

# Human Trafficking: Extreme Profitability Leading to Shocking Growth

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*In the “enlightened” period of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are still about 90 million people in the world who have experienced some form of human bondage, more than at any time in history. Of these, approximately five million participate in the category that relates to sexual exploitation including forced prostitution. This evil “industry” is growing rapidly. The \$30-billion industry of ten years ago is now a \$150-billion industry with mafia-type strength. It is crucial that we combat these negative elements by increasing awareness, strengthening law enforcement, enacting better laws, applying stricter penalties, improving intelligence, and exposing the customers.*

## INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to imagine anything more devastating to the soul than human bondage. It might exist because of natural circumstances like the need to subsist in times of a widespread famine. It might be a reality because of the uncertainty and fear of a tyrannical government. It might exist as a natural consequence of one’s choices and imperfections like addictions to alcohol, gambling, or the like. Under these broad descriptions, it is likely that most people have experienced the “burdens of bondage” at one time or another.

As discouraging as these circumstances are, perhaps a bigger bondage might be the likelihood that the victims may never be able to escape the chains of despair because of legal realities, the norms of society, the lack of strength or will to remedy the situation, or the anonymity of their circumstances. Unfortunately, these offsetting challenges have frequently been the case throughout history.

Slavery, which is perhaps a subcategory of general bondage, was well-entrenched in the societies of past centuries. The great pyramids of Egypt were built with slave labor as were the massive walls of the city of Baghdad. Likewise, the impressive buildings of the Greek and Roman empires were built with slave labor. According to one source, there were actually more slaves in the Roman Empire than free Roman citizens.

As humanity was emerging from the depths of the “dark ages,” the practice of slavery was still very prominent in the societies established by the Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonists. Slave trading was even prominent among the indigenous peoples of the Americas. However, with mounting criticism and increasing enlightenment, the pernicious practice of slavery was trimmed back over time although admittedly at a pace with which many were impatient.

In the American colonies, Thomas Jefferson penned the famous lines: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” But even with such a definite and

official government declaration, it still took a Civil War about 85 years later to more legally abandon the practice of slavery.

## **THE CURRENT STATUS OF HUMAN BONDAGE**

So how is the world today doing in its efforts to reduce human bondage? Of the 7.759 billion people who live on planet Earth, one source estimates that there are currently 89 million people who have experienced some form of slavery from a few days to five years (FitzPatrick, 1). In other words, shockingly, there are now more people who have experienced some form of servitude than at any time in history (stemming partly from the obvious fact that there are more people living in the world today).

Another source (Plante, 1) puts the more current “servitude number” at 46 million people including 1,048,500 in Russia, 1,100,000 in North Korea, 1,236,600 in Uzbekistan, 1,531,300 in Bangladesh, 2,134,900 in Pakistan, 3,388,400 in China, and 18,354,700 in India.

There are widespread differences in the estimates because of the difficulty in defining what constitutes slavery or servitude. The 18,354,700 estimate in India, for example, relates mostly to the complicated caste system that has existed for many centuries. Under this long-established stratification mentality, the Indian people have generally been classified as (1) priests and teachers, (2) warriors and rulers, (3) farmers, traders, and merchants, (4) laborers, and (5) outcasts (who are primarily street sweepers and latrine cleaners). Progress is being made, but such formal classification systems do not disappear quickly.

One positive thing that might be said about the cultural practices of stratification or classification is that at least families are largely intact, and tender family relationships continue. But that is not often the case when people are abducted and put into servitude against their wills (including forced prostitution). It is frequently true that they are never heard from again. It is a diabolical practice that brings immense heartache to the victims and to their families.

How does this happen? What events lead to these forms of human bondage? In some situations, the families themselves may place family members in such circumstances when they respond to what are thought to be employment opportunities in, perhaps, other countries. When they arrive, their passports and other documents are taken from them, and they are placed in conditions of servitude from which there is little hope of escape.

Oftentimes the eventual victims put themselves in harm’s way when they run away from home or otherwise find themselves “on the streets” with inadequate means of support. Such people (especially youth and women) are conspicuous targets for cunning people who promise to give them the things they need including food, shelter, and employment. But the ‘employment’ may turn out to be very different than expected, and, of course, in some cases the victims may be suddenly and violently kidnapped.

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

For what purposes are these people abducted and placed in servitude? Some of the more unusual and tragic reasons include forced military service, organ harvesting, and suicide bombing. But by far the two greatest reasons are for sexual exploitation (about 80%), and labor exploitation (about 19%) with the remaining 1% involving the more unusual situations including those just mentioned.

As to those who are placed into labor exploitation, one source (FitzPatrick, 6) estimates that 24% of this group end up in domestic work, 18% in construction, 15% in manufacturing, 11% in agriculture and forestry, 10% in accommodation and food services, 9% in wholesale and trade, 7% in personal services, 4% in mining and quarrying, and 1% in begging.

Many of those who are victims of labor exploitation are also expected to provide sexual privileges, and agencies that keep track of such numbers often maintain a joint category of “labor and sexual exploitation.” But whether included in the joint category or the separate category of “sexual exploitation” the number of such victims certainly exceeds 20 million people at the present time, especially if the 15 million forced marriages are included.

As to the five million victims who are currently marketed as prostitutes and the like, over 50% are children under 18 years of age. It is also staggering that about 50,000 new victims are brought into the United States each year, primarily from Mexico and the Philippines (Human Trafficking Within... , 2).

Overall, the human trafficking “industry” brings in over \$150 billion a year and is second only to illegal drugs as the largest criminal activity in the world. It is also the fastest growing criminal activity because of (1) its unusual profitability and (2) the low risk for the perpetrators. Experience shows that those involved in human trafficking are less likely to be punished for their activities than perhaps those in other criminal pursuits.

