

Human Trafficking and Contemporary Slavery

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Abstract

The article begins with a discussion of definitional issues regarding human trafficking and modern slavery and then briefly critiques some popular claims regarding each problem. Examples of macro-level research are critically evaluated, followed by a review of micro-level studies that illustrate tremendous variation and complexity in structural arrangements and individuals' lived experiences. These studies suggest that in this field micro-level research has at least three advantages over grand, macro-level meta-analyses—advantages that are quantitative (i.e., estimating the magnitude of the problem within a measurable universe), qualitative (i.e., documenting complexities in lived experiences), and well suited to formulating contextually appropriate policy and enforcement responses.

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking and modern slavery have become major public issues over the past two decades. By 2012, 134 nations had enacted laws criminalizing human trafficking (28 had not done so) (UNODC 2012, p. 88). International organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have sponsored an array of research initiatives and programs to locate and assist victims. And an increasing amount of money has been allocated to tackle trafficking and slavery, both domestically and internationally.¹

Legislative and enforcement initiatives have outpaced social science research on the topic. This means that domestic and international policies have been formulated largely without any basis in credible evidence. High-quality research is especially scarce. A review of 100 academic articles found that few contained original data and most simply recapitulated the assertions of government agencies and global organizations, even though these bodies had consistently failed to reveal their own sources or methods (Zhang 2009). Another literature review of 1,500 diverse publications on human trafficking found that only one-third reported empirical research findings (the remainder were overviews and commentaries) and most of the empirical writings were based on either convenience samples or unidentified samples (Gozdziaik & Bump 2008). Similarly, a content analysis of 41 recent books on sex trafficking found that four-fifths of the books cited arguably flawed sources without questioning them, some ignored qualifications that were offered in the sources, and only a few contained any original research findings (Fedina 2015). Two-thirds of the books were published by academic presses, yet they were just as evidence-thin as the popular books. And three-quarters of the books cited as authoritative the unverified assertions of either activist Kevin Bales or the US State Department's antitrafficking office—both of which have long been criticized for making grandiose claims about the magnitude of trafficking and slavery. Only 3 of the 41 books questioned the basis for the State Department's claims and estimates (which have fluctuated radically), and none questioned Bales's (2004, p. 8) assertion that there are 27 million slaves in the world today, something he calls a "good guess." The vast majority of writings on modern slavery and trafficking ignore the standard canon against uncritical acceptance of official figures (Kitsuse & Cicourel 1963), which in this case are highly dubious.

In the absence of an extensive body of high-quality empirical research, the problems of contemporary slavery and human trafficking have been constructed in a way that may lack a basis in evidence, as discussed further below (Doezema 2010; Molland 2014; O'Brien et al. 2013; Vance 2012; Weitzer 2007, 2014). Most commentary simplifies the issue and ignores findings that document the diverse structural and experiential dimensions of both human trafficking and modern slavery, mirroring the variation documented in the process of labor migration and working conditions of migrants more generally (Donato & Armento 2011).

The article is structured as follows: After identifying some serious problems in this field, I examine a body of literature that highlights tremendous complexity and heterogeneity in migration, trafficking, and unfree labor conditions. I begin with a set of definitional issues and then review the most common claims about slavery/trafficking, as articulated by activists, officials, and some scholars. I then explore two kinds of empirical studies, highlighting research that offers the most insight into the dynamics of labor migration and the variegated lived experiences of working

¹In the United States, antitrafficking efforts are shared between the Departments of State, Labor, Justice, Health and Human Services, USAID, Homeland Security, and local police departments (Wylar 2013). Between fiscal year 2001 and fiscal year 2010, the US government authorized a total of \$1.45 billion for domestic and international antitrafficking programs—allocations that increased dramatically each year during this time period (Siskin & Wylar 2013, pp. 55–60). The cumulative figure does not include costs for administration or for law enforcement. Expenditures by other governments and by international organizations have been substantial as well (Hoff 2014).

abroad. The focus is on human trafficking, with contemporary slavery a secondary consideration insofar as it intersects with trafficking.

DEFINITIONS

Definitional problems plague discussions of trafficking and modern slavery. Among the most serious issues are whether transit from one place to another is a necessary ingredient in human trafficking; whether a person's consent is relevant; the line between smuggling and trafficking; whether trafficking is distinct from slavery, overlaps with it, or is synonymous with it; how exploitation is defined; and the status of bonded labor. The literature is something of a quagmire regarding each of these issues.

Critiques of the literature often point to the lack of consensus on a definition of human trafficking, with some analysts and states including all unauthorized, assisted migration for purposes of obtaining work irrespective of whether the individual consented or was aware of the type and conditions of work at the destination. Some leading international organizations, including the United Nations, seem to conflate trafficking with slavery: "The term *trafficking in persons* can be misleading: it places emphasis on the *transaction* aspects of a crime that is more accurately described as *enslavement*" (UNODC 2009, p. 6). Some governments engage in this conflation as well, mixing human smuggling and trafficking into their official figures or equating trafficking with slavery in official discourse or in law (Chuang 2014). In Brazil, for example, sex trafficking is defined by law as any assisted migration of female prostitutes—"promoting, intermediating, or facilitating the entry of women who practice prostitution into national territory or the exit of women who practice prostitution abroad"—whether or not deception, coercion, exploitation, or rights violations occur. Research on prosecutions under Brazil's trafficking law reveals that most of the cases involved no coercion or deception and that "the law is being used as a way to prosecute sex work, which gets around the fact that adult self-prostitution is not illegal" in Brazil (Blanchette & da Silva 2012, p. 114).

Most governments and scholars distinguish human smuggling (in which someone assists a consenting person to illegally cross a national border and where the two parties have relatively brief contact with each other) from trafficking (in which at least some deception or coercion is involved in recruitment or transit and in which the person may have protracted ties to the trafficker) (Aronowitz 2009, pp. 6–8). The two types may overlap, such as when a person first enters into a voluntary agreement with a smuggler but later experiences some kind of deception, coercion, or other victimization from the same smuggler or a different one, thus qualifying as trafficking. Moreover, the binary distinction between smuggling and trafficking has been questioned insofar as there can be fluidity between the two—victimization in smuggling and agency in trafficking or a mixture of choice and compulsion in both smuggling and trafficking (O'Connell Davidson 2013). But most authors as well as international legal protocols make a clear distinction between the two (Bilger et al. 2006).

