![IPA Innovations for Poverty Action logo]

Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) Funded Projects

Please find below projects funded by IPA's Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI).

Understanding How to Reduce Adolescent Recruitment into Gangs: Experimental Evidence in Medellín, Colombia

Researchers: Christopher Blattman, Arantxa Rodríguez-Uribe, Santiago Tobón
Country: Colombia
Partners: Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA), Caja de Compensación Familiar de Antioquia (COMFAMA), Secretaría de Educación–Alcaldía de Medellín, Towards Kindness, Templeton World Charity Foundation (through Universidad EAFIT), Gobierno Nacional de Colombia–Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación (through Universidad EAFIT), Innovations for Poverty Action–The Governance, Crime, & Conflict Initiative (Peace & Recovery Program)
Type of Project: Pilot + Randomized evaluation

In Medellin, Colombia, most low- and middle-income neighborhoods are controlled to some degree by street gangs. Gangs in Medellín use force, fraud, and deception to recruit children and adolescents. Around ten percent of males aged 15 to 34 in low- and middle-income neighborhoods are somehow affiliated to gangs (Blattman et al. 2024), and were typically recruited between the ages of 10 and 17 (Blattman et al. 2024, Carvalho and Soares 2016). However, most research about recruitment is qualitative and subjective, as there is no systematic data on an adolescent's choice to join gangs. In this project, researchers are piloting a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of anti-gang interventions on adolescent males, including a training and mentorship program to promote legal career paths and information sessions about safety and future career risks associated with gang involvement. In concurrence with the randomized evaluation but funded separately, researchers are conducting a panel survey of adolescent males to assess the risk factors and drivers of gang recruitment.

Profit Motives, Working Conditions, and Labor Trafficking: Evidence from Bangladesh's Brick Kiln Industry

Researchers: Grant Miller, Stephen P. Luby, Kim Babiarz, Jessie Brunner, Nina Brooks, Sameer Maithel, Debasish Biswas, Shoeb Ahmed
Country: Bangladesh

Partners: International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b), Stanford Impact Labs, JPAL/K-CAI, Sustainability Accelerator at Stanford University Doerr School of Sustainability
Type of Project: Randomized evaluation

Despite being a key source of employment in Bangladesh, brick kilns significantly contribute to climate change and local air pollution, and commonly rely on bonded and forced labor, often involving migrants (ILO 2017). Zigzag kilns—which use a unique design to redirect the air flow and change the way coal is loaded—have the potential to reduce carbon emissions and increase profitability if operated correctly. However, their efficient implementation hinges on worker cooperation, a factor often hindered by kiln owners' inattention to worker incentives. In this project, researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of providing technical training and encouraging kiln owners to implement strategies that incentivize workers to adopt these new technologies and practices. The project will assess whether increased worker adoption of the new technology leads to improvements in working conditions and reduces human trafficking in brick kilns.

Evaluating the Feasibility of a Survivor-centered Case Management Program in Providing Effective and Trauma-informed Services

Researchers: Richard Matthew, Kelsey Morgan, Angela Robinson
Country: Uganda
Partners: Everfree, University of California, Irvine
Type of Project: Pilot Research Project

Existing human trafficking protection-focused research emphasizes the importance of providing survivors with opportunities to determine their own goals, priorities, and avenues for achieving them (Hopper 2018; Ladd and Weaver 2018; SAMHSA 2015). However, service providers often fail to incorporate survivors' voices into the case management process, limiting survivors' agency in their recovery and negatively impacting providers' ability to provide effective and trauma-informed services. EverFree is piloting the Freedom Greenlight, a survivor-centered case management tool adapted from the Poverty Stoplight, which invites survivors' input during program intake and centers their priorities throughout the recovery process. This study will pilot the use of the Freedom Greenlight in a limited number of aftercare centers, assessing the feasibility of a full-scale randomized evaluation to determine the effectiveness of this case management model.

Feasibility Pilot of a Mental Health Intervention for Survivors of Human Trafficking

Researchers: Laura Cordisco Tsai, Catherine Carlson
Country: Philippines
Partners: Eleison Foundation, University of Alabama, Harvard University, Healing and

Resistance After Trauma
Type of Project: Pilot Research Project

Despite the high prevalence of mental health issues among human trafficking survivors, most do not have access to specialized, trauma-informed, evidence-based mental health care. Evidence is growing on effective mental health interventions delivered in low-resource settings by non-mental health professionals; however, such interventions have yet to be adapted and evaluated for survivors of sex and labor trafficking. HaRT (Healing and Resilience after Trauma) is a trauma-informed, survivor-centered, twelve-week group intervention that includes breathwork, yoga poses, guided meditations, and group discussions (Namy et al. 2021). Sessions are led by trained paraprofessionals and delivered in groups to enhance social support and trust building. In an initial pilot in a shelter-based setting in Uganda, HaRT showed promising outcomes in reducing post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety among female-identifying survivors (Carlson et al., forthcoming). HaRT has since been culturally and contextually adapted for community-based settings in Cebu, Philippines. This pilot will employ a mixed-method design to assess the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary effectiveness of implementing and rigorously evaluating the HaRT intervention in this new country context. A follow-on randomized evaluation could provide evidence to inform anti-trafficking reintegration support policies and programming to improve mental wellbeing of survivors in low-resource settings.

