Human Trafficking Research and Learning Agenda

Acknowledgments

Disclaimer

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I. Introduction

What is the Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI)?

The Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) was initiated in 2020 as a collaboration between Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and the Program to End Modern Slavery (PEMS) of the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office). This initiative aims to strengthen the evidence around what works to reduce human trafficking, examine the main drivers of human trafficking and identify the most effective methods to combat it. HTRI utilizes and builds on IPA's expertise in designing and running randomized evaluations to measure the effectiveness of programs and policies, which allows researchers to isolate the effects of a program from other factors.

The initiative provides research funding for pilot research projects, data analysis, exploratory studies, and randomized control trials (RCTs)[1] that focus on combating human trafficking. Further, HTRI engages in other dissemination, training and policy support activities to exchange information about the evidence surrounding effective counter-trafficking interventions and to generate contextual knowledge about how, why, and when anti-trafficking efforts are effective.

What is the HTRI Research and Learning Agenda?

The HTRI Research and Learning Agenda is the Initiative's guiding document that outlines priority research gaps and questions to be addressed through funding new and promising research. This agenda is intended to guide the project's research and policy efforts by:

- Identifying critical evidence gaps hindering the success of international anti-human trafficking initiatives;

- Providing information and evidence to guide the prioritization and selection of grants funded under HTRI's Competitive Research Fund; and

- Shaping donor and policymakers' funding priorities and policy agendas through new evidence and data gathered from HTRI-funded research.

To set the agenda, the HTRI team conducted a literature review and a consultation process with leading policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. The objective was to identify inefficiencies and critical evidence gaps that hinder the success of international anti-trafficking initiatives. The result is five priority research questions organized around the "4Ps" framework for combating human trafficking:

Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership. Answering these questions has the potential to help develop interventions to either prevent human trafficking, support victims of human trafficking, or prosecute the crime. For each of the five questions, HTRI identified several sub-questions of interest, and proposed research and learning activities—as well as research methods—for each sub-question.

What is the HTRI Competitive Research Fund?

HTRI's Competitive Research Fund provides funding for pilot research projects, data analysis, exploratory studies, and RCTs that focus on combating contemporary forms of slavery. To generate a more expansive pool of high-quality research proposals focused on human trafficking, HTRI will finance projects that are aligned with the priority research questions and working analytical framework presented in this document. HTRI provides funding under two buckets: seed grant funding (early-stage activities to develop partnerships, carry out exploratory research, pilot research protocols, and demonstrate the feasibility of larger-scale studies evaluating the effectiveness of current or planned counter-trafficking interventions) and partial/full research project funding (specifically, randomized evaluations that isolate the effects of a counter-trafficking program from other factors). HTRI-funded research primarily takes place in lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs), but in some cases may occur in high-income countries where the intervention serves individuals from lower- and middle-income countries. HTRI will pay special attention to anti-trafficking work that benefits the people of countries where PEMS has current and future investments.[2]

Competitive fund applications are regularly solicited through HTRI's website and considered by a selection committee comprised of a rotating panel of human trafficking and impact evaluation experts (academics, policymakers, practitioners, people with lived experiences of trafficking, and other stakeholders). Applications are selected for funding based on their responsiveness to the evaluation criteria, including relevance to HTRI priorities, project viability, academic contribution, policy relevance, value for money, and relevant experience of the research team. Lessons from these research findings will be disseminated to key policymakers as well as practitioners at all levels to promote improved practices among a wide variety of anti-trafficking initiatives.

How will research projects funded by HTRI contribute to the human trafficking evidence base?

As research findings emerge, HTRI will engage in communities of practice, webinars, conferences, and other information platforms and venues to share

new information and evidence, as well as build contextual knowledge of how HTRI-funded research efforts worked (or did not work) and why. Specific opportunities for engaging the human trafficking community include:

- Convening and leading conferences and meetings with projects and groups working under a similar evidence-based, research-focused mandate

- Participate and present at quarterly meetings of the Monitoring and Evaluation of Trafficking in Persons (METIP) Community of Practice

- Participate in quarterly meetings with PEMS implementing organizations, under the leadership of the Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, and other relevant USG efforts, as appropriate

- Participate and present at targeted human-trafficking focused conferences and forums

- Provide input into USG anti-trafficking products and initiatives

- Participate in academic and global efforts to improve evidence-based practices in combating human trafficking

- Promote survivor-led and -informed research projects and evaluation practices

- Develop podcasts, white papers, and/or short, targeted presentations for policymakers and implementing organizations highlighting relevant evidence from human trafficking-adjacent fields, to inform the development of new human trafficking-focused projects

- Inform and refer donors, policymakers, and implementing organizations to external organizations and internal teams at Innovations for Poverty Action

II. Background

Worldwide, more than 25 million victims of human trafficking are enslaved for the commercial gain of others (ILO and Walk Free Foundation, 2017). This pervasive violation of basic human rights has led to a widespread movement of governments pledging to end modern slavery as one of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and to adopt the United Nations (UN) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (known widely as the Palermo Protocol). However, despite the gravity and prevalence of human trafficking, there is a notable lack of evidence on which programs work to reduce trafficking and support victims. By its illicit and clandestine nature, human trafficking is a difficult topic to study.

Victims and perpetrators are not easily identified. Often, trafficking victims do not identify as having been trafficked, and perpetrators of trafficking do not necessarily see themselves as traffickers given definitional confusion or lack of familiarity with the term. Public misconceptions regarding human trafficking also abound. Moreover, measuring the prevalence of human trafficking, vulnerability to human trafficking, and the antecedents of human trafficking is not straightforward given the sensitive and varied nature of the crime.

Due, in part, to the inherent difficulties in studying the topic, developing large-scale studies that strengthen the evidence base on counter-trafficking have been particularly challenging. These challenges include:

- Variations and disagreements in measurement of trafficking activities, including assessing how to accurately determine whether someone is a victim or perpetrator in an ethical, trauma-informed, and cost-effective manner

- Tensions between prevailing local cultural and social norms (for example, with respect to child labor) and the international community's definition of TIP, which can reduce local cooperation in both implementation and data collection

- A large body of gray literature that provides interesting context on various interventions and has rich monitoring and evaluation data but lacks peer-reviewed, rigorous studies to assess intervention effectiveness, and may promote misinformation and practices that are not survivor- and/or trauma-informed

- Tendency to implement small-scale programs (e.g., capacity building of anti-trafficking units within the justice sector, shelter service provision for small numbers of trafficking survivors) that, while important, do not lend themselves easily to rigorous impact assessment due to their small sample size

- Proclivity of new entrants in the anti-trafficking space to fund lower-cost/low-barrier but unproven interventions (e.g., awareness campaigns with untested messaging)

- Interventions that do not lend themselves well to a large-scale evaluation that is both rigorous and ethical, such as those implemented in high-risk environments or where there are concerns with withholding or delaying the intervention for the purposes of carrying out a RCT.

- Limited monitoring and evaluation/research funding built into large donor-funded anti-trafficking programs

- Widespread external validity concerns across countries and type of exploitation (i.e., challenges with applicability of promising interventions found in one context in other disparate contexts)

- Lack of survivor engagement in research and evaluation (survivors have largely been accepted into victim service provision but lack representation in researching and evaluating best practices and are rarely engaged in the development of—or funding decisions around—priority research questions)

III. Trajectory of Human Trafficking Research

Research on human trafficking began in earnest in the 1990s with a focus on sex trafficking of women and girls, especially from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. The adoption of the 2000 Palermo Protocol (UN General Assembly, Resolution 55/25 2000) established the first global definition of human trafficking, though counter-trafficking interventions and research continued to focus on sex trafficking into the 2000s despite the fact that the Palermo Protocol notes exploitation should not be limited to "the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation" and makes no mention of gender.