In the United States, the 2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act defines criminal trafficking as the recruitment, transport, receipt, or harboring of a person that involves (a) the use of "force, fraud, or coercion" over an adult or (b) any recruitment of persons under age 18 irrespective of whether coercion or deception are involved. The key international trafficking convention, the 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol (also known as the Palermo Protocol), likewise centers on deception and coercion but also includes "the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation" (UNODC 2004, p. 42). Remarkably, the key terms "exploitation," "abuse of power," "vulnerability," and "control" are left undefined.

Researchers who have attempted to apply the Trafficking Protocol to concrete cases have found its criteria difficult to operationalize, especially in cases in which trafficking and smuggling are blurred, e.g., where smuggling involves vulnerability and some exploitation but not deception or coercion (Molland 2014, Skilbrei & Tveit 2008). Alternative indicators, such as “force, fraud, or coercion,” provide more concrete measures of trafficking.

Although the term trafficking suggests movement from one location to another, such movement is not a necessary condition according to US and international law. Both the Trafficking Protocol and US trafficking law include in the definition *recruitment, receipt, or harboring* of persons, any one of which qualifies as trafficking provided that other conditions (e.g., coercion, deception, exploitation) are met, regardless of whether geographical movement occurred. Any deception in recruitment by a pimp, for example, is now defined as trafficking.

Definitions of other key terms, such as modern slavery and bonded labor, raise a different set of questions. The League of Nations’ 1926 Slavery Convention defined slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the power attaching to the rights of ownership are exercised.” Today, ownership of another person is not included in definitions of slavery, as human ownership is outlawed in most nations. One prominent writer defines slavery as “the total control of one person by another for the purpose of economic exploitation. [The person] is controlled by violence and denied all of their personal freedom to make money for someone else” (Bales 2004, p. 6). According to Bales, slavery manifests itself in bonded labor, forced labor, and human trafficking—which expands the scope of slavery beyond Bales’s own necessary conditions: violence, lack of freedom, and “total control” by another person. His definition has been contested by other experts because it conflates slavery with other forms of exploitation. Patterson (2012), for example, restricts the compass of modern slavery to cases in which individuals are socially isolated, suffer “parasitical degradation,” and are denied membership in the society of their masters (e.g., trafficking to foreign countries where one enjoys no citizenship rights), but not other instances of trafficking (within a nation or lacking social isolation and degradation) or forced or bonded labor (in which the worker is neither socially isolated nor denied all rights). However, Patterson’s (2012) construction of slavery is itself problematic insofar as there is ambiguity in the meaning of key constructs (social isolation, parasitical degradation) and because he treats all instances of sex trafficking as slavery regardless of whether his other criteria are met.

Bales (2004) defines debt bondage as a situation in which “people give themselves into slavery as security against a loan or when they inherit a debt from a relative” (p. 9). Some leading authorities agree: The International Labor Organization (ILO) considers bonded labor a form of forced labor, as does the US State Department:

One form of coercion is the use of a bond or debt. US law prohibits the use of a debt or other threats of financial harm as a form of coercion and the Palermo Protocol requires its criminalization as a form of trafficking in persons. . . . Sex trafficking also may occur within debt bondage, as women and girls are forced to continue in prostitution through the use of unlawful “debt” purportedly incurred through their transportation, recruitment, or even their crude “sale”—which exploiters insist they must pay off before they can be free. (USDS 2012, pp. 33–34)

In this formulation, incurring a debt is deemed inherently coercive and harmful. It is assumed that these relationships are “forced” and that debt is a form of indenture “purportedly incurred” in return for some kind of assistance. This definition ignores the many exchange relationships in which individuals voluntarily agree to pay facilitators for the costs of their labor migration and willingly assume a debt in order to migrate or work—but are not slaves “controlled by violence and denied all of their personal freedom” (Bales 2004, p. 6). In fact, incurring a debt to a middleman or

employer is a staple of labor migration for most resource-poor migrants. And for many migrants, bonded labor in a wealthy country is seen as far preferable to what is available on the free labor market at home. What matters is the precise nature of the contractual relationship and whether it is honored in practice, coupled with the subsequent working conditions—criteria that determine whether a debt is truly coercive, fraudulent, unpayable, or exploitative or instead simply a mutually agreed loan to be repaid (Derks 2010, O’Connell Davidson 2013, Sandy 2009). Indebtedness should be disaggregated into arrangements that do and do not involve deception, coercion, and contract violations.

Some analysts use the term *slavery-like conditions* to describe circumstances that are less comprehensive or onerous than outright slavery. These conditions include confiscation of legal documents, tight restrictions on one’s freedom, poor working conditions, low pay, and debt that accelerates rather than diminishes over time. In this category, the worker does not suffer absolute slavery in terms of ownership, routine physical violence, total control, confinement, or dehumanization, but is subject instead to milder forms of control.

The trend in national policies is conflation and domain expansion (Weitzer 2007). Until recently, for example, the US government made a clear distinction between human trafficking and slavery, but in 2012 it began equating trafficking with both slavery and forced labor, resulting in a huge spike in the alleged number of trafficking victims. Trafficking and slavery are used interchangeably in the State Department’s 2012 and 2013 annual reports, both of which embrace Bales’s assertion that 27 million individuals are victims of trafficking/slavery at any given time (USDS 2012, p. 7; USDS 2013, p. 7). Chuang (2014) calls this growing conflation of distinct problems “exploitation creep,” driven by activists’ interest in drawing greater attention to the problem.

