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Human Trafficking Prevention: Improving Interventions to Combat Forced Labor and Human Trafficking

LESSONS FROM RIGOROUS EVIDENCE

Introduction

Efforts to prevent human trafficking and protect exploited persons have disproportionately focused on increasing public awareness about human trafficking. Prevention interventions are among the most popular and well-funded anti-trafficking interventions globally, though there has been limited research to date about their impact. The few impact evaluations that have been conducted have demonstrated that how awareness-raising campaigns are designed is critical, as poorly designed campaigns could have undesirable unintended effects. Well-designed awareness campaigns, however, can improve knowledge with regard to people's rights and entitlements, as well as available resources and services. With that said, a few studies have shown that even well-designed campaigns can have limited effects on highly vulnerable communities, as awareness-raising is often an insufficient alternative for tackling the intricate challenges associated with addressing the economic, political-legal, and socio-cultural foundations of exploitation.

In this evidence brief, the Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) has compiled rigorous evidence¹ from 10 pilot and full impact evaluation studies on prevention interventions and their impact on knowledge, behaviors, and practices related to human trafficking. Due to the limited number of existing studies to date that focus specifically on preventing human trafficking, this evidence brief includes more information related to adult migration and topics that are trafficking-adjacent, such as unsafe or irregular migration, than findings from studies on prevention of labor and sex trafficking. While migration is often voluntary and can have a positive impact on individuals and societies, irregular migration² increases the risk of human rights violations and human trafficking (IOM, 2023). The findings from these studies—as well as emerging themes, trends, and evidence gaps—contributed to a set of research questions, available here. It is important to note that trafficking can take many forms and impact all genders and age groups. Further research across the spectrum is needed to build the evidence base around trafficking prevention. HTRI is providing research funding for academics, researchers, donors, and policymakers to pursue and support further research around these topics.

¹Please find a description of the methodology at the end of this document.

²Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit, or destination.

Key lessons from existing research

1. **Information and awareness-raising campaigns** may improve knowledge but have limited effects on changing unsafe migration practices or reducing vulnerability to human trafficking. Additionally, campaigns may be more effective in raising awareness when they utilize "empowering" narratives – i.e., narratives that underscore the steps individuals need to take to avoid negative outcomes.
2. **Interactive, personalized information provision and counseling for migrants** may be more effective than short pre-migration or pre-departure training in increasing knowledge and reducing unsafe migration intentions and trafficking, but more rigorous research is needed.
3. **Fair recruitment practices and targeted information provision for both employers and employees** may improve labor conditions for migrant workers and reduce exploitation in destination countries.
4. **Increasing the availability of information on worker conditions in factories** may lead to improvements in labor conditions and worker rights and reduce vulnerability to trafficking.
5. **Coupling improved information with the provision of alternatives to unsafe migration** (such as cash transfer) may be more effective than information provision alone in reducing unsafe migration practices and vulnerability to trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

Human Trafficking Prevention: Lessons From Rigorous Evidence

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In this evidence brief, the Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) has compiled rigorous evidence from 19 pilot and full-impact evaluation studies on prevention interventions and their impacts on knowledge, behaviors, and practices related to human trafficking. Due to the limited number of existing studies to date that focus specifically on preventing human trafficking, this evidence brief includes more information related to adult migration and topics that are trafficking-adjacent, such as unsafe or irregular migration, than findings from studies on the prevention of labor and sex trafficking. While migration is often voluntary and can have a positive impact on individuals and societies, irregular migration increases the risk of human rights violations and human trafficking (IOM, [2019](#)). The findings from these studies—as well as emerging themes, trends, and evidence gaps—contributed to a set of research questions, available [here](#). It is important to note that trafficking can take many forms and impact all genders and age groups. Further research across the spectrum is needed to build the evidence base around trafficking prevention. HTRI is providing research funding for academics, researchers, donors, and policymakers to pursue and support further research around these topics.