

Human Trafficking at the U.S.-Mexico Border

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Introduction

Human Trafficking is defined by the United Nations as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.” Human Trafficking rates have been increasing, making it the “second fastest growing criminal industry, just behind drug trafficking” as reported by the U.S. Department of Justice.

There are many elements that play a role in determining the root problems of human trafficking in relation to sex trafficking and forced labor. The lack of enforcement of existing laws and improper procedure at the U.S.-Mexico Border are directly correlated with rising sex and forced labor trafficking rates. The goal of my research was to explore what fuels human trafficking demand, why it is so prominent at the border, and how corruption in the Mexican and American governments contribute.

Findings

According to scholar Eva Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova, the U.S. serves as the “world’s second largest destination country for women and children who are internationally trafficked,” despite having one of the highest numbers of anti-trafficking laws (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova 2). Undocumented migrant women and children are the most susceptible to human trafficking. Mexico’s border is easily accessible to transfer internationally trafficked victims to the United States. Findings from interviews of women previously trafficked across the U.S.-Mexico border concluded that “coerced and deceptive migration, deportation as forced migration, and voluntary mobility for sex work emerged as themes illustrating how circumstances leading to and resulting from mobility shape voluntary sex work entry and sexual exploitation” (Goldenberg-et al. 30).

Many victims are trafficked due to U.S. employers’ demands for cheap labor. The border operates in terms of favorable outcomes for U.S. employers. According to Ge Nova and Loza, “some are deported in order that most may remain (un-deported) as workers. Capitalist desires for a flexible, deportable workforce with little change to the current labor conditions. It is well documented that prior to 1965 the Border Patrol did open and close the border at specific times according to the needs of US employers” (Palacios 1211). The Immigration and Naturalization Service was called the “most vulnerable to corruption” by a Dallas News article, and the New York Times revealed that “between 2005 and 2015, almost 200 employees of the Department of Homeland Security took nearly 15 million dollars in bribes” (Palacios 1215).



“40 Million in Modern Slavery and 152 million in Modern Labor Around the World.” International Labor Organization, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_574717/lang-en/index.htm.

In a 2018 interview of 180 Mexican migrant smugglers, “three out of four interviewees (77.2%) indicated that some US immigration agents were corrupt as they accepted bribes to allow undocumented border crossings” (Palacios 1219). Mexico also has laws in place to prevent human trafficking, which are severely under enforced or incorrectly implemented, the most important being the Mexican Anti-trafficking Law. According to Garza, “the law has not yet been adequately implemented as only one conviction has been achieved to date” (Garza 440). This law states that the Mexican Federal Government would implement an Inter-Secretarial Commission of various governmental agencies and called for a National Program to Prevent and Sanction Trafficking in Persons” (Garza 441). This commission has still not been implemented. The law also lets convicted traffickers argue that the victims consented to be smuggled, making it hard to prove victims were trafficked if under coercion or false promises. The UN Protocol contains a provision making consent irrelevant where coercive means are used to obtain labor or services., however the Mexican Anti-Trafficking Law omitted it” (Garza 443).



Holpuch, Amanda. “Migrant Children Held in Facility Need Access to Doctors, Attorney Says.” June 10th, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jul/08/migrant-children-detention-center-texas-attorney-health-crisis>

Conclusion

Human trafficking has become an epidemic and it’s up to every individual to share this information and do their part to abolish it. The lack of enforcement and proper procedure at the U.S.-Mexico Border plays a major role in rising human trafficking rates, which often leads to sex trafficking and forced manual labor. Proper procedure in both governments, an increase in academic writing about corruption among U.S. employers and their role in trafficking, and a bilateral partnership between the U.S. and Mexico could all greatly benefit individuals who are trafficked in North America.

The Mexican Anti-Trafficking Law needs to be altered to make consent an unimportant factor, an Inter-Secretarial Commission needs to be implemented by the Mexican government, and the United States needs to properly train CBP officials to find and identify victims. If Mexico does not comply with international law, and if the U.S. does not put their bias aside, we will never abolish human trafficking. A bilateral partnership between the U.S. and Mexico could be ideal. As mentioned by Garza, with a bilateral partnership “the US and Mexico would be able to come up with strategies that keep traffickers and smugglers out of the United States while protecting the victims, allowing shared information about traffickers, which could lead to more prosecutions without the need to petition for extradition, and better preventative measures at the border” (Garza 448-449).

Works Cited

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