

Modern Day Slavery

Preliminary Research for the Pacific Center for Global Justice

By Rose Gerber

Brief Overview of Modern Day Slavery

An estimated 27 million slaves are in bondage around the globe today. That's double the number of slaves that came from Africa in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. There are many definitions for modern slavery in the scholarly community. But the three that appear to be most agreed upon are as follows. The first is the complete control of one person by another through physical or psychological violence. The second- hard labor for little or no pay. The third is economic exploitation.

Modern day slavery takes many forms. Human trafficking is often discussed, but the sex trade, bonded labor, inherited slavery, early and forced marriage, chattel slavery, child labor (including child soldiers), and domestic slave labor are all forms of slavery that can be found all over the world.

There are only two countries in which modern day slavery has not been recorded and those are Iceland and Greenland. It is truly a global issue. However, the most concentrated numbers of reported incidences are found in the southern hemisphere and in the Middle East and Asia in particular.

Though slavery is not legal in any state and global treaties exist to combat the issue, the slave trade continues to flourish. Root solutions are needed to address the issue. Part of the research I present to the board will include data gathered from NGO's and scholars who are on the cutting edge of combating slavery with root solution approaches.

Root Causes of Modern Day Slavery

When I present my research findings to the board on modern day slavery, I will argue that there are three major root causes. The first is poverty and the feminization of poverty, the second is the human tendency for greed capitalizing on conditions caused by globalization, and the third is a lack of education and awareness of modern slavery in both victims and the public at large.

Of the three, poverty stands out the major root causes of modern day slavery. Those most affected by modern day slavery are living in the third world. They are subject to exploitation because their poverty makes them vulnerable. Conditions that affect third world countries the most such as environmental degradation, the effects of globalization, government corruption and lawlessness, and natural disasters, make them excellent praying grounds for the slave trade.

Kevin Bales, a famed scholar on the issue, calls modern day slavery an economic crime. Scholar Michelle C. Rickert explains that modern day slave traders are "inventive business persons looking for opportunities to exploit their new cheap human commodity to make a profit in many different businesses". And human labor is cheap. The price of human beings has collapsed. Two thousand years ago a slave could be bought for \$4,000. Today, \$90 per person is average price of a slave, with people even being sold for 5-10 dollars in India and Nepal.

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Second is the feminization of poverty. Women and girls are the largest demographic affected by the slave trade. Women compose about 80% of trafficked women in the U.S. alone. Women are also a strikingly larger percentage of the world's poor. Scholars point to the feminization of poverty as the reason for such a disproportion.

Women are affected the worst during times of economic distress because of various reasons. Factors include: Women often have lower social and economic status than men. (Women are frequently sold by their families into slavery because they are not valued as much as men.) There is an ever-present gender wage gap. Women need to play multiple roles and their lack of time limits their access to formal employment and general advancement.

Finally, there is the issue of lack of education and awareness. Those who are poor and vulnerable to becoming enslaved are easily persuaded and tricked by slave traffickers. Potential victims largely lack the awareness to look for signs that might indicate they are about to be entrapped.

Root Solutions

Root solutions to poverty find success when they are targeted at women. NGO's all over the world recognize this. Women not only are disproportionately poor, but they are more likely to keep jobs, send their kids to school and use earned income for their families.

If poverty is the root cause of people being vulnerable to becoming victims of the slave trade, then addressing that poverty needs to be part of any root solution. Sometimes a few dollars makes the difference between a family selling their child into slavery or not. Identifying the most vulnerable of the poor and giving them mechanisms to improve their livelihood is one way of preventing them from becoming casualties of the trade.

Today there are organizations around the globe working to educate potential victims of the slave trade while at the same time helping those people to build strong economic and socioeconomic conditions to prevent victimization. Many of these organizations focus on strengthening women's economic well-being while at the same time educating them about the dangers of slavery. They also assist those who have been in the slave trade with economic and emotional rehabilitation, since many of those who have been slaves often know nothing else and return to it even after they are free.

There is not a single prescription for combating slavery every place it occurs. But its root causes are present in every situation. Based on the conclusions of the research, my paper will offer up courses of action consistent with the mission of the PCGJ that it can pursue to address the root causes of modern slavery.

For those of you interested in watching a brief lecture by scholar Kevin Bales online that is educational and moving, please follow this link.

Kevin Bales Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUM2rCIUdeI>

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Organizations:

The Sold Project

Nightlight

Association of People for Practical Life Education

Rugmark

The Polaris Project

International Justice Mission

Anti-Slavery

The Protection Project