This focus began shifting in the late 2000s, with the concept of human tracking growing to encompass a broader picture of subversion that was more neutral with respect to gender and type of exploitation (Bonilla and Mo 2019). Counter-trafficking actors began to increasingly acknowledge the large scale of trafficking and abuse of migrant workers (both male and female), especially in and from South and Southeast Asia, while the number of organizations working on human trafficking began to increase. Human trafficking research also began to grow, with an initial focus on crossover research from public health.

In the 2010s, research focused on human trafficking moved towards analyzing counter-trafficking programming for labor trafficking and migrant workers with the development and implementation of large programs funded by a variety of donors, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Department of State, Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid), Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO/UKaid), international organizations, such United Nations Actions for Cooperation Against Human Trafficking (UN-ACT), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), and others. The number of both small and large organizations focusing their work explicitly on human trafficking also grew significantly in the 2010s.

In the latter part of the decade, the body of research on human trafficking shifted again as donor governments began to pass major human trafficking acts and placed a stronger emphasis on monitoring and evaluation and research of human trafficking interventions. Donors also began to incorporate a focus on systemic approaches that engaged the private sector and demanded more robust research around intervention effectiveness and prevalence estimates. In the U.S., this effort was most notable in the Congressional authorization and funding of the 2017 Program to End Modern Slavery (PEMS), which is unique in its focus on measuring the reduction of the prevalence of human trafficking as part of its program funding. This increased emphasis on research, measurement, and public-private funding was also reflected in the establishment of two new international NGOs, the Freedom Fund (founded in 2013 by Humanity United, the Legatum Foundation, and the Walk Free Foundation) and the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) (founded in 2015). In the academic sphere, the *Anti-Trafficking Review* —a biannual open access, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the issue of human trafficking—was established by the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW) in 2011, while the first issue of the quarterly *Journal of Human Trafficking* was published in 2015.

In the 2020s, implementing organizations and policymakers have a large body of (largely qualitative) research to reference when designing programs to combat human trafficking. The U.S. government is currently funding more than 100 trafficking-focused projects—implemented primarily by international/ UN agencies as well as national and international NGOs—with varying degrees of monitoring, evaluation, and research data and analysis available to researchers and practitioners. USAID's Center of Excellence for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) has funded a variety of research efforts on TIP, including RCTs and vulnerability mapping in Asia, datasets of minors trafficked into the U.S. from Latin America, and desk studies in Colombia, Libya, Mali, and South Africa. PEMS has also bolstered scholarship in this space, with funding provided to GFEMS, the Freedom Fund, the Warnath Group, the University of Georgia, and others to conduct prevalence and vulnerability studies in a variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, domestic servitude in Ethiopia; labor trafficking of Vietnamese, Ugandan, and Kenyan migrant workers: forced labor within the construction sector in India; commercial sexual exploitation of children in Kenya and Uganda; bonded labor in Pakistan; child domestic workers in Morocco; and the trafficking of overseas Filipino workers.

Global counter-trafficking programs are also increasingly incorporating technological interventions (e.g., worker voice apps, satellite technology to identify forced labor camps and mines, remote connectivity on fishing vessels) to compile and analyze data that will be used to combat abuse and trafficking of both domestic and migrant workers (see **Box 1**). While causal research on the effectiveness of these types of interventions is still nascent, the National Science Foundation is funding a series of research projects under the Disrupting Operations of Illicit Supply Networks (D-ISN) to improve understanding of the operations of illicit supply networks and strengthen the ability to detect, disrupt, and dismantle them.

In recent years, donor calls for experimental, rigorous data on human trafficking interventions have increased, though the added demand for experimental and quantitative work has not always been accompanied by higher levels of funding needed for this work. As a result, most human trafficking research continues to focus on descriptive and ethnographic studies that, while important, may suffer from limited generalizability and ability to establish causal relations. Despite large-scale collaborative efforts by IOM and others, the field also continues to be challenged by a lack of comprehensive, publicly available, high-quality datasets that can be used to measure the scope of trafficking as well as interventions designed to combat trafficking. Efforts are currently underway by IOM, ILO, and UNODC to establish and synchronize global indicators on human trafficking. If successful, the establishment and adoption of the International Classification Standard of Human Trafficking Data Collection and Statistical Reporting (ICSHT) will facilitate the gathering and production of high-quality administrative data that can be aggregated for sharing and reporting at the national and international levels.

IV. HTRI Research Review

In the first half of 2021, HTRI conducted a rapid review of existing research to examine the state of empirical literature across methods (qualitative and quantitative, see **Annex 1**) and identify promising areas of human trafficking programming for potential RCTs. This was not a formal literature review, but instead prioritized searching for experimental elements of research in human trafficking, followed by compiling a list of strong descriptive research and research on interventions likely to impact trafficking. HTRI searched relevant open source and academic databases and consulted with global experts to ensure that relevant publications—particularly those with a focus on rigorous quantitative research methods—were not omitted from the review.

This top-level review of academic literature and trusted sources for causational research (e.g., the

World Bank Group) revealed a lack of randomized control trials and impact evaluations with counterfactual components. This is true for both the global north and the global south, although the global north has a small amount of emerging research around how healthcare providers can better identify and intervene in cases of human trafficking (Grace et al. 2014). Below we describe the main types of research outputs, their main contributions, and their limitations.

Box 1: Technology Partnerships, Research, and Interventions to Combat Human Trafficking

Governments, civil society groups, and universities have increasingly partnered with private sector actors to harness technological interventions to combat trafficking. Some examples of civil society and for-profit organizations working in this space include Verité, which uses online platforms to facilitate ethical recruiting practices; Ulula, which leverages global connectivity to promote transparency; ELEVATE, which has created supply chain traceability tools; BanQu, which uses financial technology to identify and prosecute traffickers; Migrasia, which leverages machine learning in social media to connect vulnerable individuals to resources; Marinus Analytics, whose Traffic Jam Artificial Intelligence tool aids in law enforcement investigations; and Issara Institute, which connects migrant communities to generate and disseminate online ethical recruitment feedback.

There are also several promising consortiums emerging around technology. GFEMS, ELEVATE, Diginex Solutions, and Winrock International are piloting a cell phone app in Bangladesh that uses mobile and other forms of technology to provide up-to-date and interactive information, services, and content to prospective migrants, while MarsPetcare has partnered with Diginex and Winrock to pilot connectivity at sea for Southeast Asian migrants working on Thai fishing boats. On a larger scale, the San Francisco, California Bay Area-based group Tech Against Trafficking, a consortium of technology companies, hosts an Accelerator Program to identify promising uses of technology in the field, harnessing the expertise and resources of member companies to advance and scale the work of organizations deploying technology that assists victims, law enforcement, business, and civil society.

PHOTO: ANA GARCIA HERNANDEZ

Evidence Reviews

A number of evidence reviews of human trafficking have been published in the past five to ten years. In line with HTRI's mission, all of these reports conclude that there continues to be a dearth of rigorous research in this field.[3] Three of these evidence reviews particularly stand out: "Combatting Human Trafficking Since Palermo" (Bryant and Landman 2020) is excellent at parsing out the practical value of different types of research; the Body of Knowledge compiled by the Winrock-implemented Attaining Lasting Change for Better Enforcement of Labor and Criminal Law to Address Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking (ATLAS) project (Winrock International 2020a) provides a comprehensive review of law enforcement and civil society coordination efforts focused on human trafficking, forced labor, and child labor; and "Helping Survivors of Human Trafficking" (Dell et al. 2019) sifts through a mountain of programmatic publications to bring forward scant—but promising—data around the effects of mental health programs on commercially sexually exploited children and young adults. The Rights Lab at the University of Nottingham also compiled a review of the evidence on policy and interventions to combat modern slavery (human trafficking, forced labor, and child labor) specifically in the context of markets (economic policy, trade policy, financial policy, development policy, and supply chains) (Lerigo-Stephens et al. 2021).

