DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS ABOUT HUMAN TRAFFICKING BETWEEN VICTIMS/WITNESSES AND NON-VICTIMS/NON-WITNESSES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract - Knowing the difference in the perceptions of human trafficking among victims/witnesses (group 1) and non-victims/non-witnesses (group 2) is important in educating the general population on the reasons and the ways of trafficking in humans. Therefore, this study sought to explore the difference in perceptions among these two groups. Data on the population who participated in the Victims of Crime survey conducted by the Statistics South Africa during 2014–2015 was used. More victims/witnesses than non-victims/non-witnesses agreed that free life-changing offers e.g. marriage for a better life (55% vs. 42%; p=0.006) and blackmailing (39.5% vs. 22.6%; p<0.001) were ways traffickers recruited their victims. There was no difference among the percentage of people who thought dealing with strangers on social networks was one of the ways traffickers recruited their victims and those who did not think so. A higher percentage of victims/witnesses believed that begging on the street was one of the reasons people were trafficked in South Africa (46.9% vs. 28.6%; p<0.001). This study's findings showed that more victims/witnesses believed that free life changing offers is an important way by which traffickers recruit their victims and also begging on the street is one of the reasons victims are recruited.

Keywords - Begging, Human trafficking, life changing offers, South Africa

I. INTRODUCTION

Lack of enough public knowledge and Information on human trafficking has been identified as factors contributing to human trafficking in South Africa (Bello & Olutola, 2017; Mollema, 2013; HSRC, 2010). While there is improved global attention to the problem of trafficking and States, including South Africa, together with spectrum of stakeholders areproviding information on the prevalence and extent of the crime, the awareness level of the public on the menace of human trafficking is still low (Bello, 2015; HSRC, 2010, UNESCO, 2007). The common assumption that "it cannot happen to me" seemingly remains strong despite local familiarity with cross-border and internal trafficking (UNESCO, 2007).

Lack of access to education could make people ignorant of trafficking. Findings from a research conducted by UNESCO and IOM on human trafficking revealed, that only 33% of people residing in South Africa view human trafficking as a serious problem (Adepoju, 2005:75-76), and 29% had no awareness of the crime (Bermudez 2008:8). Public perception of causes of human trafficking is important and this is because perceptions directly influence behaviour in a top down manner (Dando, Walsh & Brierley, 2016). However, the undesirable impact of human trafficking on the victims and society have been acknowledged worldwide (Feingold, 2005).Victims of human trafficking experience high levels of abuse including physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, economic restrictions, and other controlling behaviours, including confiscation of passport and other identity documents, and threats to report the victim to immigration, police and child welfare authorities (Zimmerman, Hossain & Watts, 2011).Human trafficking has been seen not always easy to detect and this is because it can masquerade as a variety of other offenses. Local law enforcement officers are the first responders in the communities where such crimes occur and are therefore the key players in identifying and exposing these serious crimes (Venkatraman, 2003). These local law enforcement officers can be seen as witnesses to this type of crime. Judging from the various experience by victims and witnesses of human trafficking which non-victims and non-witnesses never experienced, this study sought to see if there were any difference in perception of human trafficking between these two groups.

II. METHODS

For the 2014/2015 South African Victims of Crime Survey, the multi-stage stratified samples were drawn from the Statistics South Africa's master samples from the enumeration areas established during the 2001 census. The target population of the survey consists of all private households in all nine provinces of South Africa and residents in workers' hostels. Altogether approximately 3 080 PSUs were selected.

Measures

The VOC used an interviewer-administered questionnaire to obtain information on socio-demographic data such as age, gender, race and socio-economic status. In the dataset, participants were also asked: "Have you ever heard of Trafficking in Persons?" Those who said "Yes" were regarded as those who had ever heardof trafficking in persons.

Those who responded "Yes" to the previous question were then asked how they learnt of trafficking in persons. There were many options which included: "media", "awareness campaigns", "through family / friends / other community members", "I was a victim" and "I was a witness" Other information obtained included reasons the participants thought people were being trafficked, and how the participants thought traffickers recruit their victims.

Statistical analysis

The data were analysed using STATA Release 12 (Stata Corporation, College Station, Texas, USA). Group differences between victims/witnesses and those who were neither were assessed using chi-square statistics. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for the final model.

