

Modern Slavery Issue Brief

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Awareness Raising: Examining the popular prevention approach

It is estimated that more than 40 million people in the world are victims of modern slavery or human trafficking, with vulnerable populations at risk of being trafficked and exploited steadily growing over recent decades. While this phenomenon is present in many nations in multiple forms, individuals are disproportionately being trafficked from poor - or developing - nations to rich or industrialised countries.¹

The Palermo Protocol (2000) put forward an internationally recognised definition of human trafficking and stimulated the adoption of national and supra-national legislations aimed at combatting human trafficking through prevention, prosecution and protection of victims. Much of the efforts in the fight against trafficking, however, have largely focused on prosecution and protection, with traditionally less attention devoted to prevention.²

While there is a broad consensus regarding the most important push or pull factors driving human trafficking, there is still limited knowledge about the effectiveness of measures or policies that can help prevent this problem. This is due, in part, to the fact that many of these driving forces require structural economic, political, and cultural transformations in order to alleviate trafficking, over the (very) long run. Analysis of effective, actionable short-term measures is unfortunately limited and largely inconclusive, which contributes to this lack of clarity. This brief focuses on awareness campaigns, a popular short-term prevention strategy most often cited in the literature.

Key Findings and Recommendations

- There is limited evidence that awareness campaigns work in isolation, but may be more effective when accompanied with other measures.
- The underlying assumption that vulnerable groups lack information about the risks of being trafficked does not necessarily hold.
- Instead, a significant issue seems to be a perception that the risk of trafficking relates to the “other” – indicating that awareness campaigns can fail to underscore the local or personal threat of trafficking.
- More needs to be done to understand context-specific drivers and knowledge gaps, to include survivors in program design, and to carefully tailor awareness building activities to the specifics of the target group.
- Messaging should be delivered by trusted messengers who have credibility amongst the targeted communities.
- Most evaluations focus on short-term recall. Longer-term evaluations assessing whether targeted prevention activities can change behaviour are needed.

What are the structural drivers of vulnerability?

The key drivers of human trafficking can be divided into push and pull factors.³ The most prevalent push factors are poor socio-economic conditions, illiteracy rates and a lack of job opportunities in developing nations and rural areas. Among the pull factors, promises of employment in big cities, demands for low-paid and under-age work, and a growing sex industry in European countries are cited most commonly.

The number of international migrants is estimated to be almost 272 million globally, with nearly 70% being labour migrants.⁴ Many of these labour migrants are low-skilled and increasingly irregular, willing to perform jobs shunned by native populations in sectors characterised by poor working conditions and high unmet demand, like agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Given their limited rights, the risk of deportation they face and the difficulties of integrating in the formal labour market, these low-skilled, irregular migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abusive labour practices more generally.

Urbanisation has also been shown to correlate with the rise in human trafficking. Rural migrant workers typically lack an education or a skill set that would prepare them for the urban labour market, and thus tend to fall into positions of informal - and easily exploitable - work. The combination of rapid urbanisation in many developing nations, with a mismatch between the skill set of rural migrant workers and the demands of the formal urban labour market, presents ample opportunities for human trafficking networks.⁵

In addition, there are other, gender- and region-specific forces that contribute to trafficking.⁶ In India and Bangladesh, for example, the pressure to collect money for dowries and the low socio-economic status of girls are additional pull factors that render them vulnerable to trafficking. Similarly, in India and some sub-Saharan African countries, cultural mis-conceptions – e.g., the belief that intercourse with young girls reduces HIV/AIDS risk – and the prevalence of child marriage, also drive child trafficking.

Awareness Building – A Popular Prevention Approach

Authors working in the area of human trafficking prevention have proposed a battery of measures aimed at tackling some of these structural push and pull factors, including microfinance programmes, poverty alleviation measures and infrastructure development projects which can help reduce rural poverty & unemployment. Shifts in cultural paradigms - such as placing legal limits on child-marriage and dowry or sensitising rural society to (re-accept) trafficking victims - are also raised in the literature.

Although addressing the structural drivers of human trafficking is fundamental, long-term measures aimed at tackling these broad developmental goals must be complemented by more immediately actionable programs seeking to improve the situation of the millions of human beings who are victims - or are at risk of becoming victims - of trafficking.