Organizations have also put together various "evidence maps" of existing information in human trafficking, typically with a focus on theory- or operations-based best practices. For example, in 2018 the Institute of Development Studies published "Modern Slavery Prevention and Responses in South Asia: An Evidence Map," which addresses gaps in evidence specifically in the South Asian countries of India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, including interventions and outcomes for specific target populations (survivors, employers, landlords, services providers, criminal justice officials) and at different levels (individual, community, state) (Oosterhoff et al. 2018). The ILO and IOM (2022a) also recently released global evidence gap maps (EGM) that identify areas of improvement and promise in research focused on forced labor and child labor, as described in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.7.[4] The EGM is intended to identify what is known on child labor and forced labor, while consultations with policymakers, donors and an international advisory board will focus on identifying what should be known.

Descriptive and Qualitative Research

The evidence reviews noted above mostly draw on a large body of descriptive literature on human trafficking. This literature spans a wide variety of subsets within human trafficking research (anthropology, criminology, economics, law, political science, public health, social work, and sociology) and provides in-depth information on specific forms of trafficking in country, state, and community-level contexts. This qualitative work is vital to contributing to our understanding of human trafficking on several fronts; for example, ethnographic studies on human trafficking have provided rich information describing the lived experience of victims. The findings from research related to specific contexts and types of trafficking can be very instructive for organizations working to combat trafficking in those same conditions and contexts, but the small scale and localized focus can make it difficult to apply and replicate the findings of the research to other contexts. In addition, much of the research to date has been conducted in high-income countries, but most of the donor-funded programming to combat trafficking is in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), exposing a gap between research and practice. Further work can be undertaken to improve accessibility of research funding opportunities for both LMIC researchers and people with lived experience (see **Box 2**), such as by considering the various unconventional funding models of LMIC research institutions and providing training and technical assistance around rigorous research methods. Moving forward, more efforts are needed to link the existing body of descriptive and qualitative research to the design of impact evaluations and other quantitative research study designs.

Guides for Human Trafficking Practitioners and Researchers

Several useful guides, toolkits, and manuals have been developed in recent years to guide practitioners and researchers through standard operating procedures and ethical practices in researching and serving survivors of trafficking. These include IOM's (2019) "Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse" and associated guidance documents on referral mechanisms and response planning; NEXUS Institute's (2020) Practitioner Guide Series on Victim Protection for frontline/implementing organizations; Stanford University's Center for Human Rights and International Justice's series on Getting to Good Human Trafficking Data (Brunner 2018) and the Winrock International-implemented USAID Asia CTIP project's Indikit platform (Winrock International, n.d.), both of which aim to improve human trafficking data collection and M&E practices; International

Justice Mission's (n.d.) Assessment of Survivor Outcomes Validation Study (ASO Tool) to measure survivor outcomes; and HEAL Trafficking (2017) and Hope for Justice's "Protocol Toolkit for Developing a Response to Victims of Human Trafficking in Health Care Settings." To date, however, the impact of these guidelines and resources on outcomes for survivors and trafficking prevalence (and on the operations of counter-trafficking organizations) has yet to be assessed in peer-reviewed publications or other research platforms.

Box 2: Survivor Leadership and Engagement in Trafficking Research

In the past five years, there has been an emerging consensus that interventions and research on human trafficking that do not incorporate the knowledge and perspective of people with lived experience of trafficking are necessarily incomplete and can inadvertently cause harm to the same people they intend to help. The Survivor Alliance is at the forefront of efforts to put survivors at the center of research and programs intended to address human trafficking in the U.S. and around the world. At the federal level, the U.S. Department of State established the U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking in 2015 to provide a formal platform for trafficking survivors to advise and make recommendations on federal anti-trafficking policies. In the UK, the Modern Slavery Policy Evidence Centre is in the process of setting up a Lived Experience Advisory Panel and Working Group of Survivor-Engaged Organizations.

The Victim Case Management System (VCMS) effort, led by international NGO Liberty Shared and funded in part by the Office to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking at the U.S. Department of State, also released a report (Liberty Shared, 2021) that uses analysis of survivor data collected through case management records to guide practitioners and researchers on how they can use case management information to inform counter-trafficking programs, as well as the inherent limitations and biases embedded in this data. Engaging research teams that include people with lived experience of human trafficking—and using data that are directly informed by survivors' trafficking and recovery experiences—can help strengthen the efficacy and impact of programs intended to support people who have experienced trafficking.

Prevalence Measurement

PEMS is actively working to address the gap in funding for research on trafficking prevalence with funding provided to the Prevalence Reduction Innovation Forum (PRIF) and prevalence measurement incorporated into the rest of its $125 million total programming to test innovative methods of study and develop standardized measures of human trafficking (TIP Office et al. 2020; U.S. Department of State 2022a).[5] Additionally, in the global north, the RAFT (Rapid Appraisal for Trafficking) (Chisolm-Straker et al. 2020) project has a team of psychometricians examining measuring trafficking in the healthcare context, while RTI International has produced a review of promising methods for estimating human trafficking prevalence in the U.S. and is field-testing at least two methods of prevalence estimation within one U.S. industry and one U.S. geographic location (an effort funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and in collaboration with PRIF) (Barrick and Pfeffer 2021). HTRI welcomes this development, as better measurement of prevalence is a first order concern for measuring the efficacy of anti-trafficking programs.

Human Trafficking-Adjacent Research

While there are limited causational studies focused explicitly on human trafficking, there is a wealth of "trafficking-adjacent" studies that human trafficking practitioners, researchers, and policymakers can use to identify evidence-based practices. Some promising examples of relevant research include studies focused on minimizing unsafe migration (Barham and Kuhn 2014), improving the mental health outcomes of conflict-affected youth (Betancourt et al. 2014; O'Callaghan et al. 2013; Ertl et al. 2011), modifying the curriculum at schools for adolescent girls to engender stronger life skills (Edmonds, Feigenberg and Leight 2021), combining cash transfers with transfers of productive assets through the ultra-poor Graduation Approach (Banerjee et al. 2015), understanding the impacts of the illicit mining sector (Parker, Foltz and Elsea 2016), promoting mobile bank account savings to reduce shock-coping transactional sex (Jones and Gong 2021), and understanding the role that large-scale private sector involvement can play on rural livelihoods (Simon 2012). The experimental data around child labor are particularly robust, with many findings suggesting promising solutions (Dammert et al. 2018). However, literature on social protection and child labor specifically shows mixed results: many cash transfer programs reduce child labor (de Hoop and Furio 2014) (parents invest in schooling) (Cardoso and Portela Souza 2004), but others increase it slightly (children work at household enterprises) (de Hoop et al. 2019).

This human trafficking-adjacent research includes encouraging solutions and interventions that have already been tested, but because they are not labeled as human trafficking or modern slavery interventions, they are largely unknown to the human trafficking implementation and research community. HTRI will highlight evidence-based practices that intersect with interventions common in human trafficking-focused programs (e.g., women's empowerment initiatives, referral mechanisms, economic development, financial inclusion, and social protection programs) throughout this initiative.

V. HTRI Priority Research Questions

During HTRI's research review, a total of nine RCT- and quasi-experimental-level studies were identified, one of which is ongoing with no public results (see **Annex 1**). Of these, most studies to date have focused on safe migration and fair labor practices, law enforcement training, content and targeting of counter-trafficking messaging, and effectiveness of large-scale awareness campaigns. All of the referenced studies were funded by a wide variety of donors, including USAID, the U.S. Department of Labor, Stanford University, Freedom Fund, Humanity United, 3ie, Terre des Hommes, and IOM. The findings from these studies, as well as emerging themes and trends and remaining evidence gaps identified during the rapid research review, yielded a set of learning questions and sub-questions organized around the Department of State's "4P" framework for human trafficking programs: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership.

These learning questions and subquestions are not comprehensive; rather, they are intended to identify gaps and suggest promising avenues for research by academics, human trafficking researchers, policymakers, and other key stakeholders. The learning questions and related evidence will be updated by HTRI every April and October through fall 2025.