The definitional issues sketched above cannot be resolved here, but to simplify matters I examine trafficking and contemporary slavery as distinct phenomena. I treat trafficking as occurring at the recruitment or transit stage and as involving deception or coercion, whereas slavery involves forced labor. Debt bondage is included only if it involves at least some coercion or deception.

THE DOMINANT FRAME

Four claims are frequently made regarding modern slavery and human trafficking:

- The number of victims worldwide is huge. Estimates range from 8 to 27 million slaves and from 600,000 to 4 million trafficking victims.
- The magnitude of trafficking and slavery is steadily growing.
- Human trafficking is the second- or third-largest organized-crime enterprise in the world, after illegal drug and weapons trading; estimated profits range from US\$5 billion to US\$36 billion annually.
- Sex trafficking is much more prevalent and harmful than labor trafficking.

Each of these assertions has been either questioned or debunked elsewhere (Chuang 2010, Fedina 2014, GAO 2006, Gozdzik & Collett 2005, Jahic & Finckenauer 2005, Snajdr 2013, Vance 2012, Weitzer 2014, Zhang 2009). Suffice it to say that no evidence exists for any of them at the global level, and it is difficult to imagine how these assertions could be substantiated globally. It is impossible to satisfactorily count the number of persons involved or the magnitude of profits in an illicit, underground economy internationally or nationally—especially when there are no tangible items such as illicit drugs or weapons (Andreas 2010). This means that (a) the worldwide magnitude of victims of trafficking and slavery is unknown. (b) Without a baseline from which to measure changes and continuities over time, the notion that a problem is growing cannot be confirmed.

Globalization has indeed catalyzed migration but this should not be equated with trafficking and slavery.² (c) The claim that trafficking is the second- or third-largest criminal enterprise is both unverified and dubious; the wide gap in estimated profits makes it impossible to rank human trafficking among other illicit enterprises. In addition, there are questions about the extent to which human trafficking or slavery qualifies as organized crime, given that many facilitators consist of either single individuals or very small groups, including networks of friends, acquaintances, and relatives: “The level of organization and number of criminal groups in trafficking differs substantially from one country to another as well as within countries” (Surtees 2008, p. 47; cf. Bilger et al. 2006, Herman 2006, López Castro 1998). A final relevant point is that the number of persons who have been officially identified as victims and assisted by the authorities is low relative to the huge number of alleged victims. In the United States, 3,181 individuals were officially certified as trafficking victims for the 11-year period 2001–2011 (Attorney General 2013, p. 34), a small fraction of the State Department’s 2004 assertion that 14,500–17,500 individuals are trafficked into the country each year (USDS 2004, p. 23)—a figure that the agency has recently abandoned.

The fourth popular claim deserves further attention here because it offers a useful backdrop to the discussion of empirical studies reviewed later in the article. The Bush administration (2001–2008) argued that sex trafficking was the most prevalent and most damaging type of trafficking. In 2002, President Bush signed a directive on trafficking that defined prostitution as “inherently harmful and dehumanizing,” and the State Department declared in 2005 that “the majority of transnational victims are trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation” (USDS 2005, p. 6). In 2010, the State Department, under Obama, reversed itself and proclaimed that “the majority of human trafficking in the world takes the form of forced labor,” citing an ILO estimate that there are nine times more victims of labor trafficking than of sex trafficking worldwide (USDS 2010, pp. 8–9; ILO 2005, p. 12). Although it is not clear how the ILO arrived at this number, the international market for all types of cheap labor combined (e.g., agriculture, mining, manufacturing, domestic service, fishing) certainly exceeds the market for sexual services—and by implication, the amount of trafficking and slavery in these labor arenas arguably eclipses the magnitude of sex trafficking. [The fact that sex workers—more than many other laborers—have routine contact with customers increases the odds that some client will report to the authorities someone who appears to be abused, a minor, or foreign, which may serve as a partial deterrent to trafficking in the sex sector (Zhang 2010).] The Obama administration’s view of prostitution also differs from that of its predecessor: “Prostitution by willing adults is not human trafficking regardless of whether it is legalized, decriminalized, or criminalized” (USDS 2010, p. 8). Nevertheless, the State Department’s annual reports on trafficking as well as US prosecutions of trafficking cases continue to focus more on sex trafficking than labor trafficking (Attorney General 2013, pp. 65–66).

Worldwide, the vast majority of media reports, policy making, and law enforcement also centers on commercial sex markets rather than labor trafficking (Chuang 2010, Gulati 2011, Jahic & Finckenaer 2005, Marchionni 2012). This discourse typically highlights lurid or disturbing cases of “sex slavery” and presents them as representative and abundant (Andrijasevic 2007, Haynes 2014, Snajdr 2013, Vance 2012). Such sensationalized depictions obscure the complexities, nuances, and contingencies characterizing specific cases. And the special status accorded to sex trafficking ignores the fact that similar conditions generate all kinds of assisted migration, as discussed further below.

²Decreasing prevalence is also possible. For example, the ILO (2010, p. 5) reports that child labor “continues to decline” in recent decades, and a census in Cambodia found that the number of persons trafficked into sex work declined by more than half from 2002 to 2008 (Steinfatt & Baker 2011).

After assessing some examples of macro-level research in this area, I turn to other, mostly micro-level studies, highlighting those that push our understanding of human trafficking in new directions.

MACRO-LEVEL RESEARCH

This section reviews studies at the national or international level. Some of these studies have been embraced by legislators in some countries and thus provide an example of a very problematic type of evidence-based policy. As will become clear, studies at this elevated level of aggregation have some inherent weaknesses when it comes to documenting and analyzing trafficking and slavery.

The Global Slavery Index estimates the prevalence of slavery in 162 nations (Datta & Bales 2013, Walk Free Foundation 2013).³ The index draws from an array of unstandardized sources: media reports, population surveys in a few countries, and estimates from anonymous NGOs, anonymous so-called experts, and government agencies. How these sources were selected is not revealed, nor whether their estimates fit the index creator's sweeping definition of slavery or were instead restricted to human trafficking or bonded labor or something else.

