



"Shine the Light: Root Causes and Intersections on Human Trafficking"

Thank you

Happy International Women's Day, and yet for so many girls and women it not a happy day as girls and women for the most part do not experience gender justice or have their rights and dignity upheld! You will hear some of these experiences during this webinar. The theme for today is "Women in Leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 World." Let me share one statistic with you - Women are Heads of State or Government in 22 countries, and only 24.9 per cent of national parliamentarians are women. At the current rate of progress, gender equality among Heads of Government will take another 130 years!

It is my privilege to join you again this year at your annual 'Shine the Light - Human Trafficking Conference' focusing on Root Causes and Intersections.

We are very familiar with the term 'trafficking'; meaning to deal or trade in something illegal. When the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was in process, a preliminary version of the collated findings had trafficking in ivory, wild life, and people, in the same sentence. I remember feeling outraged at this, but today as I recall that particular incident, I realize that we have a new and deeper consciousness of the interconnected web of all existence. A mentality of wheeling, dealing or commodifying any life forms, is contrary to living from an ethical stance, which act from values upholding the sacredness and interconnectedness of all life, dignity, mutuality, respect, the common good and sustainability.

Shine the Light

We read in scripture and sing from our hymnals 'Let your light shine'. 'No one lights a candle to put it under a bushel but rather puts it on a light stand to give light to all in the house.' Luke 11

Shine the light Has COVID 19 been a light? What have we seen and experienced during this pandemic?

COVID 19 has revealed fault lines in society – showing ever more clearly the structural and systemic issues that we have known, ignored or chosen not to address. COVID 19 has exposed and exploited overlapping inequalities as well as weaknesses in our social, economic and political systems and is now threatening to undo and reverse years of human development. The global public health crisis – that is COVID 19 – is intersecting with and exacerbating gender injustice,

while furthering economic inequalities within countries and between countries. COVID 19 has been a wakeup call with regard to our interconnectedness across the planet. Another threat is looming - Climate Change - the most dire threat humanity has ever known. The COVID 19 virus has not respected international boundaries and neither do carbon emissions and the impacts of climate change. The climate crisis has emerged from a reality in which those who benefit from our globalized economy, are not the same people who suffer the impacts, some of whom are victims of human trafficking.

In the U.S. the systems and structures that favor the few and disadvantage the many are clearly illustrated in the following: 'The total wealth of U.S. billionaires reaches \$4 trillion, over \$1 trillion of which has been gained since the beginning of the pandemic¹ between March 18, 2020 and January 18, 2021. Contrast this with the difficulty in getting a stimulus package of 1.9 trillion passed for the wellbeing of people!

'Black Lives Matter'

In the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, another light was shining in the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. This has shone a light that white privilege and white supremacy are unfair and harmful to those who have it, and those who do not. Scenes of how George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many before and after them are treated led to an outcry to dismantle systems and structures that are inhuman and unjust. Currently our social, economic and political systems are inherently unjust and perpetuate exploitation and death to people and the planet.

Root Causes – 5 P's

The root causes can be summed up in 5 P's

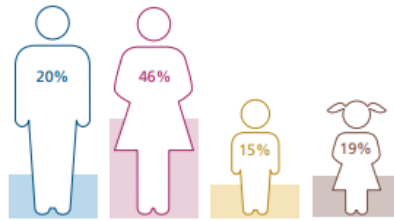
- Pleonexia – extreme greed and avarice
- Privilege
- Pleasure
- Power
- Profit

The current systems and structures are the carriers of these root causes, and are the *raison d'être* of human trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation and these intersect with persons in poverty, who are vulnerable, marginalized, dark skinned, migrant, – disproportionately impacting girls and women.

Female victims continue to be particularly affected by trafficking in persons. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime published its Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020 at the end of January 2021. According to the report in 2018, for every 10 victims detected globally, about five were adult women and two were girls.²

¹ <https://ips-dc.org/u-s-billionaire-wealth-surges-past-1-trillion-since-beginning-of-pandemic/> Institute of Policy Studies

² <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html> 2020 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons



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About one third of the overall detected victims were children, both girls and boys, while 20 per cent were adult men. The characteristics of child trafficking and its underlying drivers seem to differ according to geographical and social contexts. Trafficked children detected in low-income countries are more likely to be exploited in forced labour. Trafficked children detected in high income countries are more frequently trafficked for sexual exploitation.

The Systems of **Militarization**, **Globalization** (*the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information*), **Corporatization** (*the restructuring or transformation of a state-owned asset or organization into a corporation with a focus on profit*), **Financialization** (*importance of a country's financial sector relative to its overall economy*), **Commodification** and today **Digitalization** are organized around the 5 P's. These are embedded in the Macro-Economic System and the financialization of markets – all of which serve to increase wealth for the few while exploiting and disempowering the many. The COVID 19 'light' show this very clearly when it comes to vaccine production and distribution, and the lack of concern and political will to care for the well-being of every global citizen and all of humanity.

UNODC Report – role of socio-economic factors

The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons has a thematic chapter that explores the role that socio-economic factors play in increasing susceptibility to trafficking, at both individual and national levels, and which in turn shape both recruitment and exploitative practices. **Economic determinants** - such as poverty, unemployment, and lower income levels, are identified **as among the most relevant risk factors** affecting victims' susceptibility to trafficking in persons,⁴ and explains the social dynamics that govern trafficking in persons.