> **HTRI Priority Research Question 1: How can counter-trafficking actors disrupt behaviors and social norms that normalize or promote human trafficking and related forms of exploitation? (*Prevention*)**

Prevention interventions are among the most popular and well-funded anti-trafficking interventions globally, particularly the use of public awareness campaigns to identify victims of human trafficking and warn migrants and other vulnerable populations

of human trafficking risks. HTRI identified three areas around which prevention research should focus: reducing vulnerabilities of populations at risk; improving awareness-raising and behavior-change interventions; and shifting practices to promote safe migration and ethical labor practices.

Question 1.1: Are current tools and methods to identify and assist populations vulnerable to trafficking accurate and effective with respect to reducing trafficking risk?

Sub-questions:

- **1.1.1.** What social protection programs, or program packages, best protect against trafficking risks for potential victims?

- **1.1.2.** What is the role of traditional poverty alleviation and humanitarian and development programs in reducing human trafficking risks?

- **1.1.3.** What roles do survivors of trafficking have in creating tools and methods to identify and support victims of trafficking?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- High trafficking source areas are not restricted to geographic areas and groups assumed to be the most vulnerable to trafficking (e.g., based on comparative poverty rates, proximity to national borders, and international migration rates).[6] Assumptions about which geographic areas and groups are most vulnerable to trafficking (e.g., comparative poverty rates, proximity to national borders, internal migration rates) do not always equate to high trafficking source areas.

- There is an assumption that improved social programs/safety nets promote individual resilience and reduce risks for labor and sex trafficking, but more evidence is needed on direct links/ability of social programs to protect individuals from being trafficked.

- Programs that use social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) to promote safe migration messaging and connect migrants with support/ migrant communities need to be studied for their effectiveness.

- Preliminary findings show that increased skills and livelihoods for individuals can lead to increases in migration (Bazzi 2017).

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- Improved government administrative data practices and use of global indicators on human trafficking (forthcoming from IOM/UNODC) to track trafficking flows

- Human trafficking prevalence measurements combined with RCTs on measuring the effect and impact of social protection and human trafficking prevention programs

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining current and recent research in trafficking-adjacent fields relevant to prevention, targeted to policymakers and implementing organizations that are developing new/adjusting existing prevention interventions

- Formal validation and dissemination of existing guidelines, protocols, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for victim identification and referrals; this should include substantive input from people with lived experience of human trafficking

Question 1.2: What kinds of NGO, government, and private sector-focused interventions can disrupt trafficking and reduce exploitation?

Sub-questions:

- **1.2.1**. Are NGO-led worker voice platforms effective? If so, are they significantly different in their effectiveness from company-led or government-led platforms?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- Governments that restrict migrant workers' ability to organize and/or have policies that allow limited due process for identified illegal migrant workers tend to have worse outcomes for exploited workers.[7]

- There are some emerging studies on labor voice applications conducted by relevant actors (Ulula, BanQu, LaborLinks/ELEVATE) that should be tracked (FHI 360 2019), though more work is needed in this area (Berg, Farbenblum and Kintominas 2020).

- Effectiveness of different models of worker voice interventions (industry-led vs. community-based; top-down vs. bottom-up) on identification of labor trafficking and restitution measures (Taylor and Shih 2019).

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- RCTs to measure the effect and impact of different models of labor voice programs (including behavior change based on information provision, ability to report abuse, ability to access restitution)

- Rigorous quantitative and qualitative research on connections between migration policies, private sector actions, and consumer behavior (including impacts of Withhold Release Orders (WROs) for products coming from countries that implicitly or explicitly allow the use of forced labor in their supply chains)

Question 1.3: How effective are awareness-raising and social and behavior change communication to target i) those considered vulnerable to trafficking, ii) those who consume products and services involving trafficking, iii) those in a position to exploit (e.g., individuals who employ domestic workers), and/ or iv) those in a position to assist or identify human trafficking victims (e.g., health & social workers, law enforcement officers, prosecutors)?

Sub-questions:

- **1.3.1.** What discrete prevention approaches and/or packages of support should be provided to migrants who seek to migrate for work due to a lack of other options (especially those affected by climate change, emergencies, and conflict)?

- **1.3.2.** How might macro conditions affect behavior-change interventions (for example, do perceptions of relative deprivation alter risk-taking in migration decision-making)?

- **1.3.3.** What awareness-raising and social and behavior change communication efforts can reduce the incidence of recruitment and trafficking of children for begging, domestic work, and sex? What activities most effectively pair with awareness-raising or behavior-change campaigns to improve the results?

- **1.3.4.** How can community awareness-raising efforts focus on helping individuals make better consumer choices that do not support labor exploitation or human trafficking?

- **1.3.5.** What kinds of adverse impacts can behavior change campaigns have on individuals and communities considered a-risk or vulnerable to trafficking (e.g., placing blame

on people engaging in "inappropriate" behaviors rather than on the traumatic events or contexts that cause the behavior; placing the burden on individuals rather than on systemic issues that enable human trafficking)?

State of the Evidence and Program/Knowledge Gaps:

- Studies on both awareness-raising and safe migration point to the importance of the design stage in setting up a successful intervention (e.g., targeting communities with high out-migration rates, assessing baseline levels of awareness and previous exposure to awareness-raising activities prior to allocating scarce resources to conducting information campaigns). They also note that while information campaigns and safe migration programs can increase individual and community awareness, they are no substitute for the more complex tasks of addressing the economic, legal, and political underpinnings of labor exploitation: the structural conditions that cause vulnerability. Thus, a multi-faceted approach is required.

- One recent study shows null results on trafficking incidence from safe migration interventions (e.g., pre-decision training, pre-departure training, smart phone apps, info cards, awareness campaigns in destination countries) for women in South Asia (Zimmerman et al. 2021). An ongoing study in Nigeria is examining whether improved knowledge about risks and information about economic opportunities at home affects the likelihood of irregular migration attempts (IPA 2020a).

- There is a lack of knowledge on how to effectively measure the impact of awareness raising activities. Current evidence rarely goes beyond awareness acquisition. Evidence-based guidance is needed on how to measure short- and long-term behavior change from awareness-raising and information campaigns.

- Studies on individual decision-making, aspirations, and risk-taking show that aspirations have a strong role in escaping poverty traps (Dalton, Ghosal and Mani 2016) and that perceptions of relative deprivation induce more risk-seeking behavior, speaking to the interaction between inequality and risk tolerance, and how economic and social forces that alter perceived relative deprivation can increase vulnerability to exploitation (i.e., when an aspirations window is open, an exploitation window for egregious human rights violations like human trafficking also opens) (Mo 2018).

- There are mixed results on the impact of awareness campaigns on trafficking incidence.

Some studies show that while there are short-term effects on a range of attitudinal and knowledge measures, few of these effects are durable, and some of these effects are not normatively desirable (e.g., increased stigma against victims) (Archer, Boittin and Mo 2016). Others show that while there is no effect on the knowledge and beliefs held by vulnerable workers, there is a positive impact on the general population (individuals who may be committing abuse or be able to stop the occurrence of such abuse) (Boittin et al. 2019).

- Little research to-date on effectiveness of behavior change programs working with religious leaders to eliminate *talibe* system (practice of sending children to cities to work in extended family/strangers' households) or familial trafficking (for child domestic work, forced begging, prostitution, and other abusive practices).

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- RCTs to examine the effect and impact of safe migration programs on migrant behavior (e.g., risk-taking) and outcomes

- Improved monitoring and evaluation support for organizations to improve their program design, data collection and analysis systems, and theories of change for safe migration interventions

- Rigorous qualitative (including participatory action research (PAR)) and quantitative research on the role of decision-making, aspirations, local norms, and risk preferences in making migration decisions

- Rigorous qualitative and quantitative research on the role of family and religious institutions in recruitment and trafficking of children for begging, domestic work, and sex

Question 1.4: What impacts do migration policies and programs that aim to reduce exploitation and/or curb migration flows have on migrant workers (including refugees and asylum seekers) and their treatment/ vulnerability to trafficking?