Because the victimization data for many nations are scarce, the index creators simply extrapolated from the few nations where some estimate was available and apply those numbers to "similar" nations lacking any such estimate. Ignoring national particularities, this procedure imputes the same slavery rates to selected nations on the basis of their geographical proximity or certain assumptions of the index creators—and this extrapolation exercise is done for 155 of the 162 countries (Guth et al. 2014). For example, "the prevalence ratio from the UK study was assumed to be relevant to other European island nations such as Ireland and Iceland, whereas the prevalence ratio for the USA was assumed to be relevant to developed Western European countries" (Walk Free Foundation 2013, p. 111). The island nations of Ireland, Iceland, and Britain receive the same slavery score,⁴ and all Western European countries receive the mean of the UK and US scores—although there is no explanation why the United States is "relevant" to Western Europe.⁵ A higher score, based on extrapolation from a figure derived from a household survey conducted in five Eastern European nations, is given to Russia and all Eastern and Central European nations. A major flaw is that the estimates for the countries that are used as typical of a certain type (United Kingdom, United States, five Eastern European nations) are themselves prone to massive error at the national level—rendering any extrapolation to other countries doubly flawed.

For most of the 162 countries, however, there was neither an official victimization estimate (as in the United States and United Kingdom) nor a population survey in one country that could be imputed to "similar" others. Therefore, in addition to extrapolation, "it was necessary to fall

³Slavery is defined in the index in two ways: "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised" and "the control of one person by another, depriving them of their freedom for the purposes of exploitation" (Walk Free Foundation 2013, pp. 2, 11). The first definition, requiring ownership, appears to be contradicted when the index creators declare that slavery encompasses human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, exploitation of children (undefined), and forced or "servile" marriage (undefined). Some of the procedures used to create the index are missing from the report but can be found in Datta & Bales (2013). For a discussion of other serious flaws in the slavery index, see Guth et al. (2014).

⁴The logic seems to be that island nations are more difficult to enter (hence, less trafficking), though this should have no impact on indigenous slavery. Higher slavery scores are given to other island nations, including Japan, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and all Caribbean countries.

⁵For the United States, the index uses a figure of 17,500 trafficking victims, an old State Department estimate that the index creators mistakenly use as a proxy for slavery (Datta & Bales 2013, p. 825). The agency has now abandoned that figure, further undermining the logic of extrapolating from the United States to Western European nations.

back on secondary source information” (Walk Free Foundation 2013, p. 113). The use of diverse and often anecdotal secondary sources—NGOs, media reports, local “experts”—for quantitative purposes is a glaring defect here, particularly when we remember that trafficking and modern slavery are clandestine practices that often defy detection. Differences from country to country are an artifact of the kind and quality of sources available in each nation, which lack uniformity from place to place.⁶ Finally, because so many of the procedures used to construct the index are either highly suspect or simply not revealed in the report, the index “cannot be validated or replicated” by other analysts (Guth et al. 2014, p. 19).

Like the slavery index, two other recent studies have attracted quite favorable attention from policy makers in several countries. Using information on 161 countries from the UN’s Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Cho et al. (2012) and Jakobsson & Kotsadam (2013) attempted to determine whether national prostitution laws are related to the prevalence of human trafficking. Yet UNODC had cautioned against using its figures either for one nation or cross-nationally because “the report does not provide information regarding actual numbers of victims” (UNODC 2006, pp. 37, 44–45). UNODC noted the widespread lack of transparency in data collection and reporting, the reliance on a hodgepodge of sources that varied by country, and the unstandardized definitions of trafficking across countries (with some conflating trafficking, smuggling, and irregular migration). The authors concede that it is “difficult, perhaps impossible, to find hard evidence” of a relationship between trafficking and any other phenomenon (Cho et al. 2012, p. 70) and that “the underlying data may be of bad quality” and are “limited and unsatisfactory in many ways” (Jakobsson & Kotsadam 2013, p. 93). Yet they nevertheless treat the UNODC report as a data source and conclude that countries with legal prostitution have greater human trafficking problems than countries where prostitution is criminalized. Not only are the UNODC data unsuitable for this exercise, given the problems noted above, but the authors’ analyses are severely flawed as well:

- The amount of trafficking is influenced by a variety of push and pull factors—not just the legal regime at the destination. It is difficult to control for these factors when many of them cannot be measured across all 161 countries in the study.
- A cross-sectional design (at a single time point) is used to measure something that should be examined longitudinally: the amount of trafficking before and after legalization. The latter approach would require valid baseline figures to compare with reliable recent figures—neither of which exists.
- The authors use aggregate national trafficking estimates (which combine labor, sex, and other kinds of trafficking) in their attempt to assess whether legal prostitution makes a difference. This means that there is a gross mismatch between the trafficking figures and prostitution law: In assessing whether prostitution law is related to the incidence of trafficking, figures on sex trafficking alone should be used, not the totals for all types of trafficking.
- The core construct—legal prostitution—is operationalized crudely. The authors dichotomize the variable, demonstrating little appreciation of the variations within it, particularly (*a*) the different types of prostitution that are legally allowed and outlawed, which

⁶The European Commission (2013) recently attempted to rank 27 European nations on the magnitude of human trafficking in each, an effort marred by the same bad data as the slavery index. And the US State Department’s annual ranking of countries’ efforts to combat trafficking is similarly deficient. Under a section of its annual report, labeled Methodology, it lists the same mix of unstandardized sources used by the European Commission and the Global Slavery Index. No methodological procedures are mentioned, only the list of sources (USDS 2014, p. 37).

differ radically from one legal system to another, and (b) the different kinds of regulation inscribed in diverse national laws. Legal prostitution is not monolithic in terms of either the activities that are permitted or the kinds of regulations in effect (Weitzer 2009, 2012).

- Both studies are restricted to “law on the books,” not “law in action.” To hinge an analysis solely on the law, rather than whether and how it is implemented, ignores potential disjunctions between law and practice.
- It is quite possible that nations in which some type of prostitution is legal and regulated by the authorities may have superior methods for detecting sex trafficking (Weitzer 2012), a variable missing from both studies. A significant number of confirmed victims in a state with legal prostitution may be an artifact of more rigorous oversight, investigations, or reporting by the authorities.