## **THE PROFITABILITY OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

While human trafficking as a general category is highly profitable and growing rapidly, the sexual exploitation part of the industry is by far the fastest growing and most profitable. In a United Nations report from 2010, it was estimated that the industry was generating revenues between \$9 billion to \$31.6 billion (Human Trafficking: The Facts”). Now, a decade later, it is estimated by most to provide an annual revenue of about \$150 billion (see, for example, Gallucci, 2). To understand why there is such rapid growth, all one needs to do is consider the profitability.

In an industry that is now quite specialized, those who are a part of “capturing” or “kidnapping” the victims can receive thousands of dollars for each “catch” depending on the desirability of the victim (see, for example, Skinner, 2). An initial payment of \$10,000 is not unusual. Many of the victims are sold in “auctions” that frequently take place in rented rooms at airports. The traffickers who buy the victims (the “pimps”) can earn as much as \$200 to \$400 per hour for one prostitute and can get as many as 6 to 10 “arrangements” per night. The resulting revenue can easily be hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. One study (Skinner, p. 3) found that a single sex slave earned her pimp at least \$250,000 a year. Another study (Piccolo, 2) showed that a trafficker can potentially earn between \$375,000 and \$1.25 million per year.

Is it any wonder that this evil practice is growing so rapidly (from the annual amount ten years ago of about \$30 billion to a current annual amount of about \$150 billion)? With such evil and pernicious practices actively functioning in the world, where is the outrage? Why is more not being done to eliminate and/or rectify these atrocities?

## **THE NEED TO CONFRONT THE SITUATION MORE AGGRESSIVELY**

For those who study, teach, and practice risk management, the excessively strong profitability and growth of human trafficking is a concern of epic proportions. As to “micro-risk” there is increasing worry that a dear friend or family member might be abducted and placed into such an environment. As to “macro-risk” there is always concern about the growing power that these negative elements might have on society.

It is not a good combination for large amounts of money to be flowing into such lawlessness and brutality. Like the illegal drug industry, the increasing financial power becomes a threat to all. Over time, the forces of evil tend to become more powerful than the organizations, resources, and procedures needed to thwart their progress. It also drains away the resources needed for other challenges in society.

Likewise, over time, the evil phenomenon becomes a larger part of a culture. It is thought of more, discussed more, analyzed more, and participated in more. The unacceptable tends to become the acceptable, the unusual tends to become the normal, and the outrage mellows to a more passive attitude. When the success in profits and growth become more visible, it tends to entice others to abandon their moral values to seek similar results. Among the perpetrators, it would be typical for brainstorming to be used to think of new approaches, new opportunities, and new brutal practices.

For example, it is interesting but extremely sad that the frequent sexual activity leading to more babies has led to more abortions. That has led to discussions about selling the babies’ tissue to laboratories and the like. That has led to the idea of providing babies for adoption (for a healthy profit).

That has apparently led to the sinister idea of organ harvesting relating to the young. And now we hear of shady institutional day care systems to provide the young for a variety of ominous purposes.

The sexual trafficking industry has already achieved mafia-type strength in some countries making the industry more difficult to counteract. The battle to contain it and reduce it should be fought more vigorously now rather than to delaying the battle to when the perpetrators are even stronger.

### **CHALLENGES IN EFFORTS TO CONFRONT THESE EVIL PRACTICES**

Those who are trying to deal with the horrific acts of human trafficking are confronted with several challenges that include the following:

1. It is often (perhaps usually) unclear who was behind the abduction.
2. It is usually unknown where the abducted person has been taken.
3. It is sometimes unclear whether there was a consensual relationship on the part of the abducted.
4. Those who have been affected (or could otherwise be helpful) often prefer anonymity rather than getting involved.
5. The human trafficking phenomenon is so profitable that it adds greater resolve for those who are involved in its practice.
6. Many prominent people (including some politicians) enjoy the “fruits” of these practices and don’t want to remove the possibilities.
7. Police and other law enforcement people are frequently bribed to “look the other way” and not get involved.
8. Much of the activity is controlled by large-scale organized crime, and their “mafia power” is difficult to overcome.
9. Many don’t get involved in efforts to thwart it because of threats of retaliation.
10. Some of the activity takes place in areas (or countries) where there are inadequate laws, organizations, and procedures for dealing with the problems.

### **CONFRONTING THE PROBLEMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

To more fully confront the ongoing problems of human trafficking, the following objectives need to be accomplished:

More needs to be done to bring about an awareness of the problem on the part of the general public. Most people are not adequately aware of the magnitude and significance of this multi-billion-dollar “industry.”

Additional laws and more severe penalties need to be put in place to make it more “risky” and more “costly” for people to be involved in this pernicious behavior.

All of us need to provide more contributions and support to organizations whose missions are to find and free those who have been lost to human trafficking.

There needs to be more worldwide coordination of efforts to confront these activities. Much of the activity moves from country to country to keep ahead of containment efforts.

Since money talks, “foreign aid” to some countries ought to be tied to their efforts to deal with these evil practices. If countries do not step up their efforts in these matters, they should pay for their apathy and indifference with lost entitlements.

Law enforcement efforts need to be at higher levels. When local police try to confront the billion-dollar organizations, their efforts are largely futile. The Federal organizations (and perhaps the Federal military) need to be more involved in confronting the major organizations.

## PARTING COMMENT

Surely if any of us were to feel the pain of those who have been abducted and placed into bondage and the pain of the extended families, there would be more outpouring of support in the ways mentioned above.

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