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888.426.4712

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIANS TO THE HUMAN  
TRAFFICKING MOVEMENT**

**By: Elizabeth Peffer Talbot, Ph.D.**

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Elizabeth Peffer Talbot, Ph.D., CSW-PIP

***Human Trafficking & Global Anti-trafficking Efforts***

The conversations concerning human trafficking and its globalization have continued to grow since the late 1990's. As many of you know, the U.S. government has taken the lead internationally in an attempt to intervene in the trafficking of humans in multiple ways. In 2000 the U.S. passed the landmark law, the Trafficking victims Protection Act. This law made human trafficking a federal crime and greatly increased resources for the prosecution of perpetrators.

The U.S. law also mandated annual reports on the anti-trafficking efforts of other countries and levied sanctions to be enacted against governments that were determined to be uncooperative (Finnegan, 2008). The U.S. government has given approximately one half billion dollars in anti-trafficking aid packages to governments, NGO's and international governmental organizations since 2000. Approximately \$11 million dollars has been given to Moldova for anti-trafficking efforts (Finnegan, 2008).

Despite the efforts of the U.S. government, European governments, and others internationally, human trafficking continues to thrive. It is described by some as the "perfect crime" (Gallagher, 2006) because the profits are enormous and on-going. The risks of apprehension are low. And, prosecution for human trafficking is rare (Gallagher, 2006).

**Definition**

Human trafficking is a modern day form of human slavery that has emerged as a result of globalization. There is no country in the world that has been exempt from the impact of human trafficking. It is estimated that there are 27 million people world-wide who have fallen victim to

traffickers (Phillips, 2010). The U.S. government estimates that approximately 600,000 – 800,000 people are lured into slavery and trafficked each year (Kapstein, 2006).

The U.N. definition of human trafficking is the most widely recognized and quoted definition to date. It describes human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation (U.N., 2005).

As a global crime, human trafficking involves the exploitation of men, women, and children for the financial gain of others. It is a violation of fundamental human rights (GAO, 2007). Human trafficking occurs in three forms, 1) sex trafficking, 2) sex trafficking of minors and 3) labor trafficking (Wolf-Branigin, Jensen, Smith, 2008). The primary targets of human traffickers are women and children. As many as 80% of the contemporary victims of human trafficking are women and children. As many as 80% of contemporary victims of human trafficking are women and girls from a range of poor countries, such as Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America, and Central Europe. Fifty percent of the victims are minors (Clarke, 2009).

Methods of entrapment are countless and include abductions, deception, the use of acquaintances, false advertisements, the selling of children by parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, spouses, and agencies the advertising for mail order brides (GAO, 2007), Talbot & Ose, 2005).

## **Poverty**

Underlying the increase in human trafficking abroad are issues of poverty and social justice. In many countries the status of women is so low that they are traditionally treated as

chattel (Clarke, 2009). Particularly in the Eastern European countries, poverty has become a major factor in the growing trade in humans for sale.

The impoverished economic conditions of the former communist countries of Europe have fed the current crisis in a thriving market for the selling of women and children for sexual purposes. Economic conditions that plagued the economy in the 1990's pushed many women into poverty. Fueled by hyperinflation and the reduction of economic output, women have been hit hard (Corrin, 2005). When economic growth resumed after the collapse of the former communist governments the poverty levels for women remained high. In 2005, it was estimated that 1,300 million persons worldwide were in poverty, and 70% were women (Corrin, 2005).

Research on poverty found four groups of women to be the most vulnerable to human traffickers, "divorced women with children, single mothers, elderly single women, and women from minority groups" (Gorniak, 2004, p. 546). Even though women are not poorer than men, there is an unequal distribution of resources that cause women and their children to be marginalized by society and experience poverty as a way of life (Gorniak, 2004).