Sub-questions:

- **1.4.1.** What policies and programs can promote ethical practices by labor recruiting agencies in trafficking source and/or destination countries?

- **1.4.2.** How have reforms to countries with restrictive laws/fixed-term sponsorship systems impacted the cost of migration and incidence of human trafficking for labor migrants? How have no-fee migration policies (including the Employer Pays Principle) impacted migration flows and trafficking incidence?

- **1.4.3.** What changes need to be made in countries' migration and asylum policies to reduce the vulnerability of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, to traffickers? What role do labor attaches and consular officers have in these countries and how might they support improved conditions for migrants?

- **1.4.4.** How can migration-focused projects successfully link activities in both destination and source communities?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- A quasi-experimental analysis of a fair recruitment pilot in the Nepal-Jordan migration corridor (Babbit et al. 2019) showed positive impacts to worker wellbeing and productivity, but further exploration of the effectiveness of efforts under ILO's Fair Recruitment Initiative and similar initiatives is needed (these can potentially use data collected by the ILO (2020a) global study on recruitment fees and related costs).

- Some overviews of the impacts of national recruitment policies on the incidence of worker exploitation and trafficking have been published (ICCR 2017; Parsi et al. 2021), but more research is needed about country uptake, the incidence of continued worker abuse in migration corridors with no-fee policies, and best practices in sustainable, ethical recruitment processes for migrant workers.

- More research is needed on the impacts of asylum and refugee policies for people fleeing untenable situations; earning potential in refugee camps and host countries; and the use of smugglers/opportunities for traffickers in refugee camps.

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- RCTs to examine the effect and impact (as well as the cost effectiveness) of fair recruitment programs on migrant behavior and outcomes

- Rigorous qualitative and quantitative research on the rollout of national no-fee recruitment policies and their impact on workers, governments, and businesses

PHOTO: THOMAS CHUPEIN

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining current and recent research in the Peace & Recovery sector, specifically on interventions examining the impact of refugees' ability to earn an income and become productive members of their host communities

HTRI Priority Research Question 2: How can counter-trafficking actors most effectively support trafficking victims and improve short- and long-term outcomes for trafficking survivors? (*Protection*)

Protection encompasses a vast array of comprehensive efforts to identify, assist and support those who have been trafficked. HTRI identified three areas around which protection research should focus: identifying victims of trafficking, survivor support and reintegration, and provision of services in a trauma- and gender-informed manner.

Question 2.1: What are best practices in supporting victims of trafficking and referring them to services in a trauma- and survivor-informed manner?

Sub-questions:

- **2.1.1.** What are effective methods for assisting victims of trafficking as they engage in services and work through their healing process?

- **2.1.2.** How much do stigma, lack of trust, and guilt or fear impact victims' willingness and/or capability to self-identify as a trafficking victim? If a victim does not want to be identified and/or referred to human trafficking support services, what are some alternative support options?

- **2.1.3**. What are best practices used by frontline workers to support victims of trafficking (e.g., training and partnerships with physical and mental health care providers, identification guidelines/trainings/standards of care for immigration officials)?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- There is anecdotal evidence that conducting outreach in victims' peer communities (e.g., religious organizations, Asia Pacific Islander groups) can encourage victim self-identification, but there is a lack of rigorous evidence that current interventions to support victims' self-identification are effective.

- Awareness campaigns and trainings have been shown to improve people's ability to identify what trafficking is or is not (Mo 2018).

- There is a solid evidence base around behavior change communication (BCC) and behavior economics that can be used to inform efforts to change community social norms that enable trafficking and reduce stigma for survivors (UNIAP and ADB 2011) (for example, a pilot project being conducted by IPA in Uganda is examining interventions to reduce stigma (including negative beliefs and behaviors) towards outgroups) (IPA 2022b).

- Toolkits are being developed and launched to improve identification and referrals (such as HEAL Trafficking (2017) and Hope for Justice's "Protocol Toolkit for Developing a Response to Victims of Human Trafficking in Health Care Settings") but evaluations of their effectiveness have not yet taken place.

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods?

- RCTs (or added research arm for existing research study) to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions that aim to increase rates of victim self-identification

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining current and recent research in BCC interventions as well as Peace and Recovery sector interventions to reduce stigma towards outgroups such as human trafficking victims, refugees, and others

- Pilot research to evaluate the effectiveness of training (including curricula, tools/guidelines, etc.) and engaging frontline workers, including those employed in related fields (e.g., public

health), in victim identification and support (leading to full RCT)

- Establish validated victim identification, screening (e.g., mental health screening tools), and referral tools where necessary and appropriate

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining current and recent research on Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence sector to examine the potential use of screening tools (e.g., danger and lethality assessments from the domestic violence high risk team model (Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center, n.d.)) to identify those most at risk of human trafficking

Question 2.2: How can survivor support and reintegration interventions be survivor- and trauma-informed and designed with the needs of vulnerable groups in mind?

Sub-questions:

- **2.2.1.** What are the best approaches to support effective short-term and long-term trauma- and survivor-informed reintegration of victims of human trafficking? What are the essential elements of survivor-led reintegration programs that ultimately reduce the risk of re-victimization and support reintegration into their communities?

- **2.2.2.** What are proven models for engaging survivors of trafficking to facilitate entry/re-entry into local job markets?

PHOTO: LUKE STRATHMANN

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- Evidence on the effectiveness of savings groups, microcredit, cash transfers, graduation programs, vocational training, soft skills training, and other interventions is very robust; however, counter-trafficking implementing organizations often develop service programs for human trafficking survivors without knowing about this evidence base or using pertinent information to inform program design. While these programs can be helpful to some survivors in the short term, they are not sustainable in the long term and can sometimes have adverse impacts (e.g., promoting training in "traditional" skills such as piecework and embroidery that do not enable women survivors of trafficking to escape poverty). Additional guidance and research are needed on how survivors can be incorporated into to the larger labor market rather than creating micro-markets that keep vulnerable individuals in poverty.

- The use of different types of psychosocial interventions and trauma-informed care are also areas that have been rigorously studied (van der Kolk, 2015) and can be applied to protection programs; however, there are widespread misunderstandings about what trauma is and how trauma-informed care can and should be provided to survivors of trafficking.

- There is also a lack of information about robust mental health interventions that can be utilized in resource-poor environments (e.g., the use of paraprofessionals such as para-social workers). Information on interventions to support LGBTQI+ survivors is even more scarce.

- Psychosocial support interventions—see Freedom Fund's (2017) "Understanding the Psychosocial and Mental Health Needs of Bonded Labourers in South-Eastern Nepal."

- Toolkits are being developed and launched (such as HEAL Trafficking (2017) and Hope for Justice's "Protocol Toolkit for Developing a Response to Victims of Human Trafficking in Health Care Settings") but evaluations of their effectiveness have not yet taken place.

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining current and recent research focused on poverty alleviation programs (including programs focused on individuals who have experienced traumatic life events),[8] targeted to policymakers and implementing organizations that are developing new/adjusting existing protection interventions (specifically livelihoods support, job and entrepreneurship training, and other economic support interventions)

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining current and recent research in the Peace and Recovery sector to provide healing and reconciliation interventions for populations in post-conflict (or active conflict) areas that have faced extreme trauma

- Support and training for non-quantitative researchers and practitioners to implement RCTs on mental health support for survivors of trafficking (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, n.d.)

- RCT to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of paraprofessionals to support the mental health needs of survivors of trafficking, potentially using the ASO tool (IJM, n.d.) or other recent measurements developed to measure survivors' progress toward restoration and reintegration

- Engage donors/implementers that are conducting pilot programs that provide survivors of trafficking with counseling and training to move into existing jobs in local markets[9] and discuss options for RCT development for future project phases

Question 2.3: How do the design of shelter and out-of-shelter services affect the welfare of identified victims, and the efficacy of those services?

