beyond political borders, political states have become increasingly disempowered in their ability to limit and control the actions of these globalized economic networks. Despite this, individuals do retain significant power, if not as citizens, then as consumers. One obstacle to realizing this power is the distance and remove at which modern consumers, particularly in the global North, are from production and the labor in the global South. In this sense, slavery is intractable to globalized economics, as slave labor in the global South touches many products consumed in the North. However, some consumer-led movements have played an important role, as evidenced by the successful Rugmark campaign in combating child labor (Bales, 2007; Charle, 2003; Manokha, 2004).

Recommendations

There are many policy options to address this issue. The eradication of slavery requires the implementation and enforcement of existing laws and treaties, changing economic structures, improving social services, harnessing the powers of the media and other institutions of civil society, and ensuring the prevention of new cases. Both the supply and demand side of slavery requires attention. A strengthening of commitment combined with a renewal of efforts is desperately needed to alleviate the suffering of contemporary slavery.

Contemporary slavery is a problem for victims, governments, activists and social scientists. Its practice means the deprivation and abuse of millions, yet slavery is difficult to observe, study and arrest. Effective intervention requires solid empirical research. Bales (2007) notes that there exists no academic center for study and dissemination of knowledge on contemporary slavery affiliated with any university. Only very recently has the issue entered into journalistic media and academic literature. Greater study is necessary, both in the quantitative estimation of the prevalence and incidence, but also into the underlying dynamics of the causes, nature and consequences of slavery. Much more research is required to understand the various economic, political, cultural, exploitative, poverty and violence-related factors which contribute to the ongoing existence of slavery.

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