UNICEF reports that the environmental conditions for women have worsened. Violence has increased due to the lowly position of women in families and because of their increased financial responsibilities for the family (Limanowska, 2002). The poor economic conditions found in former soviet occupied countries compounded by the political and social status of women leave them with few choices for survival. Women who are seeking ways to survive their poor economic situations and overcome the devalued status they hold in society are being forced to make harsh choices and take serious risks. As victims of human trafficking, they are exposed to serious health conditions, physical and emotional problems due to the violence they encounter, and the unhealthy living conditions they are forced to endure. The mortality rates for victims of

human trafficking are reported to be 40% higher than the U.S. national average (McCabe, 2010, p. 147).

Eastern European countries in transition and those experiencing political, social and economic distress are challenged by high rates of unemployment and gender inequality. Poor women have little hope for improvement or a better future (Kanics and Reiter, 2001). The feminization of poverty has contributed to the vulnerability of women for exploitation and trafficking (Corrin, 2005). The overt human rights abuses directed at women as a result of human trafficking are directly related to the degraded status of women within some European societies (Corrin, 2005). In those societies, women and children are often viewed as “valuable commodities” for prostitution and other forms of exploitation by criminals, military personnel, and business people (Corrin, 2005, p. 543).

The desire to improve one’s standard of living leads people to migrate for purposes of employment, the global slave trade involves deception and coercion designed to coerce victims to cross national borders in search of jobs (GAO, 2007). Many seeking migration are dependent on others for travel documents, travel arrangements, and employment abroad. This dependence frequently results in the trafficking and enslavement of the individual (Kanics and Reiter, 2001).

### **Focusing on Moldova**

#### **Economic and Cultural Background**

Moldova is a small country surrounded on three sides by the Ukraine and by Romania on the south. There are approximately 4 million people in Moldova, and approximately 600,000 of the Moldovan people (25%) are working outside of the country (Finnegan, 2008); Galeoni, 2008). Travel agencies have thrived as a result of the migration across borders. Travel agencies have also become a thriving resource for traffickers as a way to lure unsuspecting victims who

are seeking out of country employment as a way to improve the lives of themselves and their families. Given the responsibility placed on women/mothers to provide for the family, Moldovan women have become easy targets. They are often recruited for work as dancers, models, casual or agricultural laborers, nannies, and housekeepers (Galeotti, 2005). Most of these women are then forced into prostitution.

Moldova is an ex-soviet country. In its heyday Moldova had a profitable agricultural business located in a province known as Transnistria. Moldova had many factories that were government owned and where many of the people were employed. After Moldova announced its freedom from the Soviet Union, Transnistria seceded from Moldova, leaving both countries with limited financial resources. Transnistria is east of the Dniester River and was the most Russian like province. The dispute over Transnistria is not resolved and Transnistria is not recognized as a government of its own. Moldova is the poorest country in Europe, although Kosovo may now have overtaken that economic position (Finnegan, 2008).

While the landscape in Moldova is beautiful, the country is in disrepair. Many people live in very primitive structures without running water or toilet facilities. When the soviet government left Moldova all construction stopped. Repairs for parks, buildings and structures in the process of being built were stopped and never resumed.

Nearly two-thirds of the population in Moldova falls below the poverty line. The average income is equivalent to less than \$4.00 per day. This level of poverty places the people at risk and as makes them primary targets for human traffickers. Moldova has become a source country for women and girls lured into sexual slavery.

Culturally, it is a country where outward appearances are important and beauty is culturally appreciated. In Chisinau, the population would appear to be middle class. On the

streets and in travel for work the people appear to be neatly groomed and dressed. When they arrive at their place of work they change into their working clothes. At the end of the day, they change into their travel clothes before they leave for home. Individuals often have only one set of dress clothes for their public appearance. When shopping, one must be careful in the handling of money. Vendors and store clerks may refuse to accept money that appears to be damaged, crinkled or folded bills. Beauty is paramount in the cultural values of the Moldovan people.

### **Source Countries**

The International Office for Migration (IOM) monitors those who are returned to Moldova after being trafficked. Their records show that 45% of the victims returned to Moldova have been trafficked into Turkey, 26% were trafficked into Western Europe, and 11% were trafficked into Russia. Victims are also found to have been trafficked into Israel and the United Arab Emirates (Galcotti, 2008). The most recent reports have indicated that the demand for women and children has outstripped the supply.