Sub-questions:

- **2.3.1.** Are gendered approaches to the provision of shelter and out-of-shelter services for trafficking victims potentially harmful?

- **2.3.2.** Has the field's focus on sex trafficking of female-identifying survivors contributed to housing and service challenges for male-identifying and LGBTQ communities?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- Qualitative research on trafficking shelters notes that very few shelter spaces are offered to male clients, leaving a large gap in available services for boys and male victims. The gray literature also suggests that both male and female trafficking victims avoid shelters for several reasons: government-run shelters can limit or prohibit individuals' ability to work, and clients sometimes fear swift deportation if they do not meet the national definition of a

trafficking victim; while NGO-run shelters can drastically limit clients' movement and recreate the prison-like environments that some victims have just escaped. Anecdotally, stigma can be even greater for men and boys, and they can be less likely to seek services even when they know those are available to them.

- More research is needed to examine the impacts of shelter and out-of-shelter support for female-identifying survivors and male-iden-tifying survivors (adults and minors as well as LGBTQI+ individuals).

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- Pilot research to evaluate the effectiveness of shelter vs. out-of-shelter service provision with randomized control and treatment groups (leading to full RCT)

- Examination of evidence from domestic violence/intimate partner violence shelters providing vocational training and job services to shelter clients

- Pilot research on effective methods to provide services to male-identifying victims (both adults and minors) and LGBTQI+ victims

- White paper/publicly available synthesis of evidence regarding the psychosocial impacts on men and women of forced idleness in refugee camps (which are also limited by regulations outlawing formal work, in addition to movement restrictions that limit access to informal work in urban centers near the camps) (IPA 2021)

HTRI Priority Research Question 3: How can governments improve judicial effectiveness, combat corruption, and disrupt criminal networks and systems that allow trafficking to continue? (*Prosecution*)

Effective investigation and prosecution of the crime of human trafficking is vital to deter those who profit from it. In its annual Trafficking in Persons Report, the U.S. Department of State (2022b) tracks the efficacy of criminal justice responses across governments. HTRI identified three areas around which prosecution research should focus: judicial training and legal support programs; structural and institutional factors that enable human trafficking; and victim-centered investigations.

Question 3.1: To what extent do police, prosecutorial, and other judicial trainings and legal support programs improve prosecution rates and reduce trafficking?

Sub-questions:

- **3.1.1.** What are the most effective methods for improving the ability of law enforcement and judicial officials to successfully conduct count-er-trafficking investigations and prosecutions?

- **3.1.2.** How does the efficacy of these methods differ for actors at different levels (e.g., national anti-TIP units vs. beat-level officers)?

- **3.1.3.** What are some of the reasons there are so few cases of human trafficking prosecutions and convictions?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- While law enforcement and judicial officials around the world have taken part in count-er-trafficking capacity-building and training programs for nearly two decades, the impact of these trainings and capacity-building efforts is not yet established. There is some evidence that conducting follow-up activities to provide additional support and/or training helps ensure that long-term behavioral change is occurring (Winrock International 2020a), but more research is needed.

- It is easier for police trainings to increase knowl-edge on penalties of trafficking than procedural knowledge (e.g., how to handle suspects and how to recognize human trafficking), and police trainings have been shown to lead to a greater appreciation of male victimhood (Boittin et al. 2019).

- Various models are being tested to speed up and prioritize human trafficking-related trials (special tribunals, trafficking-focused task forces) but there is a lack of rigorous research that examines their effectiveness.

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- RCT to evaluate the effectiveness of law enforce-ment and judicial training and law enforcement capacity-building programs that examines the trainings themselves as well as support provided to participants post-training (e.g., mentoring, supportive supervision, affinity groups)

- Pilot research to examine the effectiveness of specialized human trafficking courts to prosecute human trafficking cases more rapidly and successfully

- Pilot research to examine the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams/human trafficking prosecution units to prosecute human trafficking cases more rapidly and successfully

- Qualitative research examining barriers and opportunities to institutionalize training at a systems level

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining interventions in human trafficking and related fields (e.g., narcotics) using predictive programs and big data to assist with prosecution efforts

Question 3.2: What law enforcement, policy, and private sector strategies are available to combat structural/institutional factors that enable exploitation and human trafficking?

Sub-questions:

- **3.2.1.** What demand-side interventions are most effective at eliminating or deterring sex and labor traffickers from engaging in trafficking-related criminal acts?

- **3.2.2.** How can restitution measures outside of official human trafficking laws/prosecution processes be used to support victims?

- **3.2.3.** How can law enforcement and immigration officials engage the trust of trafficking victims specifically and the community more widely, leading to better cooperation on trafficking cases?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- The evidence around demand reduction strategies for sex trafficking conducted over the past decade has not been promising (for example, efforts that were touted as effective, such as John Schools, were widely replicated but have since been shown to demonstrate attitude change but not behavior change (Lovell and Jordan 2012)). Anecdotal evidence also shows that traffickers do not view arrest/prosecution as a deterrent because so few cases are successfully brought to trial. More research is needed in this area.

- Counter-trafficking donors and implementing

organizations have increasingly focused on the use of alternative dispute mechanisms and other restitution measures as a better option for victims because the process is shorter and the burden of proof is lower. However, prosecution actors point out that reducing the crime to civil cases and payment of fees allows traffickers to keep perpetrating this crime with other victims. More research is needed in this area.

- Understanding how potential traffickers assess risk and benefits of engaging in trafficking could help counter-trafficking actors successfully identify the levers to minimize entry into the field (and facilitate exiting the field/turning to legitimate forms of work).

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- Rapid literature review of current counter-trafficking demand reduction interventions and their impacts

- Pilot research to examine one or more of the most promising demand reduction strategies

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining how existing evaluations of community policing models can create opportunities for counter-trafficking activities that promote positive, mutually respectful interactions between civilians and the police by allowing officers to respond more proactively to the needs of citizens and communities, providing mechanisms to report acts of corruption and abuse, and encouraging citizens to rely on state security and justice sector institutions when crimes are committed or violence occurs (IPA 2020b; EGAP 2021)

Question 3.3: How can counter-trafficking interventions (including anti-corruption and anti-money laundering efforts) reduce the economic returns from this crime?

Sub-questions:

- **3.3.1.** How can law enforcement and civil society work together effectively to combat online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC)?

- **3.3.2.** How can human trafficking programs and policies promote ethical practices (IRIS Ethical Recruitment, n.d.) by labor recruiting agencies in both trafficking source and destination countries?

State of the Evidence and Program/

PHOTO: PUTUL GUPTA

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- Pilot research to examine the effectiveness of law enforcement and civil society efforts to rapidly identify and prosecute traffickers engaged in OSEC, leading to an RCT

- Pilot research leading to an RCT evaluating the effectiveness of ethical job recruitment programs

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining promising themes from economic theory regarding methods to increase risk and difficulty and reduce profitability (e.g., ensuring there are more profitable routes of commerce/employment available than trafficking; reducing the ease of corrupt practices in business, such as targeting the areas that require corruption and making them more difficult to manage; and disrupting the capacity for networks to form or for networks to engage in trafficking)

Question 3.4: How can the use of victim-centered principles of investigation (including adoption of multi-disciplinary teams to support victims) be used to improve justice for victims and increase prosecution rates?

Sub-questions:

- **3.4.1.** How can enforcement of labor and trafficking laws be improved to provide clarity around labor abuses vs. human trafficking and enhanced restitution measures available for victims of exploitation and trafficking?

- **3.4.2.** Do multi-disciplinary TIP response teams lead to more investigations/prosecutions and better results for victims?

State of the Evidence and Program/Knowledge Gaps:

- A 2020 evidence review (Winrock International 2020a) notes that programs that provide support on implementing labor and trafficking laws at both the national and subnational levels—and clearly defining human trafficking, forced labor, and child labor—are effective practices in the prosecution space.

