



Te Ope Whakāora

Reveal: Unintended Consequences

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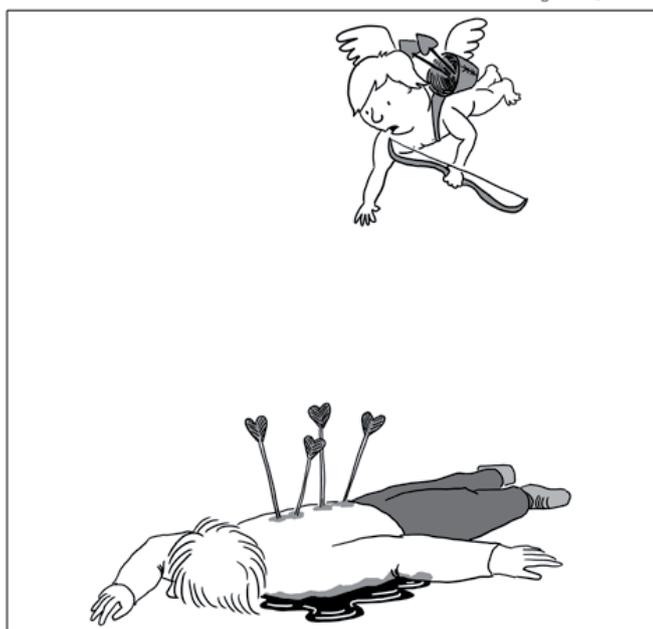
Theological perspectives on current issues in the public domain | A publication from the Social Policy Unit

Ahead of the 2011 Pacific Trafficking in Persons Forum, event organiser and social justice advocate Chris Frazer, challenges the prostitution-trafficking paradigm and asks how we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities behind the crime of human trafficking.

‘For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction,’
Isaac Newton

In social science terminology *unintended consequences* describes the *knock on effect* resulting from a certain course of action. This ‘think piece’ endeavours to contribute, in a small way, to the current conversations, debates and dilemmas surrounding the crime of trafficking in persons, by briefly examining some of the unintended consequences resulting from current anti-trafficking measures.

NOISE TO SIGNAL
RobCottingham.ca/cartoon



...Hello? Gary?

Unintended consequences of helping

In Haiti there is a proverb that says, ‘we see from where we stand’.³

Phil Wall is even more challenging when he states, ‘*Vision is not only about being able to see—it is about where we choose to look*’.⁴

It is suggested that ‘in the 21st century few other issues command public attention as powerfully as that of human trafficking ... the war on trafficking, it seems, is a contemporary global imperative’.⁵ Yet, as Howard and Lalani⁶ point out, there is an emerging scholarship that is challenging prevailing understandings of trafficking that currently is inherently-gendered and overly-focused towards sex trafficking, merging it often, and unhelpfully, with prostitution.

Overinflated figures, sensationalism and hyperbole have skewed the focus, and reinforced an inaccurate stereotype of women as passive and vulnerable, who have all been forced into prostitution and are in need of being ‘rescued’. However, this narrow focus overlooks important issues, like their need to make a decent wage to support their families, and their right to make decisions over their own lives. This means that sometimes the best-intentioned campaigners have caused inadvertent harm.

Trafficking is, indeed, a gender issue, with the vast majority of victims being women. But a narrow focus on sex trafficking has masked much broader issues, including all the other forms of trafficking, the goods that we consume as a result of trafficking, the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that cause people to take risks with migration, the motivations for traffickers themselves—and by and large, has ignored the plight of men.

Understanding the issues

Eight years on from the adoption of the United Nations Human Trafficking Protocol, there still remains a lack of good, credible data and understanding as to the

→ This paper does not necessarily represent the official views of The Salvation Army.

complexities of the crime that sees countless women, men and children exploited and abused for profit. Reliable research that is free of sensationalism is needed to address the broader issues that cause people to be trafficked in the first place.

Without adequate information about what's working and what's not in anti-trafficking are we just wasting time 'feeling good about feeling bad'?

