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Introduction

Sex trafficking is a global phenomenon that has a presence in almost every country. There are many different forms of sex trafficking, but it is generally defined by Shared Hope International as occurring “when someone uses force, fraud, or coercion to cause a commercial sex act with an adult or causes a minor to commit a commercial sex act”. There are many constant motivators of trafficking of humans for sex such as poverty, social factors, and corruption. However, there are times in history in which certain regions have experienced a surge in trafficking due to events such as political uprisings, social unrest and natural disasters. I want to investigate how natural disasters cause an increase in sex trafficking cases in regions. I will use the 2010 earthquake outside of Port-au-Prince, Haiti as a case study in which I look specifically at sex trafficking from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. Due to the racial tensions that exist on this island, I will also investigate how the earthquake further lowered the social level of Haitians in the DR and what effect this had on Haitian working in the sex industry.

Background

In order to look at the specific impacts the 2010 earthquake had on sex trafficking from Haiti to the Dominican Republic I must first lay out some background information on the sex industry in the Dominican Republic and the role that Haitian women play in this industry. Prostitution is legal in the DR but at first glance it is not clear how it is regulated and what restrictions there are. I will analyze laws in the DR to understand this system better. To study interactions between sex workers and their clients I will study videos recorded by several US and

Dominican news outlets of conversations between these individuals. I will then look at studies done by other academics and organizations that use interviews to measure attitudes towards sex workers in Dominican society so that I can draw comparisons between perceptions of general sex workers and those that come from Haiti.

Theoretical Framework

Because data and reports of trafficking are often not available and accessible, much of my argument will be theoretical and drawn from other studies done on human trafficking. I will then use the ideas and theories produced by these studies to analyze the Haiti/Dominican case.

Kevin Bales, the founder of Free the Slaves and a renowned academic, provides a theory of trafficking that I will use as the framework of my main argument. He investigates the factors that are present in countries of origin and destination in human trafficking. He uses a multiple regression analysis to determine which of the 76 factors he chose were significant predictors of trafficking from a country. Those that were found to be significant were governmental corruption, infant mortality (as a measure of poverty), % of population below the age of 14, food production, population pressure and conflict and social unrest (Bales, 2007, Bales, 2005).

When testing for factors expected of countries that individuals are trafficked to, Bales had less conclusive results. However, he mentions some general trends that are present in countries he examined that receive high levels of trafficking such as perceived opportunity of employment and a seemingly “endless demand for the services of the victims” (Bales, 2007). I will investigate these types of trends in the Dominican Republic to better understand the “pull” factors that motivate traffickers and immigrants that so desperately want to cross the border they turn to smugglers.

Furthermore, Bales mentions in his study that one question he was unable to address is the influence that migration policies have on trafficking levels in a country. For a country to receive high numbers of trafficking he expects that there must be low legal permeability so that individuals turn to underground means of entering the country. There must also be a certain level of corruption that allows traffickers and smugglers to bring people across a border. I plan to use these general thoughts of Bales to investigate the relationship between Haiti and the DR and how immigration policies might create an environment that promotes trafficking.

In order to look at the role that Haitian individuals fill within sex work and how this changed post-earthquake, I will use the theory of intersectionality put forth by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. Crenshaw discusses the multiples axes of power that are able to compound and subsequently subordinate an individual to a higher degree than someone who experiences only one of these axes. (Crenshaw, 2000).

Case Selection and Methods

I will be doing a single case study of the island of Hispaniola and the 2010 earthquake to analyze the effects that natural disasters have on human trafficking. I will measure the six factors put forth by Bales (governmental corruption, infant mortality, % of population below the age of 14, food production, population pressure and conflict and social unrest) in Haiti to show the environment that is created in the nation that allows for trafficking (Bales, 2007). I will specifically look at how these factors changed in the months following the 2010 earthquake to determine if this natural disaster increased trafficking. I plan on using the World Data Bank, reports done by UNICEF and International Justice Mission and other forms of quantitative data to measure these variables.

I will then look at the Dominican Republic through the lens of Bales' study of factors that are indicative of a receiving country of trafficking victims. I plan on looking at the demand of sex workers in the DR and specifically the demand of Haitian women in the sex industry. Haitians have historically been hyper-sexualized and many myths of Haitians providing a more pleasurable sexual experience have circulated the island (Petrozziello, Allison J, 2013). I will investigate these perceptions on the island that increase demand and also the sex tourism that exists, primarily catered to North American and European men through qualitative sources and secondary sources. Bales also mentions the need for a perception of opportunity to motivate individuals to cross the border. In my time living in the DR I noticed that most low skills job that I observed were filled by Haitians. I plan on looking at the type of employment that Haitians find in the DR and the information they send home about available jobs that motivates more peoples to cross the border.

The Dominican government has always had restrictive immigration policies towards Haitians. I will use this case to expand on Bales discussion on the connection between migration policies and human trafficking. In my investigation I will analyze how the immigration laws changed and became more restrictive after the 2010 earthquake. I predict that the increased difficulties to migrate in the years after the earthquake caused an increase in use of smugglers and thus an increase in cases of trafficking.

In addition to presenting an argument about the earthquake causing an escalation in trafficking from Haiti to the DR I will discuss how the perception of Haitians in the DR and specifically in the sex industry changed after the earthquake. By analyzing local newspapers in Santo Domingo, DR, I will investigate attitudes towards Haitian migrants. I also plan on discussing my observations during my time in the DR. I overheard conversations almost daily

that expressed ideas of Haitians as dirty, sick, and lazy. These perceptions are historically embedded in the nation but were heightened after the cholera outbreak among Haitians after the 2010 earthquake. I am interested in looking at the intersection of Haitians being seen as sick and dirty and the perception of Haitian women as more desirable in the sex industry. I am hoping to find more primary sources to analyze this dichotomy of impressions of Haitians to see how it has played out in sex workers since the 2010 earthquake.

Limitations

When investigating crimes such as sex trafficking there are always extreme limitations. Due to the underground nature of trafficking there is not much data on rates or numbers of cases of trafficking. However, I hope that through applying the theoretical framework on trafficking by Kevin Bales I can make a convincing argument that trafficking rates increased after the 2010 earthquake. Additionally, I have a limitation of time and space. I do not have the opportunity to travel to the Dominican Republic to further develop my ideas during the time frame of this investigation. Therefore, I will be relying heavily on secondary sources created by academics that interviewed the populations I am interested in.

Bibliography

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