An alternative to comparative international meta-analyses is research at the national level. Few solid national studies exist, however. One of the most rigorous is a Cambodian study that utilized field visits to all known prostitution venues in the country in 2008, in which researchers attempted to count the number of sex workers present as well as those who appeared to be trafficked. The researchers concluded that, nationwide, 1,058 women out of a population of 27,925 female sex workers had been trafficked into prostitution (Steinfatt 2011, Steinfatt & Baker 2011). Note that the total number of sex workers in this study is a fraction of the number of *trafficked* sex workers alleged by Cambodian NGOs (80,000–100,000). However, even rigorous research such as this is difficult when it attempts to cover an entire nation. Steinfatt & Baker used different procedures to estimate the number of prostitutes and trafficked persons in the capital, Phnom Penh, and elsewhere in the country. The result was a more comprehensive count in the city than in towns and villages, but collection of reliable data was challenging throughout the country.⁷

Another macro-level design is a national survey of a population regarding its migration experiences. Because victims of slavery and trafficking constitute hidden populations whose parameters are unknown, representative surveys of this population are impossible. But alternative samples can be mined.

The International Organization for Migration conducted one such survey in five Eastern European nations thought to have major trafficking problems. Sampling 5,513 randomly selected households, respondents were asked whether a close family member had been trafficked or enslaved.⁸ The study found that approximately 2% ($N = 108$) reported having a family member who fit the survey’s definition of a victim—22 sex trafficking and 86 labor trafficking victims—with Moldova accounting for half the total (Omar Mahmoud & Trebesch 2010). Asking individuals whether a family member has been a victim of trafficking is arguably superior to asking respondents about their personal experiences, owing to the sensitive nature of the questions. But reporting bias

⁷A field researcher asked a random taxi driver to take him to the closest brothel; he entered the brothel, made observations, and asked the manager some questions, after which he hailed another taxi and repeated the procedure—continuing until saturation and producing a census of the population. “Trafficked” was operationalized as a person who appeared to the field researcher to be underage or was not permitted to leave a brothel with the field researcher, playing the role of a customer. Operationalizing trafficking in this way may significantly distort victim numbers, given that appearance is fairly subjective and that inability to leave a brothel with a customer may be standard procedure (the norm being in-house sexual commerce) rather than indicative of confinement.

⁸The countries were Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania. Respondents were asked whether a family member had traveled to another country and been (a) “offered a domestic or nursing job, but was locked and forced to work for no pay,” (b) “offered a job at an enterprise, on a construction site, or in agriculture, but was locked and forced to work for no or little pay,” or (c) “offered employment, but the passport was taken away upon arrival to the destination country, and was forced to work in the sex business.”

is likely to be high with the indirect method as well, because it assumes that the respondent is fully aware of all family members' experiences—thus inflating false negatives. The more general point is that population surveys are prone to at least some, and perhaps a large, amount of error when used to estimate the prevalence of hidden and stigmatized practices such as trafficking or slavery (Molland 2014).

RESEARCH AT THE MICRO LEVEL OR WITH SPECIAL POPULATIONS

An antidote to both the dominant, popularized framing and multi-case macro-level analyses of human trafficking and slavery is research in contexts smaller than the national or global level—a town, city, region of a country—or with special, delimited populations.⁹ Micro-level studies have the potential to (a) produce more reliable numbers on victimization (in a universe smaller than nationwide); (b) identify context-specific structural catalysts of migration, smuggling, trafficking, and slavery; and (c) generate richer insights regarding actors' lived experiences. Given the clandestine nature of these enterprises, research at the micro level can be quite challenging (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010, Gozdziaik & Collett 2005). But a slowly growing research literature illustrates how such studies can advance knowledge on these three dimensions.

Migrants/Victims and Brokers/Traffickers

Migrants are motivated by both push and pull factors, e.g., the lack of economic opportunities, poor working conditions, or personal problems at home, and the promise of upward mobility, personal autonomy, or an enriched or “modern” life abroad (Aronowitz 2009, pp. 11–12). Their experiences range along a broad continuum both during the migration process and at the destination workplace. At one end of the spectrum are individuals who have been kidnapped and forced into work, were lied to about the kind of work they would be doing, are confined to the job site, receive little or no pay or have wages withheld for long periods, experience physical or sexual assault, or labor under very dangerous or unhealthy conditions. At the other end are individuals operating with full consent and who encounter no abuse; some of them experience both upward mobility and liberation from oppressive conditions (marital, familial, work, crime, political violence) in their home countries. Between these two extremes are those who have mixed experiences over time or are subjected to milder types of mistreatment. Examples of the latter include being informed about the kind of work they would be doing but not the exact working conditions, receiving less pay or working longer hours than what was agreed to, having their passports confiscated but enjoying a measure of freedom outside working hours, or being subjected to arbitrary penalties, verbal abuse, or harassment but not physical or sexual assault. The studies reviewed below document each of these patterns.

Extreme or manifold victimization. This section presents just a few illustrative examples of the ways in which parasitical traffickers and abusive employers violate human rights. Filipinas working in Japanese hostess clubs are compelled to enter into bonded labor arrangements to pay off their debts to brokers who arrange for their travel and employment in Japan. The middlemen

⁹The director of a leading organization, Anti-Slavery International, wrote a harsh critique of the Global Slavery Index before it was released: He advocated abandoning the quantitative ranking exercise altogether and replacing it with field studies (McQuade 2013).

and managers routinely exploit the workers: They inflate the debt owed, keep as much as half of the earnings, withhold passports and wages until the women return to the Philippines, force the women to sign a blank check or contract that employers can later fill in with expenses, charge exorbitant commission, and overcharge for food and housing (Parreñas 2011, pp. 40–48). Although not fulfilling the criteria for slavery, these arrangements certainly consist of highly exploitative servitude, even though the women consider them preferable to living in poverty back home.