With regard to economic needs at the recruitment stage, the report indicates that of 233 trafficking-in-persons court cases, the majority of the victims were reportedly in a condition of economic need, characterized by an inability to meet basic needs, such as food, shelter or

³ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_Global_overview.pdf Page 31

⁴ Among others: David, F.; Bryant, K; Larsen, J.J. (2019) Migrants and their vulnerability to human trafficking, modern slavery and forced labour, International Organization for Migration; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019) Protecting migrant workers from exploitation in the EU: workers' perspectives; FRA, Vienna, 2019; Cho, S. Y. (2015), Modeling for determinants of human trafficking – An empirical analysis. Social Inclusion, 3 (Special Issue, "Perspectives on Human Trafficking and Modern Forms of Slavery"), 2-21; Kara, Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective, (2017); Perry McEwing, How Do Social Determinants Affect Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia, and What Can We Do About It? A Systematic Review, Health and Human Rights, 15 2, (2013).

healthcare.⁵ Traffickers deceptively presented solutions, to alleviate the condition of economic need, offering jobs, promising greater financial stability, better living conditions or better social status.

Persons who were victims of human trafficking were also affected by other conditions perceived as **disadvantageous within their social context**. The most commonly reported types of disadvantages were, having a dysfunctional family, and a mental, behavioral or neurological (MBN) disorder, and these were often associated with economic need. It was further noted that the emotional attachment of female victims to the trafficker was linked with having a dysfunctional family.

Typical examples of structural disadvantages include being migrant workers, being a women and being a child. The gender dimension is especially relevant when assessing how economic need and structural disadvantages may affect an individual's vulnerability to trafficking. These individuals experience a reduced range of opportunities and hence, may have a higher level of acceptance of exploitative practices that constitute trafficking when compared to other groups.⁶

Macro-economic determinants of trafficking in persons

The current dominant economic system – sometimes called neoliberal capitalism – is a system that privileges capital and profit over life – promoting privatization, financialization and generating precariousness of existence for people and planet. Neoliberal capitalism, promoting free trade, contributes to the deterioration in a country's economic outlook, and may result in an increased outflow of migrant workers. This increased outflow can overlap with trafficking-in-persons flows thus increasing the number of trafficked persons.

Embedded in this neo-liberal capitalist economy is commercial sexual exploitation, the 'sex trade' and the porn industry, all of which is an assault on the person. The push from within so many circles towards full decriminalization of the sex industry is a fatal blow to girls' rights, women's rights and gender equality. Advocacy for the full decriminalization of the sex industry amounts to the corporate, patriarchal, criminal and neoliberal capitalist capture of the gender equality agenda.

It should be recognized that economic determinants represent only one of several driving factors. Other key elements that predispose people to being trafficked include community systems breakdown, displacement, the occurrence of conflict, human-made and natural disasters. Some build upon the structural conditions of disadvantages and oppression such as migration policy issues, gender and race-based discrimination, political structures and systems that devalue and exclude women and girls, with reductions in national budgets to fund social policy, favouring austerity measures, and the continuance of traditions and practices that encourage abusive and exploitative practices.

⁵ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_Chapter2.pdf Page 70

⁶ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_Chapter2.pdf Page 71

TRAFFICKERS USE OF THE INTERNET; DIGITAL HUNTING FIELDS

The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Person has a chapter entitled ‘Traffickers use of the Internet; Digital Hunting Fields’ where they describe traffickers as actively ‘hunting’ those who they deem as vulnerable to falling victim to trafficking, or passively ‘fishing’ for potential victims by posting advertisements and waiting for potential victims to respond.⁷ Traffickers are advertising deceptive job offers, marketing exploitative services to potential paying customers while recruiting victims. Patterns of exploitation have been transformed by digital platforms, as webcams and livestreams have created new forms of exploitation and reduced the need for transportation and transfer of victims.

I want to conclude by recognizing the tremendous work you do - at the policy and service level to counter human trafficking both for labour and sexual exploitation, but I wish to challenge you to engage in newer levels of advocacy to address the systems and structures – the very carriers of injustice – that are currently operative in the many jargon terms I used at the beginning: Globalization, Militarization, Corporatization, Financialization, Commodification and now Digitalization - that privilege the few while creating and exploiting the vulnerability of our many sisters and brothers. Meeting needs is important, highlighting the issues of exploitation in human trafficking is important, but we must connect with, and challenge the very system that perpetuates such abuses, exploitation and injustices including gender inequality. We must look at the big picture - the interconnectedness of the web of all existence - the planet and its peoples. We must raise our voices for new systems and new structures that seek to uphold the sacredness of life through advocating for ‘economies of care,’ gender justice, eco justice and social justice. If we fail to do this, we are merely addressing symptoms but not the root cause. Once we make the connection, once we see the intersections, and move beyond the symptoms, then we are truly on a journey of change. Mahatma Gandhi said “The world has enough resources for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed” pleonexia! There are no easy answers, but we can raise our voices, we must challenge our political, social and economic systems and, perhaps hope! With the light of COVID 19 are we able to usher in a new world order – new economies built on care, inclusion and gender justice. If NOW is not the time to act on what the light has revealed, when will that time be?

Winifred Doherty

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⁷ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_Chapter5.pdf Page 119