Effectiveness of Targeted Counter-Trafficking Community-Based Awareness Campaigns in Guatemala

Researchers: Lauren Pinson, Catlan Reardon
Country: Guatemala
Type of Project: Travel/Exploratory Grant

Existing studies show mixed long-term impacts from human trafficking awareness campaigns. While some studies indicated that these campaigns lead to short-term changes in behavior, most are unable to demonstrate a measurable and meaningful reduction in the prevalence of human trafficking (HTRI 2021). However, emerging scholarship appears to indicate that community-driven campaigns targeted within specific populations can be effective at preventing human trafficking. Researchers will travel to Guatemala to assess existing community-led counter-trafficking interventions, such as those that engage volunteer community facilitators to lead anti-trafficking education and awareness-raising activities. They will examine these programs' ability to alter community members' perception of human trafficking as a local issue; reduce relative deprivation; and affect risk-seeking behaviors linked to trafficking vulnerability. Researchers aim to build and cement a research partnership with at least one implementing organization working with highly vulnerable populations in Guatemala and assess the feasibility of designing a large-scale randomized evaluation.

Information, Social Networks, and Safety: Reducing Exposure to Human Trafficking in Mexico

Researchers: Antonella Bandiera, Fernanda Sobrino, Ignacio Rodriguez Hurtado
Country: Mexico
Partners: IPA Mexico, Duke University, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), University of Chicago
Type of Project: Pilot Research Project

Migrants are highly susceptible to human trafficking, especially while transiting through border crossings, illegal migration routes, and refugee camps (IOM 2019). In Mexico, all these risk factors are present and further exacerbated by the combination of unprecedented migration flows, government harassment, and violent criminal organizations (Castañeda 2021; Human Rights First 2021; Infobae 2020). This study evaluates whether targeted information dissemination through mobile applications and connections with social networks can reduce migrants' vulnerability to human trafficking during their journey through Mexico. Researchers will bundle two different interventions to assess their feasibility ahead of a full-scale randomized evaluation. The first intervention encourages migrants to use existing mobile applications that offer information on legal resources and the location of shelters. The second intervention sets up social networks that provide targeted information - for example, strategies to avoid criminal groups, or information on which route is safest - to reduce human trafficking risk. For ethical reasons, all migrants are informed about the mobile apps.

Challenges Faced by Children of Individuals Engaged in Commercial Sex

Researchers: Stephanie Bonds, Muhammad Zia Mehmood, Edward Miguel, Caroline Kemunto
Country: Kenya
Partners: University of California, Berkeley
Type of Project: Travel/Exploratory Grant; Pilot Research Project

Existing literature suggests that children of individuals engaged in commercial sex have a heightened likelihood of becoming a victim of sex trafficking due to proximity to the commercial sex industry from an early age (Fedina et al. 2016; Kennedy and Pucci 2007; Polaris Project 2015). However, there is little, if any evidence on the challenges these children face that could increase their vulnerability to sex trafficking, and what interventions can effectively address these changes. The researchers aim to address these gaps by providing evidence on the challenges faced by this vulnerable population and ultimately implementing a randomized evaluation with children of women engaged in commercial sex in western Kenya.

Working closely with a local organization that provides support services to individuals

engaged in commercial sex, researchers will conduct an exploratory pilot study to better understand what challenges these children face. They plan to then use these findings to test the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving outcomes for these children, including physical and mental health, educational effort and outcomes, career aspirations, and engagement in commercial sex. The pilot will seek to inform the design of a large-scale randomized evaluation of the primary behavior change/mental health intervention.