Joarder & Miller (2014) questioned Bangladeshi labor migrants who had returned home after working illegally abroad, accessing them via the Immigration Authority at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka. Of the 476 respondents, fully 81% ($N = 386$) were categorized as trafficked on the basis of reported victimization during transit, at the worksite, or both. Abuses took the following forms: The broker provided fraudulent travel documents (64%); wages were withheld for at least six months (40%); labor contract was violated (57%); and victims were forced to work long hours coupled with no overtime pay or holidays (77%). Four-fifths had their passport confiscated (and never returned for 45% of them), and almost all of the women (96%) reported that they had experienced either sexual harassment or sexual assault by a broker or employer. If the findings are more broadly applicable outside this sample, it suggests that abuse and exploitation during transit and at the workplace are fairly common among Bangladeshi labor migrants.

Other studies focus exclusively on victims, not the larger population of migrants. An analysis of court cases in Italy, for example, revealed differences in the practices of Eastern European and Nigerian traffickers:

Enslavement strategies adopted by exploiters from Eastern Europe [Albanians and Romanians] are based on the ruthless, systematic use of violence, while those used by Nigerian traffickers. . . [involve] magical practices. . . . In many cases, this type of control requires no systematic use of violence. (Becucci 2008, p. 65)

But the latter is coercive nonetheless. Nigerian madams perform voodoo rituals that involve collecting a woman's personal effects (e.g., hair, fingernails), mixing them with powdered animal bone, and rolling these items into a scroll bearing the woman's name, which is retained by the madam: "The ritual has the power of inspiring real terror in victims who believe they will be seized by madness or sudden death if they fall short of the promises made" (Becucci 2008, p. 65; cf. Iacono 2014). Once the women were in Italy, they were charged for rent, necessities, and condoms, and discovered that their debt skyrocketed up to 10 times the initial agreement. Another study identifies other actors who abuse the Nigerian women in Italy—clients, government officials, police officers—and underscores how their illegal status increases the chances of mistreatment by parasitical individuals (Baye & Heumann 2014).

Other studies have documented extreme trafficker-victim relationships. An analysis of questionnaires completed by 4,559 female sex trafficking victims who worked throughout Europe and Central Asia and had received assistance from field missions staffed by the International Organization for Migration revealed manifold victimization (Di Tommaso et al. 2009). Almost all (96%) were denied the freedom to choose clients, 88% were not allowed to determine the kinds of sexual services they would provide, 40% were regularly prevented from using condoms, and 9% were never allowed to use them. They worked 7 days a week and an average of 13 hours per day. Approximately one-third (31%) had experienced at least one incident of physical assault, 17% sexual assault, and 9% psychological abuse; about one-tenth of the abusers were clients and the others were traffickers, employers, or others. Medical care was denied to 58% of the sample; 60% were denied all freedom of movement, and 36% were allowed some mobility but only if accompanied by someone else. They served an average of five clients per day and were allowed to keep just

one-sixth of their earnings.¹⁰ These findings—some of which are slavery-like conditions if not outright slavery and demonstrate both multiple and intense abuse—are due to the nature of the population studied: officially confirmed, assisted victims rather than a larger population of migrants. Assisted victims likely overrepresent persons who have the worst experiences (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010).

Mexico is another place where victims per se have been studied. One researcher used a key informant (a brothel owner) to access 60 prostitutes who had been trafficked to Mexico City from elsewhere in Mexico:

I told her that I needed to identify some trafficked women for interviews. I explained the meaning of women trafficking and how it differs from other women who are in prostitution. She agreed to cooperate but would charge 50 pesos (US\$5) per information. Whenever she found a trafficked woman (working with another pimp) she called me to arrange an interview. (Acharya 2008, pp. 81–82)

Acharya would then visit the brothel and locate the trafficked woman; after paying the fee for sex, they would go to her hotel room for an interview. The women qualify as victims of trafficking because recruiters deceived them regarding the kind of work at the destination and, when they refused to sell sex, they were subjected to violence. When asked about their experiences during the past month, extremely high victimization rates (52–100%) were reported: verbal abuse, beatings, drugging, confinement, cigarette burns, use of chili powder as a punishment, rape, and threats of being killed. Because condom use was not widely practiced, 4 out of 10 women had unwanted pregnancies and about the same number had abortions. Acharya does not say whether his subjects worked in legal or illegal brothels; interviews with 251 sex workers in Tijuana found that none of them had been trafficked but also that those who worked legally benefited in a variety of ways compared with those who worked illegally, including lower mistreatment rates (Katsulis 2008). And Zhang's (2010) interviews with 220 sex workers in Tijuana found that the vast majority had not been trafficked: 12% had been forced or deceived into prostitution on the street, in strip clubs, or as escorts by pimps, boyfriends, or husbands. These larger Tijuana studies suggest that Acharya's findings may not be the norm, but his findings nevertheless illustrate the extreme and manifold victimization type of trafficking or slavery-like conditions.

Mixed experiences or moderate mistreatment. A second set of studies highlights either (a) mixed experiences at the individual level or (b) moderate kinds of exploitation and abuse. The latter includes lack of full disclosure in agreements or contracts, some infringement on freedom, unpleasant treatment by brokers or employers, or some economic exploitation during at least one stage in the migration and employment trajectory. Some migrants do not fully appreciate the terms of their agreement with a facilitator, the specific working conditions or risks of arrest in a new locale, or how difficult it can be to pay off a debt to some brokers or bosses. For those who performed the same kind of work at home, working and living conditions in the destination may be quite different from what they are accustomed to. And other labor migrants do so reluctantly—a diluted form of consent—out of an obligation to support their families or because of overt pressure from relatives.

