Human Trafficking:
Knowledge Gaps and Research Priorities

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Journal Articles and Reports by Year, n = 228 & 536

Year

1980 1987 1991 1993 1995 1997 1999 2001 2003 2005 2007

Number of Publications

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Journal Articles

Reports

[Bar chart showing the number of journal articles and reports by year from 1980 to 2007]
Journal articles (N=218)

- Non-Empirical/Not Peer Reviewed, n=83, 37%
- Non-Empirical/Peer Reviewed, n=96, 46%
- Empirical Research/Peer Reviewed, n=36, 16%
- Empirical Research/Not Peer Reviewed, n=3, 1%
Populations

Journal Articles - By Trafficked Population

- Women: 36%
- Men: 2%
- Girls: 2%
- Boys: 0%
- Children: 13%
- Unknown: 47%
Reports-Empirical Research

- Empirical Research/Not Peer Reviewed, n=286, 67%
- Empirical Research/Peer Reviewed, n=6, 1%
- Non-Empirical/Not Peer Reviewed, n=134, 31%
- Non-Empirical/Peer Reviewed, n=3, 1%
Reports - By Trafficked Population

- Unknown: 3%
- Children: 6%
- Boys: 21%
- Women: 32%
- Men: 4%
- Girls: 34%
Theory

- Research influenced by ideology
- Moral crusades
- Research conducted by activists involved in anti-prostitution campaigns
- Radical feminist theory
  - No distinction between trafficking for forced prostitution and voluntary migration (legal or irregular) for sex work
- Research on trafficking for labor exploitation
  - Disconnected from theory
  - No attempts to analyze the issue of cross-border trafficking for labor exploitation within existing international migration theories
  - Poverty as the major “push factor”
Methodology

- Lack of innovative methodologies
- Reliance on unrepresentative samples
- Reliance on interviews with ‘key stakeholders’
  - Valuable ethnographic interviews
  - Untrained researchers
  - Participant observation
- Small samples
- Dangers of generalizing from small convenience samples are routinely ignored in the literature
- Need to emphasize the limitations of small samples for generalizations and extrapolations
- Need to stress the value of ethnographic investigations for hypothesis formulation
Recommendations

• Need for quantitative and qualitative research to provide macro- and micro-level understanding of the phenomenon
• Methodologically sound compilation of statistical data to inform appropriation of funds for counter-trafficking initiatives and services to survivors
• Rigorous ethnographic and sociological studies based on in-depth interviews with trafficking survivors to obtain baseline data on their characteristics
• Monitoring and evaluation studies to identify effective policies and best practices and assess success of programs
• Lack of research-based policy, practice, and knowledge may inadvertently ‘deepen rather than loosen the factors that make trafficking both so profitable and difficult to address’ (Kelly 2002: 60)