### **Crime**

There has been an increase in organized crime in Moldova since the 1990's when they gained independence from Russia. Because the demand has outstripped the supply, Moldova has also become a transient country. Gang members have assumed the role of import and export agents, and have been found to work for larger transnational criminal networks (Galeotti, 2005).

It is estimated that there are 35 criminal clans in Moldova that are from approximately 300 small Moldovan gangs. Most of the clans are small smuggling rings and local protection racketeers. The clans are comprised of 2-6 members who are often from the same family. Many of the small-time traffickers are women (Finnegan, 2008).

There are between 10-12 serious organized criminal gangs operating in Moldova. These gangs have benefited from the corruption that exists within the Moldovan government. Many smaller clans have banded together with larger criminal operations as a way to protect themselves from the government's campaign against corruption (Galeotti, 2008).

The primary source of illegal income in Moldova is cross-border trafficking. Human trafficking and the smuggling of drugs are the two primary activities of gang members. The income produced by criminal gangs was estimated in 2007 to be approximately \$2.5 billion, which was equivalent to half the gross national income. Other estimates suggest that the income from criminal activity is \$1.2 billion, which is equal to the inflow of money from Moldovan's who are working abroad (Galeotti, 2008).

### **Police and the Courts**

Moldova has become the gateway into Europe for human traffickers (Galeotti, 2008). Police provide little protection. The police in Moldova are notorious for protecting traffickers and pimps, and for demanding sexual favors for themselves (Finnegan, 2008).

Victims have found little protection from the courts. They are often not protected when they appear as witnesses. Frequently the charges against traffickers are downgraded to charges of pimping which carry lesser sentences.

One of the difficulties with human trafficking is persuading victims to prosecute and to stay with the case throughout the time of prosecution. Victims are often frustrated with the legal system and experience continued humiliations through the court system as their case is processed toward completion. Some victims are terrorized during the criminal proceedings by their perpetrators and criminal gang members. Judges often express prejudicial feelings toward women who have been prostituted (Finnegan, 2008). They are victimized again by the courts as



they attempt to support efforts to take traffickers off the streets and hold them responsible for their actions.

### **Impact on the Family**

The cultural impact of the position of women in Moldovan society adds to their vulnerability. In Moldova, the value of women is less than the value of men. Domestic violence is an acceptable practice. A Moldovan myth says “the woman who is not beaten is like a house that is not cleaned” (Finnegan, 2008).

Estimates suggest that a third of all Moldovan children have lost at least one parent to emigration, and thousands of parents are missing. Known as social orphans, they are looked after by a neighbor or relative. Frequently they are left to fend for themselves. Many children of trafficked women end up in orphanages, or left on the streets to fend for themselves. Living on the streets or alone in neighborhoods places children at risk of being trafficked. When children age out of orphanages, they have no place to go, are vulnerable, and frequently trafficked.

Another serious impact on the family is the impact of children born to women during their enslavement. The children are fathered by the men who have raped their mothers, or were the pimps who purchased them, or sold them for financial profits. The presence of these children in the lives of women who were trafficked reminds them of the abuse they encountered. These feelings are often projected onto the children.

Often women who have been trafficked have difficulty with sexual relationships after they are freed. They have difficulty reintegrating back into their families. They experience post traumatic stress disorder, and often they have been infected with sexual diseases that have gone untreated, and many have active cases of AIDS. They also carry physical scars from cigarette burns, cuts, and tattoos that identify them as slaves.

## **Christian Contribution**

The Christian community has encountered victims of human trafficking for many years prior to the recognition of human trafficking as a global issue. About 30 years ago missionaries in India encountered women whom they learned were slaves and forced into prostitution. Most of these women had begun attending bible studies held in the red-light district of Bombay. What the missionaries have learned from their 30 years of experience with victims of human trafficking has been helpful to the government of India and Nepal, as these countries have begun to address the issues of human trafficking. Many government and NGO programs for the recovery for victims have been modeled after the missionaries plan for providing after care.