There is also a longitudinal dimension, which can involve mixed experiences over time. Some individuals who were initially victims become favorites of their employers and experience upward

¹⁰A large number of values for several of these questions were missing. The authors report findings only for women involved in sex trafficking; the study did not analyze the 660 victims of labor trafficking and the 560 male victims of sex trafficking in the database.

mobility, illustrated by a Nigerian trafficked to Europe who later becomes the personal assistant of a madam running a brothel or becomes a madam herself and then begins to exploit others (Iacono 2014). In other cases, a person's initial consent at the previctimization stage is compromised by subsequent, unexpected job requirements. And in still other cases, an initial lack of consent for work to which one is averse evolves into an emergent acceptance because of the economic benefits. Ethnographic research among young women who work in sex clubs along the Thailand-Laos border demonstrates this pattern. Their attitudes shifted over time: from resentment toward being deceived about the kind of work they would be doing to gradual socialization by coworkers to accept the working conditions, to satisfaction with their earnings, and to eventual normalization of their erotic labor (Molland 2012, pp. 99–101).

Positive experiences during transit may be inverted at the destination. A study of 149 Chinese women who traveled to other Asian countries for the purpose of engaging in sexual commerce found that the majority of their facilitators were other sex workers who had returned from abroad and then helped the novice obtain a visa, accompanied her in transit, and introduced her to a business owner at the destination (Chin & Finckenauer 2012). Such chain migration lends itself to building small networks of sex workers who can socialize and protect each other (cf. Molland 2012). None of the Chinese sex workers reported that they had been coerced into this work, a few felt unfairly treated by middlemen, and conflicts between workers and their facilitators were virtually nonexistent. Relations were better with brokers, however, than with some employers. One-quarter (26%) of the sample reported that they were financially exploited at work (defined as receiving less than half what clients paid for services), and 15% were not free to move around or quit work because their travel documents were held by their debt holder or employer.

Andrijasevic's (2010) findings on Eastern European women working in Italy are more mixed than those of Becucci's (described above). She describes a continuum in their transit experiences, contractual obligations, working conditions, and amount of freedom at the destination. Similarly, interviews with 92 Bulgarian women who had returned home after working in prostitution in Western Europe yielded a mixed picture. Approximately one-quarter (27%) had experienced physical coercion, 4% had been abducted, 7% had been deceived, and 7% experienced debt bondage (Petrunov 2014). According to Bulgarian law, all 92 women were trafficking victims simply because they had been recruited and transported to places where they sold sex (consent being irrelevant by law in Bulgaria), but the findings show that a fairly small minority met the conditions of coercion or deception. The victims of labor trafficking in this study fared worse than the prostitutes: Some of the trafficked laborers worked 14-hour shifts, were kept in cages, were fed inferior food, and earned only one-third of what they had been promised.

Bélangier (2014) interviewed a large sample of Vietnamese labor migrants ($N = 646$), two-thirds of whom experienced no deception, exploitation, or abuse either in transit or at work; 60% reported positive outcomes from the work they engaged in outside Vietnam (income earned, benefits to family members, housing improvements at home). However, one-third had at least one type of victimization: reduced wages, threats of being deported, confinement at the workplace, no sick leave, no telephone communication, and being prevented from returning to Vietnam. The same proportion, one-third, of 826 Mexican laborers who migrated to southern California were found to be trafficking victims during transit as defined by US law, and 55% had been subjected to some form of abuse during employment (Zhang 2014). Such treatment included false promises regarding the work to be performed, assault, confinement, and unfair labor practices (e.g., withholding wages). Abuse rates were highest in construction (35% during transit, 63% at work) and lowest in agriculture (16% and 27%, respectively), with janitorial/cleaning, landscaping, food processing, and manufacturing sectors in between the two extremes.

Further evidence comes from a survey of 580 women who worked in brothels in eastern India, who were accessed while they were being tested for HIV (Sarkar 2008). The women were asked, *inter alia*, about the circumstances under which they entered prostitution. Two-thirds had entered voluntarily, whereas 8% were coerced by a family member and 24% were deceived or forced by someone other than a family member. Asked whether they had experienced “any torture (physical, mental, sexual), including rape, during the initial few weeks” of working in prostitution, 29% answered affirmatively. Four-fifths of the perpetrators of violence were recruiters or brothel staff, with customers accounting for 6% of the violence. Importantly, those who had been coerced during recruitment or transit were much more likely than those who entered sex work voluntarily to experience violence after they began working (57% versus 15%, respectively).

Research on middlemen is extremely thin, and most of what we know about them comes either from information supplied by migrants or from court records of prosecutions of a few traffickers or smugglers (e.g., Becucci 2008, Leman & Janssens 2011, Verhoeven et al. 2015). Information drawn directly from brokers is scarce. One unique study utilized in-depth interviews with 91 individuals convicted and incarcerated for trafficking in Cambodia. The subjects’ education, marital status, and gender (54% women, 46% men) varied significantly, though most (80%) were poor (Keo et al. 2014). The researchers determined that only 25% of their incarcerated respondents had indeed been involved in trafficking as defined by Cambodian law, whereas 16% had been involved simply in procuring for prostitution and 59% had been “doubtfully convicted” of trafficking—meaning that their accounts did not fit the legal definition of trafficking. The accounts were cross-checked with other sources in some cases, but lacking access to court records, the researchers could not determine conclusively whether individuals had been wrongly convicted; the in-depth interview data are used to illustrate why they were categorized as doubtfully convicted. Much more research is needed on the ways in which criminal justice systems identify and adjudicate cases of accused traffickers. We do know that the number of arrested and convicted traffickers worldwide has grown over the past decade and that the authorities target sex traffickers much more than labor traffickers (Attorney General 2013, Farrell & Pfeffer 2014, USDS 2012).