- Preliminary evidence suggests that the use of victim-centered principles and multi-disciplinary teams can be impactful but resource constraints in many countries results in a struggle to put MDTs and other intensive investigation and care models into place.

Knowledge Gaps:

- Several reviews and guidelines have been published that describe the use of online platforms, apps, and other tools that contribute to the recruitment of child victims for online sexual exploitation and propose measures to prosecute laws against OSEC perpetrators and identify victims in urgent need of interventions (IJM 2021; ICMEC 2017; ICMEC and UNICEF 2016), but the effectiveness of these efforts is not yet known.

- Preliminary evidence suggests that interventions to assess and improve ethical recruitment practices by recruiting agencies can be helpful, but after several years of implementation, most of these efforts are still at a pilot stage, which suggests that they face sustainability and cost effectiveness challenges.

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- RCTs to evaluate the effectiveness of legal support programs conducted at the national and sub-national levels

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining the use of MDT models with GBV victims

- Pilot research to examine the impact and cost effectiveness of MDT model to support victims of trafficking

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HTRI Priority Research Question 4: How can the private sector strengthen its actions and accountability to eliminate human trafficking in global supply chains? (*Partnership*)

Private sector efforts to combat trafficking fall within and complement broader protection and prosecution work in partnership with governments, NGOs, and policymakers, especially along supply chains. HTRI identified that research surrounding partnerships with private sector organizations should focus on supply chain regulation and transparency.

Question 4.1: What is the role that private sector supply chain regulation can have in changing employer behavior, deterring trafficking practices, and influencing the behavior of consumers?

Sub-questions:

- **4.1.1.** How effective are private sector efforts to institute supply-chain transparency?

- **4.1.2.** How effective are private sector efforts to institute supply-chain transparency?

- **4.1.3.** How effective are external mandates and enforcement on individual companies in-country?

- **4.1.4.** How effective are cross-border trade regulations at reducing trafficking incentives?

- **4.1.5.** What are effective measures for engaging private sector companies in improving their efforts to combat labor trafficking in their supply chains?

- **4.1.6.** How can policymakers leverage isolated commerce transaction points, such as customs crossing for cross border trade or commercial licensing, to reduce the use of products produced by forced labor and trafficking victims?

State of the Evidence and Program/ Knowledge Gaps:

- Know the Chain, the Ethical Trading Initiative, and others have a comparatively large—if potentially incomplete—collection of data. In addition, over the past two years, the retail sector has reported several updates to their processes and procedures to address trafficking in supply chains; there is the potential to leverage this administrative data to assess impact in addition to their current reporting.

- Examinations of industry certification programs (chocolate, coffee, palm oil) have shown mixed results. These and other partnerships between governments, NGOs, and private sector to eliminate elements of forced labor and trafficking in supply chains (e.g., government to government agreements, crowdsourcing apps, watchdog groups) need to be rigorously assessed.

- A promising area of study is the effectiveness of Withhold Release Orders (e.g., under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which prohibits selected imports from Xinjiang) and California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (impacts on goods originating from lower- and middle-income countries).

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- White paper/synthesis of evidence outlining supply chain interventions and their impact on labor, changing employer behavior, and influencing the behavior of consumers

- RCT to evaluate impact of certification programs

- Rigorous qualitative and quantitative research on the impacts of WROs and other policies on the flows of restricted goods

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HTRI Priority Research Question 5: How can all counter-trafficking actors leverage technological advancements to combat trafficking? (*Partnership*)

Emerging technology partnerships between governments, civil societies and universities and private sector actors have more recently worked to support, enhance, and improve prevention, protection, and prosecution efforts. HTRI identified that research on technology partnerships should focus on using technology to identify victims and reduce vulnerabilities to human trafficking.

Question 5.1: What role can technology, big data, and machine learning have in promoting improved identification of human trafficking/forced labor sites, vulnerabilities on social media sites, and predictive data on future human trafficking flows within and across borders?

Sub-questions:

- **5.1.1.** Are technology interventions (such as the use of social media platforms) to reach prospective and active migrants effective at mitigating/reducing trafficking rates?

- **5.1.2.** How can technology be used to improve research and implementation practices and capacities for frontline workers and other practitioners, researchers, and government actors to improve identification of trafficking-affected communities and targeting key populations of interest?

State of the Evidence and Program/Knowledge Gaps:

- Predictive analytics are being used to successfully identify patterns to predict the likelihood of financial fraud (IPA 2022c), migration (UNHCR, n.d.; Centre for Humanitarian Data, n.d.),[10] and other events. Pilot efforts in the field of human trafficking are underway but are not far along enough to be evaluated (e.g., Stanford University's creation of a decision-support tool that the labor sector and prosecutors can use to detect and catch traffickers (Duff-Brown 2021)).

- Many counter-trafficking actors are also testing the impact of social media outreach/interventions on trafficking in supply chains,[11] which needs to be rigorously studied.

- The use of WhatsApp and other social media applications have shown some promise in their ability to engage vulnerable and highly mobile populations in research (IPA 2020c); human trafficking researchers should investigate using these methods in their research efforts.

- There is some emerging literature around analysis of trafficking activities on the dark web and using data mining to uncover and disrupt human trafficking networks (Reid and Fox 2020).

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods

- Engage implementing organizations and universities that are conducting pilot technology and machine learning programs and discuss options for RCT development for future phases

- A/B testing on social media platforms combined with user surveys to track behavior change, migration patterns, and engagement with worker protection groups and apps

Question 5.2: Are no-fee migration policies, blockchain, and other cloud-based documentation and payment/contract tracking approaches effective at reducing vulnerability to trafficking?

State of the Evidence and Program/Knowledge Gaps:

- Scores of human trafficking hackathons and other Silicon Valley/tech-focused interventions have been conducted in the past decade, leading to widespread interest in and excitement about the role that technology can play in combating trafficking, but the impact of these efforts to the reduction of trafficking or support for survivors is unknown. The effectiveness of these apps and other interventions produced as part of these strategies needs to be rigorously studied.

Proposed Research and Learning Activities and Methods:

- RCT to evaluate the effectiveness of blockchain, cloud-based documentation, and payment/contract tracking approaches using various apps and platforms

- White paper summarizing the main technology interventions to date, including an overview of the various methods used to engage private sector actors and professionals (accelerator programs, hackathons, and other tech-based activities) and assessment of the existing evidence around the impact of these interventions to identify survivors, increase awareness, and/or enhance the use of information to prosecute human trafficking crimes

PHOTO: STELLA BENEZRA

VI. Ethical Standards in Human Trafficking Research

To guide research projects funded under HTRI, the initiative will develop and disseminate guidance on ethical standards and requirements to research projects that includes provisions around relevant legal frameworks, Institutional Review Board processes, and flow-down provisions for funding recipients undertaking TIP data collection, as described below.

Beneficence

Beneficence is a concept in research ethics that states that researchers should have the welfare of participants as a goal of any research study. Human trafficking can be incredibly destructive to its victims. Accumulating evidence to effectively stop trafficking and mitigate its harm is clearly valuable.

However, this means the targeting for research questions and resources has a higher burden of justification, both to avoid "waste" and design that incorporates respondents' inherent risks. Researchers must definitively demonstrate that the research will benefit the respondents, specifically those who are trafficked.

Piloting

Small-scale survey pilots should be followed by a critical reflection period. The ethical reflection period with research staff and enumerators should discuss how the surveys are going, how respondents are reacting to the sensitive questions, any adverse events that the team did not anticipate, and, most importantly, should the team continue with the survey as-is. Stopping the study based on feedback from the research field team should always be an option on the table.