Awareness campaigns are one of the most popular prevention measures cited in the literature, in part due to their relatively low risk, broad reach and relatively low cost. Despite their popularity, there is limited evidence that awareness campaigns actually work in isolation but may be more effective when accompanied with other measures.⁷ Pairing rights education, for example, with the provision of legal services and interventions to increase trust in law enforcement and the legal system, has been found to be more effective.⁸

Further, it is not clear that the key underlying assumption behind awareness campaigns, namely, that vulnerable groups lack information about the risks of being trafficked, necessarily holds. This is evidenced by research, and the existence of re-trafficking - where victims by definition are aware of the risk of trafficking. A recent study of labour abuse amongst Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs) in Hong Kong found that high levels of exploitation were associated with already high levels of awareness regarding workers' rights and labour regulations.⁹ Further, a recent study evaluating pre-migration community-based awareness and knowledge-building activities in South Asia found that most prospective migrants are, in fact, aware of migration-related trafficking risks but are either willing to take those risks or assume that their own experience will be different from those of victims of trafficking.¹⁰

Similarly, an evaluation of anti-trafficking awareness campaigns in Nepal found a disconnect between awareness of trafficking risks in their country and perception of the personal risk. Figures 1 and 2 below show the difference between how individuals perceive the magnitude of the human trafficking problem locally and nationally, despite the districts surveyed having some of the greatest reported incidence of human trafficking in the country. The authors characterise this as the “otherness” problem, where people recognise that this is an issue for others but not necessarily for themselves.¹¹

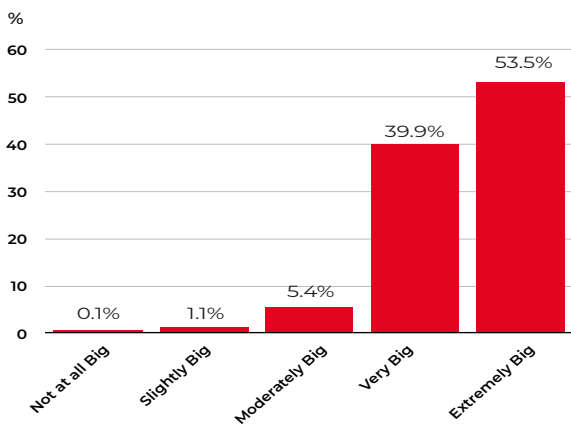


Figure 1: Perception of Size of Trafficking in Nepal

Source: Boittin et al. (2018)¹¹

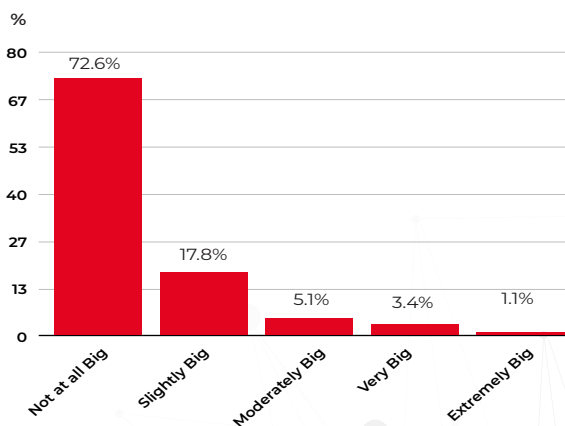


Figure 2: Perception of Size of Trafficking in One's Ward

While awareness campaigns were found to successfully increase people's perceptions that human trafficking is a problem in Nepal, they had no such effect on perceptions that human trafficking is a problem in their own communities. Authors highlight this as cause for concern, noting that if respondents believe their community is exceptional or immune to the drivers of human trafficking,

they will be less likely to recognise it when it manifests itself. Findings in a further study in Nepal indicate that awareness of migration risks very rarely changes any aspect of a woman's migration plans and does not alter her risk of labour trafficking.¹²

Promising Approaches

In contrast, carefully tailored awareness campaigns show some promise. IOM studies have found that some targeted, well-designed campaigns have been linked to a reduction in intention to emigrate amongst 10 to 20 percent of irregular migrants. Yet those facing severe security risks or struggling to provide for their families were still likely to move, despite full awareness of the many risks involved.¹³

The need to include survivor voices in programme design and to pre-test messaging in order to assess its effectiveness and ensure messages are not misunderstood, are noted. Participatory approaches that allow audiences to inform what kind of information they need, how to frame it, and who should be communicating are also important.¹⁴ Given that alternative knowledge and success stories circulating amongst vulnerable communities are generally transmitted by people connected by prior relations of trust, these communities will be more likely influenced by trusted networks than by foreign authorities.¹⁵

The trust and credibility of the messenger thus critically affect the credibility of campaign messages. Specific power asymmetries also need to be understood as they govern recruitment and employment practices, and can prevent any new information learned through awareness campaigns from being applied.