In their report, the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW), states:

'Information on its dynamics, on its interrelations with other crimes, on the various forms, on the trafficking routes, on the modi operandi of the traffickers as well as on how trafficking in persons affects our societies and hampers good governance, is still limited. Although much money has been spent: hundreds of projects at national, regional and international levels have been carried out and recommendations formulated; identification-checklists and standards for victim protection have been developed; training material has been produced and national plans of action crafted; countless conferences, symposia, and meetings have been organised; a continuing stream of commentators, researchers and analysts have informed on the intricacy of the problem; and, many policy tools have been applied—surprisingly little is known about the impact of anti-trafficking responses, efforts, measures and activities⁷.

GAATW emphasises the urgent need for objective, qualitative knowledge so as to better understand the hidden side of the crime. Good impact evaluation on

current anti-trafficking initiatives would serve to more clearly identify those in need of help, lessening the chances of creating far-reaching unintended consequences that can inadvertently cause further harm to those already suffering.

Pausing for thought

'The law of unintended consequences pushes us ceaselessly through the years, permitting no pause for perspective.'

Richard Schickel

'If we to reduce them to their essence, international development groups and non-profit organisations work to make lives better and more just for the populations they serve. But sometimes the desire to help can create unintended consequences that may actually be harmful, or even lead to human rights violations.⁸

There is little doubt that non-government agencies (NGOs), both large and small, play a significant and positive role in offering assistance to people who have become increasingly marginalised through a range of reasons. Such dedicated commitment has seen a range of innovative programmes instigated, some effective lobbying and research carried out, and—of immense value—raising awareness of hidden factors within our global community that would otherwise simply slip below the radar of public gaze.

Numerous NGOs bringing into focus the crime of trafficking in persons, have seen the issue feature prominently in media worldwide. For example, through dedicated lobbying that is still continuing, the hidden plight of children working on cocoa plantations to produce our chocolate is now in the forefront of public attention. It has led to chocolate manufacturers beginning to take notice

What are 'unintended consequences'?

While the concept dates well back into history, it was popularised by sociologist, Robert Merton.¹ Merton, in his 1936 paper 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action', endeavoured to analyse the unforeseen cost resulting from any social action that involved a motive, and consequently, choices between various courses of action. Merton, in his book² outlined five probable reasons for such unforeseen consequences, namely,

Ignorance (it is impossible to anticipate everything, thereby leading to incomplete analysis).

Error (incorrect analysis of the problem or following habits that worked in the past but may not apply to the current situation).

Immediate interest, which may override long-term interests.

Basic values, which may require or prohibit certain actions even if the long-term result might be unfavorable (these long-term consequences may eventually cause changes in basic values).

Self-defeating prophecy (fear of some consequence drives people to find a solution before the problem occurs, thus the non-occurrence of the problem is unanticipated).

Unintended consequences can be either beneficial, leading to a positive outcome, or conversely, result in an undesirable, and unforeseen, outcome.

For example, rabbits introduced into Australia and New Zealand for food resulted in a rabbit population explosion which has seen considerable environmental degradation in some areas. The *war on drugs* intended to stem the illegal drug trade, instead strengthened the effectiveness of drug cartels.

On the other hand though, the medieval policy in England, of setting aside large areas of land for the hunting nobility, resulted in the preservation of green spaces for public use. As well, the practice of sinking ships in shallow water during wartime created many artificial reefs which have proved invaluable for science, and given pleasure for recreational divers.

and action, to make the supply chain far more transparent in order to bring about 'slave free' chocolate.

On the other hand, the unintended consequences of vigorous and impassioned campaigning that has been overly-focused on sex trafficking, has overshadowed far wider issues such as labour exploitation and abuse, the causal 'push' and 'pull' factors underpinning the crime, and in some instances, created further misery and harm to those the campaigning was professing to help. Few would deny the horror of forcing mainly women and girls into sexual servitude. The crime is abhorrent and needs every effort to confront the climatic conditions in which it grows and thrives unabated. However as Ambassador Luis CdeBaca⁹ pointed out, only a small fraction of involuntary workers throughout the world are sex workers, yet this is the overriding issue that dominates the discourse on trafficking.

The unintended consequences of the trafficking-prostitution paradigm have been far reaching. Patrizia Testai¹⁰ highlights how the Italian approach has been heavily influenced by religious NGOs who offer rehabilitation for trafficked sex workers. Accordingly, the State policy is 'to offer victims the chance to be "morally constructed", re-entering society as domestic workers or similar occupations'. Patrizia argues that such choices have denied many survivors the chance of realising the goal of economic autonomy.¹¹

Put simply, many people who care deeply about this issue have passionately campaigned to help victims of this dehumanising crime. But, it is time to ask how we can be better informed, and best eradicate human trafficking from the global landscape. We care, and we need solutions that work.