Christian missionaries, initially in India, have participated in a rescue and restore movement for at least three decades. Initially, they set out to purchase back women they encountered. Quickly they recognized that the money they used to buy freedom was used by brothel owners to purchase new slaves. As a result, they embarked on dangerous missions to rescue women from brothels, hide them, and then move them to safe houses they had opened to provide after care.

Based in Christian beliefs, they began their efforts of restoration of the soul through prayer and fasting. As the host they never pushed their faith onto those they rescued or cared for. Their methods are to live out their faith by doing for the women and children what they would do for one another. They met them at the point of their needs through food, clothing, and safe shelter. They opened their homes, and allowed the women to voluntarily participate in their bible study groups when and if they became ready. They assessed the needs of each woman. They provided children with the opportunity to attend school. Many women received vocational

training. Women who were ill received medical services. Those who were terminally ill were cared for until their death.

As more and more victims were rescued, and as the government began rescuing victims who needed a safe place to live, homes were opened across India, and a home in Nepal.

## **Moldova**

Several years ago a missionary was returning home on a flight and sitting next to a Moldovan government official. The official began talking about the problem of human trafficking in Moldova and asked the missionary what the church intended to do about the problem in Moldova.

The encounter led to the eventual opening of a rescue home in Moldova. As the missionary began to explore the problems in Moldova she learned of the problems children were encountering when they aged out of orphanages. She also learned about the countless victims who were being returned from abroad after the experiences of being trafficked. Through donations from U.S. churches, the missionary couples were able to purchase a new home in a safe neighborhood, and establish a home for rescued victims in Moldova.

Staffed with a counselor, a social worker, a housekeeper, a cook, and a staff person to work overnight, the rescue home opened in December 2008. It was dedicated in May 2009 to provide after care for women rescued from human trafficking, a work that could only be achieved with the help of the Lord.

## **Caregivers**

I spent two weeks in Moldova interacting with rescued women and staff in the rescue home. Christian staff persons are hired for rescue homes. Largely, staff persons are lay people looking for opportunities to help the women coming out of slavery. Work in a rescue home is

difficult. Work with women who have been broken, abused, and prostituted is challenging. Most staff persons are unprepared to deal with the emotions they encounter. In talking with staff about their experiences I learned that most feel that their work is a calling. They acknowledge the difficulty of the work they do, and discussed how they continuously turn to God to help them deal with the women in the home, and to help them persevere.

Often the women have difficulty dealing with their emotions, and express their frustration and anger openly. This is difficult for staff to experience. Untrained, they find they are unable to respond in a way that is helpful or comforting, leaving them open to feelings of failure. When a woman becomes angry and leaves the home unexpectedly or runs away, staff persons also feel traumatized. They feel overwhelmed with their concern for the safety and well-being of the woman, and search their souls for something they could have done differently.

Burn-out is high among the caregivers of trafficked women. Missionaries recognize that as they open rescue homes they also need to prepare the caregivers for the encounter of a wide variety of emotions that will be encountered as women fill the available beds in the home. Missionaries find that they need to routinely meet to talk about the issues women are bringing into the home, the trauma they have encountered, and the responses that emerge as a result. Over time staff experience vicarious trauma. The vicarious trauma makes holding their position difficult. Because they feel work with rescued victims is a calling they persevere. However, most will ultimately leave feeling defeated in their mission to be helpful.

### **Lessons Learned**

The restoration strategy is important. Missionaries and their staff must be prepared to meet the multiple needs of the women who enter their home. When women come to the home they have physical needs that must be addressed. They need a medical exam to determine if they

have any communicable diseases or physical problems that must be addressed. They need dental exams and repairs. The women have emotional needs that have been ignored. Women leaving captivity are not accustomed to making decisions. From the time of their captivity their every move has been with permission and commanded by their owner. Owners have told them when and what they could eat and wear. They instruct them when and where they can sleep. They determine when they have sex, how they have sex, and with whom they have sex. No decision is made unless it is made by their owner. Thus, learning to make decisions is difficult and overwhelming for them. The women need counseling for the trauma of abuse and exploitation that they have experienced.