III. RESULTS

Of all the 24,701 respondents, 75.23% (18,346) reported ever heard of trafficking in persons. Most of the respondents (98.9%) who reported they had heard trafficking in persons reportedly heard it from the media, awareness campaigns and/or through family / friends / other community members. The remaining 1.1% were either witnesses or victims. When asked the question "What do you think could be the reasons of people being trafficked?" (Table 1), there were no differences in all the reasons between the two groups except "begging on the street" reason. A higher percentage of the victims/witnesses than non-victims/non- witnesses believed that begging on the street could be a reason for human trafficking.

In table 2, only free life changing offers and blackmail were ways of recruiting victims which were different between the victim/witness and non-victim/non-witness groups.

Table 1: Perceived reasons of people being trafficked

Characteristic	Prevalence %(n) of Victims/witnesses	Prevalence %(n) Non-victims/non-witnesses	p-value
Sexual exploitation			0.521
No	18.84 (41)	21.10 (4126)	
Yes	81.16 (152)	78.90 (14073)	
Forced labour			0.240
No	40.25 (85)	45.69 (8612)	
Yes	59.75 (108)	54.31 (9430)	
Begging on street corners			<0.001
No	53.06 (100)	71.40 (13205)	
Yes	46.94 (91)	28.60 (4934)	
Extraction of body parts			0.608
No	46.66 (85)	44.25 (8088)	
Yes	53.34 (109)	55.75 (9955)	
Financial gain			0.231
No	22.11 (46)	27.08 (5116)	
Yes	77.89 (147)	72.92 (13089)	

Table 2: Perceived ways traffickers recruit their victims

Characteristic	Prevalence %(n) of Victims/witnesses	Prevalence %(n) Non-victims/non-witnesses	p-value
Offering good job opportunities			0.323
No	21.00 (45)	17.56 (3470)	
Yes		82.44 (14830)	
Dealing with strangers on social networks			0.251
No	44.98 (87)	50.35 (9549)	
Yes	55.02 (107)	49.65 (8602)	
Free life-changing offers (e.g. marriage for a better life)			0.006
No	45.04 (84)	57.87 (11017)	
Yes	54.96 (110)	42.13 (7218)	
Someone offering lifts			0.365
No	51.65 (87)	55.84 (10307)	
Yes	48.35 (107)	44.16 (7931)	
Blackmail			<0.001
No	60.47 (106)	77.41 (14382)	
Yes	39.53 (88)	22.59 (3875)	
Offering free drugs			0.324
No	49.25 (92)	53.85 (10157)	
Yes	50.75 (102)	46.15 (8086)	
Abduct			0.232
No	41.01 (82)	46.53 (8769)	
Yes	58.99 (112)	53.47 (9382)	

DISCUSSION

This study showed that most of the perceived reasons behind human trafficking and ways of recruitment were not different between victims/witnesses and non-victims/non-witnesses. The reason of being trafficked in South Africa which victims/witnesses identified was begging on the street. Begging on the street could be an organizational complexity where persons are trafficked to be part of a beggars' ring. These persons could be children and elderly women who have been turned into forced beggars after trafficking them (Cherneva, 2011). The result of this current study shows that very few people who are not victims or witnesses know about the use of trafficked individuals as beggars on the street.

The promise of free-life changing offers is one of the ways traffickers recruit their victims. More victims/witnesses know more about this form of recruitment than non-victims/non-witnesses in this study. Researches have shown that the problem of trafficking often does not begin with the traffickers themselves, but with the circumstances that force victims to seek 'greener pasture' under environments that render them susceptible to exploitation (Chuang, 2006:141). Studies on factors that contribute to the susceptibility of persons to trafficking in South Africa

identified factors such as poverty, inequalities, dysfunctional family settings, greed, pervasion of cultural practices, peer pressure, unequal access to quality education, corruption and high unemployment level (HSRC, 2010; Bello, 2015).

Blackmail which is a form of coercion has also been seen as another way of recruiting victims of trafficking. Victims can be blackmailed with images (Richard, 2012), or emotionally blackmailed to believe that their family members back home would suffer some unspecified harm (Venkatraman, 2003). In this study, more victims/witnesses believe blackmail is a way traffickers recruit their victims.

This study may confirm a study by Sigmon in 2008 that the general public does not easily recognize, identify, or advocate for victims of human trafficking. Education has been a key component of the prevention of human trafficking (UNODC, 2008) and research has assessed the effectiveness of public education concerning the problem of human trafficking in persons (Bishop, Morgan & Erickson, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, it is important that the South African general population be educated on the reasons and the ways of human trafficking in South Africa.

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