Only if you deal fairly with others, if you no longer oppress the migrants in your country or neglect the poor and needy. Only if you no longer cause hardship for others or set your hearts on selfish false values will I remain in this place with you. (Jeremiah 7: 5-7 Paraphrased)¹³

Only a small fraction of involuntary workers throughout the world are sex workers, yet this is the overriding issue that dominates the discourse on trafficking.

Where to from here?

This question will be addressed towards the end of our Pacific Trafficking in Persons Forum to be held early December. The two days in which we examine and reflect on what is happening in New Zealand and the wider Pacific, in a non-sensational, factual, informed way, will intentionally lead to the action-orientated: *where to from here?*

First and foremost, I suggest, any way forward cannot be in the absence of the voice and agency of the people who lives are impacted by the crime, the majority of whom are women. Yet in many of the discourses on trafficking, such voices remain stifled and go unheard. While only 22 per cent of voices in the news today are women's, approximately 80 per cent of those trafficked are female.¹⁴

Of equal importance, I would advocate, is to engage in wrestling with the less 'sexy' issues. Until we gain a greater understanding of why and what is actually happening, thus beginning to unravel the facts from the fiction and folklore, how will we be able to affect positive change? Or as one anti-trafficking stakeholder asked, without adequate information about what's working and what's not in anti-trafficking are we just wasting time '*feeling good about feeling bad*'?¹⁵

The task ahead of us won't be easy, yet I believe we can and indeed must, continue to address the dangerous bend in our global economy that sees a radically-divided world made up of those who have excess resources, and those who struggle simply to eat. It is within the complexities of these polar opposites, that trafficking flourishes.

'We must have no illusions. We must not be naïve. If we listen to the voice of God, we make our choice, to get out of ourselves and fight non-violently for a better world. We must not expect to find it easy; we shall not walk on roses, people will not throng to hear us and applaud, and we shall not always be aware of divine protection. If we are to be pilgrims of justice and peace, we must expect the desert.' (Bishop Dom Helder Camara)

A Parable of Good Works

'There was once a very hazardous corner in the road outside a village visited by many traders and tourists. The accident rate was very high as vehicles skidded and crashed, and people in the village felt great compassion for the victims. They set up an ambulance station with first aid available 24 hours a day, and immediate transport to hospital for the victims. This good work was maintained for quite some time.

Then someone asked, 'why are accidents so frequent in this part of the road? An investigating committee was formed, surveying done and advice taken. The road was redesigned to remove the sharp bend that had caused so many deaths and injuries. Eventually the emergency service was no longer needed.'¹²

- 1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended_consequences
- 2 Merton, Robert, K, 'on Social Structure and Science', 1996, USA
- 3 <http://www.beyondborders.net/essays/WeSeeFromWhereWeStand.htm>
- 4 Wall, Phil. 'I'll Fight, Holiness at War', Sovereign World, UK, 1998
- 5 Howard, Neil, Lalani, Mumtaz, Editorial introduction, 'The Politics of Human Trafficking', STAIR 4:1 (2008):5-15
- 6 IBID
- 7 Hewes, Caroline, Dewar, Fleur, Napier-Moore, Rebecca, 'Feeling Good about Feeling Bad', Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women(GAATW), Bangkok, 2010
- 8 Ray, Audacia, 'Anti trafficking measures and Human Rights Impact', International Women's Health Coalition, January 2011, US
- 9 Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Occasional Papers, 'The Unintended Consequences of Help', Washington DC 2010
- 10 IBID
- 11 IBID
- 12 IBID
- 13 Social Justice Resource Kit, 'Starting Places and Projects', inter Church working group, Social Responsibility Commission of the Anglican Church of New Zealand, Wellington, May 1994
- 14 <http://ipsnews.net/genderwire/>
- 15 Hewes, Caroline, Dewar, Fleur, Napier-Moore, Rebecca, 'Feeling Good about Feeling Bad', Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women(GAATW), Bangkok, 2010