Prevalence Studies and Determinants of Slavery

Overview and Background
Many organizations conducting research in the anti-trafficking space have sought to analyze both the prevalence and determinants of modern slavery. However, these efforts are rife with difficulties. First, there are many forms of trafficking, almost all of which are kept explicitly hidden, making it challenging to research, estimate, and analyze prevalence and determinants. Trafficking, by its criminal nature, occurs in the shadows of society, making it challenging to uncover. Secondly, slavery is not defined in a single way by a single country or institution. The Palermo Protocol is one standard, but is not recognized as a singular source of truth, making it difficult for disparate organizations to collaboratively collect and analyze data. Without one, clear definition you can’t hope to accurately measure it.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation (WFF) have dedicated over fifteen years to conducting anti-trafficking research with the specific goals of attempting to measure the prevalence of modern slavery and isolating its key determinants. The ILO is known for monitoring and providing guidance regarding employment standards at an international level. The Walk Free Foundation strives to protect human rights through international collaboration and an integrated strategy. In an effort to eliminate redundancy in human trafficking research, the ILO and WFF have partnered together to release the Global Estimate of Modern Slavery in early 2018. The estimate will combine the ILOs methodology for determining forced labor with the WFFs Global Slavery Index (estimation per country and globally) to give a more accurate and holistic estimate of the global prevalence of modern slavery. If we, as the anti-trafficking community, can come to a greater consensus on the definition of slavery and its many forms, the best methods for capturing data on all those affected, and the factors that put people most at risk for trafficking, we can create more effective and durable solutions.

Prevalence is a vigorously debated topic; determinants, perhaps even more so. As populations, technology, currency, and other circumstances change, so do the factors that lead to trafficking. This paper will further discuss the common findings from past and current research about the prevalence and determinants of modern slavery.

Prevalence
In order to understand the true scope of human trafficking, the prevalence of the issue must be known. Prevalence is the proportion of a specific population or an entire population who had or have a certain characteristics in a given period of time. It is very difficult to determine the percent of various populations that are at risk of, or are currently trapped in, slavery. Many authors of literature reviews and studies share a common conclusion: victims of human trafficking come from all education levels, races, ethnicities, genders, cultures and

Prevalence: how many people, often classified by region or country, at one point in time living under the subjugation of modern slavery.

Determinate: a factor or set of factors that decisively affect a person’s situation of slavery. Often a range of behavioral, biological, socio-economic and environmental factors.
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socioeconomic groups.\(^9\) Because of this diversity, it is impossible to pinpoint a “typical victim” of human trafficking, thereby increasing the challenge for researchers to determine both what qualifies as trafficking and how to quantify the number of people living in conditions that fit the definition.

**Measuring Prevalence in the Past**

“Global modern slavery is hard to measure... [In] management speak, if you can’t measure it, it doesn’t exist.”\(^1\) The concealed and global nature of human trafficking poses challenges not only in collecting data, but also in attaining consistent measurements across borders.

The Global Slavery Index, a WFF program, is an effort to combat these challenges and accurately measure the prevalence of modern slavery.\(^2\) The 2016 findings reported 45.8 million people in 167 countries are suffering from a form of modern slavery.\(^3\) Previously, over 50 countries had been represented in a random sample, also incorporating available data from the International Organization for Migration.\(^3\) Now that the ILO and WFF are collaborating, the methodology will be modified to include additional sources of data, enabling more comprehensive statistics in future years.

**Determinants**

In addition to understanding how many people are affected by trafficking, it is equally important to examine what factors lead to enslavement. There are several key determinants that contribute to human trafficking globally, including: social, political, economic, and environmental factors. Identifying the key determinants is crucial to understanding the root causes of this complex issue so that lasting solutions and preventative measures can be implemented.

The literature identified twenty-five risk factors. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a risk factor as “any attribute, characteristic or exposure of an individual that increases the likelihood of developing a disease or injury.” The literature encompassed risks related to individual, household, community and societal influences, including risks both in and out of an individual’s control. The most commonly noted risk factors include: gender; age; irregular migration; low skill labor; knowledge gaps; recruitment practices; and law and policy gaps.\(^8\) Based on the Freedom Fund report, described below are examples of key factors that increase people’s risk of being trafficked.\(^3,8\)

**Gender:** Reports indicate that females are more vulnerable to certain forms of exploitation. These forms might include the following scenarios: 1) Girls traveling via overland transit and those using irregular channels may be at risk of harm at border control sites where sexual favors may be demanded for onward passage; 2) Female-headed houses experienced greater vulnerability because of social or class discrimination; or 3) Often times the work women are recruited to do, such as domestic work, enables exploitation. A common underlying explanation for female’s higher risk of poor migration outcomes is gender discrimination and inequalities. Recent estimates suggest that females comprise a greater proportion of those in situations of forced labor.\(^8\)
Age: Reports indicate that young age is a risk factor for exploitation; however some literature states that it is difficult to distinguish between young migrants and victims of trafficking.³

Irregular Migration: Irregular migration, movement which is illegal in some way, is a high risk of exploitation. Reports indicate that because the paperwork involved with migrating can be expensive and tedious, migrants may take underpaid or unsafe work available for undocumented immigrants.³

Low skill, poorly or unregulated labor sectors: Reports indicate that certain low skill labor roles, such as domestic work, agriculture, construction, and deep-sea fishing, are associated with exploitation. Workers may report excessive hours, lower wages, unsafe working conditions, and physical assault. Because these positions can be informally coordinated, particularly for undocumented workers, these unregulated sectors create more opportunities for exploitation.³

Poor migration knowledge among prospective migrants: A lack of knowledge among migrants contributes to their chance of being exploited. Many interventions target to raise awareness amongst the migrants.³

Recruitment: Various parties may recruit individuals in the process of labor migration and include “extortionate fees, deceptive verbal agreements and paper contracts, withholding passports, lying about ultimate employment locations, etc.” Until fair recruitment can be assured, the challenge for programming is to help individual avoid falling prey to exploitive recruiters.³

Law enforcement and policy problems: Literature indicates that policy gaps and problematic regulations hinder protection and limit migrant rights. Gaps in police enforcement and prosecution at district levels create barriers for victims to access justice and grey areas in bringing perpetrators to justice.³

There are also factors that span across several determinant areas. For example, global warming can lead to food insecurity, poverty, natural disasters, environmental degradation, and displacement.⁷ Cross-functional determinants require further examination, as they could be causing more vulnerability than is currently realized.

Conclusion
Coming to a consensus on how to measure the prevalence of trafficking is an essential element in the fight to eliminate it. Yet, there is little consensus around the number of trafficked persons in the world at any given time, leading to disunity in communicating about the issue among the anti-trafficking community. The collaboration between ILO and WFF to create a new measurement methodology seeks to help all organizations better understand and communicate the scope of the problem, which will lead to stronger advocacy and more support for the movement. It is equally important to come to consensus around the key factors that increase the likelihood of a person being trafficked. When anti-trafficking groups are able to align on the key determinants of modern slavery, they can begin to work together to create solutions that target prevention, rescue, and rehabilitation.
Discussion questions:

1. What challenges do you predict can come from the new metric that the ILO and WFF have collaborated on releasing?
2. What other determinant(s) do you believe are crucial to understand in combatting human trafficking? How can these factors gain exposure?
3. How will a single measure of prevalence impact your organization?

Works Cited


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