The key message emerging from the literature regarding awareness campaigns, however, is that more needs to be done to assess their effectiveness in preventing human trafficking. Typically, most of the very limited rigorous evaluations of awareness campaigns have focused on short-term recall. There is a need to focus on longer-term evaluations in order to more thoroughly assess whether targeted prevention activities can change behaviour that causes slavery.

Moving forward

Human trafficking is a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon. While tackling the deep causes of trafficking is of paramount importance, the urgency of

the issue calls for short-term actionable measures to complement the longer-term structural policies. In this brief, we have reviewed the literature and evidence on the effectiveness of awareness building activities as a short term “actionable” strategy. The findings of this review underscore the fact that rigorous empirical analysis of awareness building strategies is still in its infancy, and more needs to be done to understand what works and in what settings. Preliminary evidence suggests that understanding context-specific drivers and existing levels of knowledge, is necessary if awareness training is to drive behaviour that prevents human trafficking.

Greater attention should also be given to:

- Pairing awareness training with other measures;
- Ensuring that survivors inform program design;
- Allowing audiences to decide what kind of information they need, how to frame it, and who should communicate it; and
- Delivering awareness training through trusted messengers who have credibility within the targeted communities.

¹Kuneviciute, Ieva. 2012. “Anti-Trafficking Campaign in Kosovo 2012: Final Campaign Evaluation Report”. Terre des hommes - Delegation in Kosovo.

²The Anti Trafficking Monitoring Group. 2012. All Change - Preventing Trafficking in the UK. Devolved Practices.

³Gosh, Biswajit. 2009. “Trafficking in Women and Children in India: nature, dimensions and strategies for prevention”. *International Journal of Human Rights* 13(5): 716-738; International Justice Mission, UK, 2020. “Preventing Modern Slavery: Recommendations to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office”; Independent Commission for Aid Impact, UK, 2020. “The UK’s approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme”.

⁴International Labour Organization. 2016. “Addressing Drivers of Migration, including adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters and human-made crises, through protection and assistance, sustainable development, poverty eradication, conflict prevention and resolution”.

⁵Lloyd, Danielle. 2019. “Human Trafficking in Supply Chains and the Way Forward”. *Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, pp. 815-837.

⁶Gosh, Biswajit. 2009.

⁷Katharine Bryant, and Landman, Todd. 2020. “Combatting Human Trafficking since Palermo: What Do We Know about What Works?”. *Journal of Human Trafficking* 6(2), 119-140.

⁸ATLAS 2020. *Body of Knowledge on Legislative, Enforcement and Co-ordination Efforts: Collating quality evidence to better address Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking*. Winrock April 10, 2020.

⁹Boittin, Margaret, Cecilia Hyunjung Mo, Biz Herman, Soo Sun You and Sarah Zendel 2021. “Growing Awareness Amid Growing Vulnerability: Assessing and Mitigating Labor Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers”. Working paper November 9, 2021.

¹⁰Zimmerman, Cathy, Mak, Joelle, Pocock, Nicola S., and Kiss, Ligia. 2021. “Human Trafficking: Results of a 5-Year Theory-Based Evaluation of Interventions to Prevent Trafficking of Women from South Asia”. *Frontiers in Public Health* 9, 645059.

¹¹Boittin, Margaret, Claire Q. Evans, Cecilia Hyunjung Mo, and Tota II, Frank Jr. 2018. “An Issue of ‘Otherness’: Beliefs that Human Trafficking Cannot Affect One’s In-Group Present Obstacle to Combatting Human Trafficking”. *Global Insights Series 1, LAPOP*.

¹²SWIFT, 2018. *South Asia Work in Freedom Three-Country evaluation: A theory-based intervention evaluation to promote safer migration of women and girls in Nepal, India and Bangladesh*.

¹³IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre 2018. *Evaluating the impact of information campaigns in the field of migration: A systematic review of the evidence, and practical guidance*.

¹⁴Seefar 2021. *Study on best practices in irregular migration awareness-raising campaigns Final Report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021 © European Union, 2021

¹⁵Schans, D. and C. Optekamp 2016. “Raising awareness, changing behavior? Combatting irregular migration through information campaigns”

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Nicole Munns International Systemic Change Director

Gabriel Katz International Systemic Change Research Associate

Suite 139,
210 Upper Richmond Road,
London SW15 6NP

hello@justiceandcare.org
+44 (0)203 959 2580
www.justiceandcare.org