Understanding the Impact of Offering Loans on Labor Trafficking

Researchers: Manisha Shah
Country: India
Partners: Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), Sattva Consulting, LabourNet, Kois, Gromor Finance, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
Type of Project: Partial Funding, Randomized Control Trial

Construction is India's second largest source of employment. It is also one of the highest risk industries for forced labor. About a third (30 million) of India's internal migrants are employed in construction (Deshingkar and Akter 2009). Nonprofit organizations estimate that 3-5 million of these migrants are victims of forced labor every year. In the sector, the responsibility for ethical business practices often falls on independent and informal contractors, who are usually subcontracted by larger construction companies. These micro-contractors (MCs) accept subcontracts from larger construction firms and then provide limited-term jobs to small crews of construction workers. When a worker experiences exploitation on a construction site, it is likely because of decisions made by MCs. Complicating matters, MCs are often workers themselves and face many of the same economic pressures. Researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of providing low-cost loans to construction MCs, testing the extent to which forced labor may be motivated by MCs' own economic insecurity and credit constraints. These microloans are offered at lower interest rates than unsecured loans typically offered by formal or informal lenders and are part of a larger suite of interventions offered by GFEMS, Sattva Consulting, LabourNet, and Kois, which includes ethical entrepreneurship training, access to work orders, and ethical recruitment of workers. IPA will support the costs of the final survey, which will be completed in early 2023.

Irregular migration, trafficking, and misinformation in Nigeria

Researchers: Alexandra Scacco, Bernd Beber, Macartan Humphreys, Pheliciah Mwachofi, Dean Yang
Country: Nigeria
Partners: IPA Nigeria
Type of Project: Partial Funding, Randomized Control Trial

Irregular migration and human trafficking have reached crisis proportions in many fragile states. Yet we lack answers to basic questions about how individuals weigh the risks and benefits of migration, and whether exposure to stressors and information on the dangers posed by traffickers along specific migration corridors, such as the Mediterranean route from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, shape potential migrants' decision-making processes. These answers matter for migration-related programs and policies: Do information campaigns highlighting risks change people's decisions to migrate? Does information about economic opportunities at home affect these decisions? Where and how is information most effectively transmitted? The study's researchers have been exploring these questions through a randomized evaluation that assesses the impact of door-to-door campaigns on migration-related beliefs, interest in attempting the migration journey and actual migration attempts. The information campaign has been delivered to treatment households in Nigeria's Edo and Delta states via an in-person script, a video message with testimonials from returnees, and a motivated reasoning exercise. Funding from HTRI will support in-person endline interviews with 3,200 individuals and dissemination of the human trafficking-related findings of the study.

Protecting Against Exploitation for Asylum and Refugees: The Impact of Information Provision in Greece

Researchers: Alexandra Hartman, Dominik Hangartner, Marine Casalis
Country: Greece (working with displacement-affected populations from various countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo)
Partners: University College London (UCL), ETH Zurich - Immigration Policy Lab (IPL), International Rescue Committee (IRC) Hellas/Greece, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Greece
Type of Project: Full Randomized Control Trial

People who flee their place of habitual residence are at high risk of human trafficking and abuse, particularly while they seek legal status in their country of asylum (ICMPD 2018). There are currently 95,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, where traffickers conduct transit and in-country operations (A21 2020). How does raising awareness about access to services and information reduce refugees' and asylum seekers' vulnerability to exploitation? What factors shape whether improving access to information can reduce vulnerability? Researchers will study the nexus between forcible displacement and trafficking in Greece by evaluating the impact of a two-way information counseling program on reducing trafficking risk. This study, which is building off an ongoing collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Greece, will establish a representative sample of 3,000 forced migrants residing in Greece to identify the relationship between legal status and trafficking and exploitation. The research team will randomly evaluate the effects of providing one-way, static information via a website link compared with providing two-way information counseling, where participants can ask questions and receive guidance from partners of International Rescue Committee (IRC) Hellas via social media and mobile

messaging apps. Results from this analysis will have wide implications for determining optimal and cost-efficient mechanisms to provide information to support and protect vulnerable and mobile populations.

Evaluating the Effects of the Crescer Sem Violência (Growing Up Without Violence) Curricula in Tackling Commercial Child Sexual Exploitation of Children

Researchers: Ligia Kiss, Elizabeth Anderson, Yuki Lo, Ana Paula Portella, Marina Barros, and Dario Brito
Country: Brazil
Partners: The Freedom Fund, University College London (UCL), Catholic University of Pernambuco (UNICAP), Canal Futura, Municipal Government of Cabo de Santo Agostinho
Type of project: Full Randomized Control Trial

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is an enormous problem in Brazil, compounded by rising income inequality and gender issues. Government and civil society coordination are often lacking, and social norms contribute to a low-level tolerance of sexual exploitation of minors. Since 2008, the TV network Canal Futura has been operating the Crescer Sem Violência (CSV, or Growing Up Without Violence) multimedia curricula to improve children's and frontline professionals' knowledge, skills, and behaviors to reduce children's exposure to CSEC. The curriculum centers on three television series that introduce concepts such as sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation, safe approaches for online dating, signs of online grooming, and self-protection to children in Brazil. The CSV materials have already been implemented in over 4,300 schools throughout Brazil but the intervention has never undergone a rigorous evaluation. This research project will randomly assign schools to receive CSV as it expands to the municipality of Cabo de Santo Agostinho, part of the Recife Metropolitan Area, where rates of sex workers who entered the sex industry below age 18 are estimated to be the highest in Brazil (Bragaet et al. 2020). The results of the research will be used to inform the Freedom Fund, Canal Futura, and other project partners as to changes needed in the curriculum and methodology and to inform the potential for scale-up of the CSV curricula in other parts of Brazil. It will also serve as the first randomized evaluation to take place of a school-based sex trafficking prevention education program.