Community-level risk assessment

A research study is often accompanied by risk, and researchers will be asked to think about the impact their research may have on the communities they examine, and how such risks will be minimized. In addition to considering the impact of the study on study participants, researchers will be asked to think about how their work might impact people who are invited to participate in their study but choose not to; people who are eligible to participate in their study but are not invited to participate; friends, family members, co-workers or neighbors of their study participants; and research staff hired from the communities in which the study takes place. Researchers will be asked to consider what might change in the community from which participants were selected if study results supporting or countering their hypotheses are published in a high-profile academic journal (Immigration Policy Lab, Working Concept Note).

Trauma- and survivor-informed design and implementation

Each researcher will design their projects assuming all respondents are impacted by trauma. Survey tools and enumerator training must reflect this assumption. For every point of researcher interaction with respondents, both during research activities and the intervention activities, a trauma-informed risk assessment will be conducted and piloted. If the respondent appears to be experiencing discomfort or negative reactions due to the questions, the enumerator should remind the respondent that they do not have to answer any of the questions. If the respondent indicates they want to end the survey or take a break, or appears to be suffering from a physical or mental emergency, it is imperative the enumerator has a referral pathway and protocol for linking them with services in a safe and sensitive manner. Enumerators must also be trained on secondary trauma (also known as vicarious trauma) and be provided with resources and tools to mitigate and address secondary/vicarious trauma. Finally, enumerators should be trained in trauma-informed researcher-interviewee relationships, including power dynamics, transparency about the purpose of the research, and opportunities to provide a safe space for the interviewee (including confidentiality and privacy considerations).
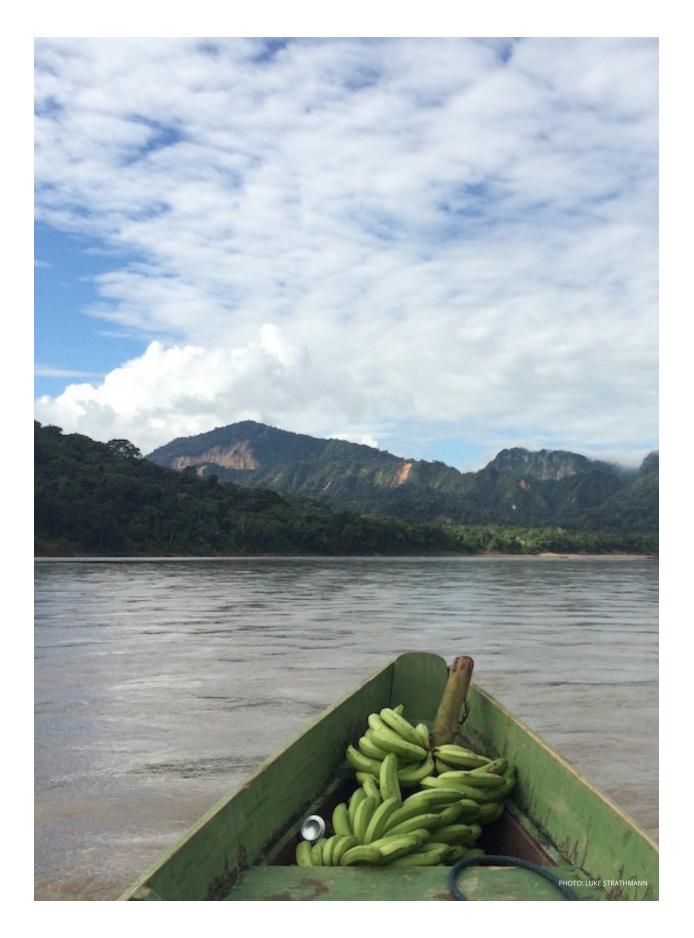
Context-specific informed consent

As always, before any personal information is collected, the enumerator must obtain voluntary informed consent. The consent needs to be specific to the types of risks the respondent is facing, often this is specific to the type of trafficking being researched.

The language used should be scrutinized and stripped of any superfluous or confusing language. If there are any situations in which the respondent's personal information will be shared—such as if they disclose that they are engaged in any type of illegal activity—this must be shared in the consent process. While not always feasible, all enumerators should be trained to pause any interview and remind the respondent about this clause if the enumerator believes the respondent may be about to trigger a mandatory reporting law or similar forced disclosure of respondent information.

Referrals for all respondents

As noted above, each project must demonstrate extra care for identifying potential referral services for respondents and basic vetting for appropriateness of care. However, we recognize that referral services specific to the needs of human trafficking victims will not be available in all research settings. In these instances, researchers will seek out alternate referral pathways that address the needs of similar populations (e.g., victims of intimate partner violence, refugees, victims of war crimes). All respondents interviewed in areas where referral services are available will receive a full referral pathway that includes comprehensive services for victims of trafficking, including medical facilities, psychosocial support, protection information, and police information for reporting abuse. They will be actively connected to any resources they are interested in pursuing if they provide consent to the surveyor to make the direct connection.

Mandatory reporting laws for human trafficking exist in many nations. All researchers must identify if there are laws relevant to their research and consult social services to construct the most care-centric pathway for any respondent who triggers a mandatory report. For example, if all instances of sex trafficking must be reported to officials, researchers should work to identify a partner in law enforcement (preferably from a designated sexual violence unit) and identify any additional advocates who can assist the respondent in navigating the system. All consent forms should contain language that outlines when/if the respondent's personal information may be shared with a social worker. Surveyors should be trained to pause interviews and alert the respondent if they believe the respondent is about to trigger a mandatory reporting law. They should then explicitly state that the respondent is not obligated to answer any questions.

PHOTO: LUKE STRATHMANN

Annex 1: References

A. Human trafficking RCTs and quasi-experimental impact evaluations

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Annex 2: Definitions of Terms

HTRI uses the following definition of human trafficking from the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (as amended):

- **Sex Trafficking:** When a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person to engage in a commercial sex act or when a trafficker causes a child who has not attained 18 years of age to engage in a commercial sex act.

- **Forced Labor:** When a trafficker recruits, harbors, transports, provides, or obtains a person for labor or services by using force, fraud, or coercion.

- **Trafficking in Persons:** "Trafficking in persons" and "human trafficking" are interchangeable umbrella terms that refer to a crime whereby traffickers exploit and profit at the expense of adults or children by compelling them to perform labor or engage in commercial sex. The United States recognizes two primary forms of trafficking in persons: forced labor and sex trafficking.

- **Child Sex Trafficking:** When a person younger than 18 is used to perform a commercial sex act, it is considered sex trafficking regardless of whether there is any force, fraud, or coercion. Children (under the age of 18) can never consent to a commercial sex act; therefore, any child engaged in commercial sex is a victim of child sex trafficking.

Endnotes

1. See IPA (2015) for a brief explanation of RCTs.

2. For a current list of PEMS-focus countries, see U.S. Department of State (2022a).

3. For example, as defined by the Maryland Scientific Methods scale (What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, n.d.).

4. SDG Target 8.7: "Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms" (UN, n.d.).

5. For a full list of PEMS-funded programs focused on prevalence measurement, please see U.S. Department of State (2022a).

6. For example, despite being at the very southern end of Nigeria, Edo state sends the largest percentage of asylum-seekers (by far) to Europe because of a combination of cultural practices (such as juju and history of pre-colonial practices) and legacy of late twentieth century migrants (primarily into Italy in the 1980's/90's); see Olfufade (2019) and Vermeulen (2019).

7. For example, in Thailand (Winrock International 2020b), Mexico (Global Americans, n,d.), and a number of countries in Africa (ITUC 2019).

8. For example, an IPA-implemented study in Colombia that is looking at motivation and internal barriers to learning and decision-making, which may be particularly relevant for victims of conflict (IPA 2019).

9. For example, see Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's Ashshash program in Bangladesh (Winrock International 2022).

10. For a catalogue of predictive models being used in the humanitarian sector, see Centre for Humanitarian Data (n.d.).

11. See "Using Social Media to Provide Information and Support for Migrant Workers about Illegal Recruitment Practices in Hong Kong and the Philippines" (IPA, 2022a).