Trafficked women are young, often considered children in most cultures, and held in captivity for many years before they are rescued, escape, or thrown out because their terminal illness has caused purchasers of sex to reject their services. Many women trafficked lack an adequate education. Some are illiterate, or barely literate. They need educational training, and vocational training to provide them with job skills so they can become financially independent. The women also have spiritual needs that have not been met. Providing for these needs is a primary task for caregivers.

Some women entering rescue homes have children that were born to them during captivity. Mother-child relationships are difficult because the mother has been the victim of rape and the father of the child may be unknown. The mother often sees the perpetrator of abuse as she looks into the face of the child. Frequently, living in an environment of captivity leaves the mother emotionally empty, with nothing left to give to a child. For other women, the child is their only form of comfort and experience for nurture. This places the child in a position of nurturer rather than the one who is loved and nurtured. Most women leaving captivity with

children do not know how to parent. Many were trafficked as children and forced into the role of slave at such a young age that any parenting they received has been forgotten long ago.

Caregivers are in a position of modeling good parenting skills and behaviors that will foster emotional growth for the child. Many staff person/ caregivers find the job difficult, but they remain in their employed positions because of the emotional attachment to the women and children who come and go, as well as their desire to be helpful to the mother-child relationship. They see it as a calling and way of doing the work God has asked them to do.

### **Issues of Trust**

Most of the women who enter rescue homes are not Christians. Relieved to be free, they find trusting anyone difficult. And, they will challenge the rules and test the boundaries that have been set. Many have been starved and will hide food until they realize that there is enough food and they will not go hungry. They have difficulty dealing with the freedom they have when every move has been directed for the period of captivity. For some, the period of captivity has been almost a life-time. Most experience restlessness and do not know what to do with their time when it is not directed. They experience anxiety remembering what has happened to them, and often find crying to be endless.

Afraid to trust, some run away. Once on the streets alone they meet and are lured back into prostitution by a boyfriend. Boyfriends offer them physical attention. When trust is gained, they become the woman's new pimp. Sometimes these women return to the rescue home pregnant. The director of the home I visited indicated that it takes the women about three months to begin to settle down and work on issues that need to be addressed.

### **Support**

Christian homes for victims are supported by Missionaries who receive funding for their work from Christian churches in the U.S. Short-term mission teams visit every summer to help with whatever needs to be accomplished. In Moldova mission teams have provided landscaping for the new facility. They have planted gardens, painted rooms, and done whatever is needed to make the home livable. Many have returned to the U.S. to raise money for unmet needs. The home in Moldova was purchased as a partly finished home. Christian volunteer mission teams completed the structure inside and out. Churches committed to and furnished money for building supplies, and furnished the home through donations. And the Christian community provides funding to keep the mission and work solvent.

### **Summary**

The Christian community of missions has played a significant role in the rescue and care of victims of human trafficking. Before there was a word for the enslavement of women and children into prostitution, missionaries were providing care and rescue. Care giving is difficult. Largely relying on the local community as staff in rescue homes, the caregivers find it difficult to cope with the emotional trauma expressed by victims, and that created for them through vicarious interactions and empathy for the victim's experiences. Women held in captivity experience serious emotional disorders and trauma to the soul. Recovery is a slow process that requires patience and commitment. Most caregivers are committed. But, do not have the professional training that would help them deal with the vicarious trauma. Even though they ultimately leave their positions, their presence and contributions have been helpful and have aided in the recovery of the women.

Christian rescue homes are supported by churches and congregations across the United States. Annually, mission teams donate their vacation time to visit and offer help in building,

painting, and maintaining buildings. Government homes provide short-term facilities for rescued victims. Christian missionaries and the homes they provide offer long-term care facilities for victims. Most of the women who enter into these homes of hope and recovery would never recover without the commitment of the Christian missionary community.

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