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices on Trafficking in Persons in Haiti

Researchers: Nicola Pocock, Carl Stephan St-Louis, Chris Cuthbert
Country: Haiti
Partners: Lumos Foundation & London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
Type of Project: Existing Data Analysis / Project Idea Building / Literature Review

Internal and cross-border trafficking of people in Haiti remains an important challenge, with an estimated 59,000 Haitians living in situations of modern slavery. Children are regularly

trafficked to residential institutions as well as for child domestic servitude (CDS), a socially normative practice known as restavek. Researchers will analyze previously gathered project survey data and conduct interviews with the general population, vulnerable families, and police officers and judges to understand practices around child domestic servitude. The research team will examine the attitudes and practices of people who place children in residential institutions, place children in child domestic work, or employ child domestic workers in their homes. The findings from this research will be used to provide conceptually-grounded insights to inform an anti-trafficking Behaviour Change Campaign scheduled to take place in late 2021 through mid-2022.

Trafficking Prevention Research Development

Project Coordinators: Veerawit Tianchainan, Lucy McCray
Country: Thailand
Partner: The Freedom Story
Type of Project: Travel/ Exploratory Grant

The Freedom Story has been working to prevent child trafficking in Northern Thailand for 13 years, with projects in Chiang Rai and Nan provinces in Thailand, both rural trafficking hotspots with high rates of poverty, low levels of education, and social isolation (including issues such as family breakdown, child abuse, and statelessness). The goal of this grant is to identify and develop relationships with researchers who can support the development of studies, impact evaluations, or other rigorous research designs to measure the impact of The Freedom Story's programs and help them replicate and scale their programs in new locations and with new populations. These efforts will build on annual surveys implemented for the past three years by The Freedom Story to monitor knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to trafficking and the risk of trafficking among the organization's target populations.

A Community-led Livelihood Intervention to Overcome Human Sex Trafficking in India

Researchers: Meredith Dank, Sheldon Zhang
Country: India
Partners: Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices
Type of Project: Travel/Exploratory Grant

Almost 20 percent of victims of human trafficking globally are sexually exploited (ILO and Walk Free Foundation 2017). In India's sex industry, many young women and girls come from impoverished, low-caste communities, including Nomadic, Semi-Nomadic, and Denotified tribes. They can be often trafficked at a young age, making it difficult for them to choose to leave the sex industry and find different livelihood options. The Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices, a social development organization based in India, has enrolled young

women into an intervention program to build their skills and confidence, promote agency and decision making, and provide them with educational and skills-building opportunities to expand their choices of livelihood options. Researchers are collaborating with the Praxis Institute to explore and design a rigorous randomized evaluation to measure the effectiveness of the Institute's interventions.

Using Social Media to Provide Information and Support for Migrant Workers about Illegal Recruitment Practices in Hong Kong and the Philippines

Researcher: Lucy Jordan
Country: Hong Kong, the Philippines
Partners: Migrasia Global Solutions
Type of Project: Pilot Research Project

Migration intermediaries play a legitimate role in the efficient matching of labor supply and demand across borders. However, exploitation and forced labor can occur when unethical intermediaries, such as employment agencies, training centers, and medical clinics take advantage of information asymmetries to charge exorbitant fees to migrant workers for their services, who often take on substantial debt and risks to finance recruitment related costs. Migrasia, a think tank devoted to migration in Asia, has used social media to overcome information barriers and improve the identification, protection, and empowerment of migrant workers and increase accountability of malicious recruitment agencies and other migration intermediaries. Building on past research that indicates that social media can be useful in spreading awareness where information barriers exist (Özdemir 2012), researchers are assessing the feasibility and suitability of conducting a randomized evaluation to determine the effectiveness of Migrasia's social media campaigns in reducing the incidence of migrant worker exploitation. The campaigns aim to prevent workers from being overcharged on recruitment fees and related costs and provide support and access to redress for those who have been financially exploited by recruitment agencies and other intermediaries across Asia, with a focus on the Hong Kong-Philippines migration corridor.