

Editorial. Humans as a Commodity: Moving Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Special Issue

Editorial

Humans as a Commodity: Moving Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

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There is a good understanding of what happens to victims of human trafficking and modern slavery—“working long hours for little or no money or food, forced into a life of crime or pushed into the sex industry. Their entire life and liberty is in the hands of another, with no say and no way out” (Home Office 2013).

While human trafficking and modern slavery are intrinsic problems because of the impact they have on victims, a greater threat emerges from the involvement of organised crime. The profit motives and violence associated with organised crime makes human trafficking and modern slavery more dangerous for victims and difficult to detect and address.

The role of organised crime in human trafficking and modern slavery is not adequately understood. There is an insufficient understanding of what form organised criminal involvement takes, how cohesive criminal networks are across the supply chain and which elements they are involved in. An alliance of NGOs identified in 2012 how little we know about this part of human trafficking, and there hasn't been a significant growth in the academic literature since then.

This Special Issue works towards filling this evidence gap. Each article engages with a different part of the problem. One article focuses on Nigeria, a key source country for human trafficking into Europe. Another focuses on the illegal kidney trade, a growing source of revenue for organised crime groups. The other articles engage with different strategies to respond to human trafficking, including corporate responsibility, multi-stakeholder partnerships, community prosecution, following financial flows and risk assessments. This is the area that needs the most evidence in order to respond effectively.

The recognition of human trafficking and modern slavery as an organised crime problem has

increased considerably. The UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner frequently refers to the organised crime elements that underpin slavery. The Modern Slavery Act includes provisions to target slavery drivers. The National Crime Agency has created a *Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit*.

This recognition provides an opportunity to learn lessons from responses to organised crime. However, care needs to be taken to ensure human trafficking has a tailor-made toolbox, as many of the tools developed to tackle other forms of organised crime, such as controlled deliveries and surveillance are not viable as they put victims in further danger.

Many of the tools to combat organised crime are drawn from the response to drug trafficking, a response that has in many ways been controversial. As I have written elsewhere, these tools, including arrests and seizures are not always appropriate (Jespersion 2016).

We need a much more nuanced response on how organised crime networks that facilitate human trafficking operate. A Centre for Social Justice report outlined several cases that involved "power pyramids," with "divisions of foot soldiers who will play their role in whichever division they are employed to operate within to recruit, transit or run the daily management of controlling victims" (CSJ 2015). But other groups are more ad hoc, or rely on social networks. Each of these models will require different strategies.

Understanding the dynamics of criminal involvement in human trafficking is a core focus of the Centre for the Study of Modern Slavery at St Mary's University, with research underway to map criminal business models facilitating the movement and exploitation of people from Albania, Nigeria and Vietnam. But much more work is needed. As European member states, and the EU, deepens its response to human trafficking and modern slavery, more analysis is required to understand the nuances of organised crime, and how effective different strategies are. This Special Issue is a step in that direction, and a call for further research to improve the response.

References

Centre for Social Justice (2015) *A Modern Response to Modern Slavery*. London, CSJ. Home Office (2013) *Draft Modern Slavery Bill*. Norwich: The Stationery Office.

Jespersion S (2016) "Recognising Modern Slavery as Organised Crime: A Stronger Response, but no Silver Bullet." Available at: <http://shoc.rusi.org/recognising-modern-slavery-as-organised-crime-a-stronger-response-but-no-silver-bullet/>

In addition to this Special Issue on human trafficking and modern slavery edited by Sasha Jespersen, we are pleased to publish another original article by Juliette Scott on an important but often neglected area of study, the fundamental area of legal translation studies and European policing cooperation (here in relation to organised crime). The proper translation of texts is key for prosecuting cases of cross border crimes and organised crime. We are pleased to publish Juliette Scott's article which draws attention to this delicate and important question.

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