Low or no victimization. A third pattern is reported in another set of studies. Southeast Asia is thought to be a hot spot for rampant trafficking, but a body of research complicates this image. A study of Vietnamese women engaged in sex work in Singapore, for example, was unequivocal: “Human trafficking for sexual exploitation is not a prevalent pattern in the mobility for commercial sex purposes from Vietnam to Singapore. Networks of migration are noncriminal, but [instead] social and peer-based, efficient, well organized, and nonexploitative in nature” (Lainez 2011, p. 3). The peers who assisted in transit, accommodation, and employment were typically friends or other sex workers. The women are responding to pull factors in Singapore, where sex work is much more lucrative than in Vietnam, just as they are when migrating to work in Cambodian brothels: motivated by “economic incentives, desire for an independent lifestyle, and dissatisfaction with rural life and agricultural labor” (Busza et al. 2004, p. 1370; cf. Lainez 2011, Liu 2011). In Kuala Lumpur, Chinese migrant sex workers “emphasize that it is not just about the income per se, but that the income permits them to be financially independent and free from anyone else’s control. One of their goals is to be able to travel and experience as many global cities as possible”; their earnings allow many of them to buy fashionable apparel, remit to parents back home, pursue education, buy a home, or set up their own business (Chin 2013, pp. 98, 117, 176). A large agency in the city provides comprehensive services for immigrant sex workers, facilitating their entry and providing “clients, personal security, housing, transportation, and banking” for a fee of 40% of their earnings. Chin (2013) found that this brokerage firm had a good reputation among the

migrant sex workers, echoed in a statement by one broker: “There is no need for force, no need to keep the women’s passports, no need to guard them 24 hours a day. No need for headaches” (pp. 143, 137, 136).

Another epicenter of human trafficking is from Eastern to Western Europe. Some of the studies described above highlight extreme victimization among European migrants, but others cluster at the opposite end of the spectrum. Similar to their Asian counterparts in the studies just described, the motives and migration experiences of Russian women who sell sex in Norway, for example, exhibit considerable intentionality:

The wish to improve the financial status of oneself and one’s family emerged as a central theme in the interviews we conducted. . . .The women distanced themselves from the stereotype of the passive victim. . . .They represented [prostitution] as something that provided both economic and experiential resources that helped them grow as individuals, to act responsibly toward themselves and others, and as a means to ensure independence and equality in their social relationships. . . .They talked about their actions in terms of intentions, choices, and desires. (Jacobsen & Skilbrei 2010, p. 190)

These findings are echoed almost verbatim in several other studies conducted in Europe (e.g., Mai 2011, Vocks & Nijboer 2000). Migrants respond, often in enterprising ways, to push factors at home, which include “lack of employment, loss of self-esteem, family abuse, interrupted education, and a general sense of life stagnation” (Andrijasevic 2010, p. 55). One of the most revealing studies is based on interviews with 100 men, women, and transgender people who had migrated to Britain in search of work (Mai 2009). Most of the respondents had entered the United Kingdom with the intention of working in jobs outside the sex sector, but dissatisfaction with these ordinary jobs and information from people working in the sex industry led them to consider erotic work. Most found sex work to be preferable to other work for the following reasons:

earning money quickly; managing time flexibly; having more opportunities to travel; being able to afford a dignified life and to help their families; meeting interesting people; getting a unique insight into human sexual and nonsexual behavior; and, less frequently, having enjoyable sex. (Mai 2009, p. 23)

Another advantage was that it was easier to engage in this work incognito as an unauthorized migrant than in more visible, regular jobs with greater barriers to entry. A minority of respondents, however, were trafficked: 6% of the women had been deceived or coerced into selling sex and 13% had been exploited by others.

Assessment. Although the literature contains evidence of all three types, it is possible that the intermediate type—mixed experiences or moderate victimization—is more common than the other two, especially when viewed in a temporal framework. As Andrijasevic (2010, p. 3) points out, abuse and exploitation are not necessarily “permanent or monolithic but open to negotiation and change over time depending on a shifting set of relationships” between the actors involved. For instance, the longer and more convoluted the journey from home to destination, the higher the risk of problems, including debt inflation, contracting illness, and violent victimization (Andrijasevic 2010, López Castro 1998). And once at the destination, conditions can change radically over time, for better or worse.

Regarding intermediaries and employers, the research literature shows that they vary tremendously in their relations with migrant workers (e.g., López Castro 1998, Spener 2009, Stovel & Shaw 2012). Indeed, “there is no standard profile of traffickers. They range from truck drivers and

village ‘aunties’ to labor brokers and police officers. Traffickers are as varied as the circumstances of their victims” (Feingold 2005, p. 28). A segment of the middleman and employer populations fits the predatory trafficker-slaveholder category well: recruiting by deception or force; mistreating migrants during transit; and severely exploiting, abusing, or enslaving people once they begin working. Other facilitators have innocuous and mutually beneficial relationships with migrants.

WHAT ABOUT MINORS?

Under international legal instruments, the assisted migration and employment of minors differ from that of adults. For minors, consent is irrelevant and coercion or deception is not necessary to qualify as trafficking or unfree labor. International conventions make some distinctions according to the minor’s age, however. The ILO deems persons under 15 years of age who are involved in labor as ipso facto victims: Their labor is considered both harmful and immoral. For the 15–17 age group, an ILO (2010) protocol permits them to work provided that they do not engage in the “worst forms of child labor,” meaning forced or hazardous work (p. 55). Hazardous work is defined as labor that endangers a person’s health and safety: long hours; night work; physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; work underground, under water, in confined spaces, or at risky altitudes; use of dangerous equipment or machinery; manual handling or transport of heavy loads; and exposure to hazardous substances, noise levels, or temperatures that can jeopardize health (ILO 2010, p. 6).

The ILO (2010, pp. xii, 56) estimates that 215 million youths worldwide are involved in labor, 115 million of whom are working under hazardous conditions and 5.7 million in forced or bonded labor. If these estimates are roughly accurate, it means that approximately 95 million minors are involved in work that is not dangerous, forced, or bonded. With more than half the population living below the poverty line, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest concentration of child labor worldwide, involving mostly agricultural work that is considered a normal part of daily life (Hilson 2010). But other kinds of work are quite taxing and dangerous for minors.

Interviews with youths show that their recruitment, labor migration, and the work itself can have both risks and rewards. Even those who are engaged in hazardous activities may not self-identify as victims. Ethnographic research in villages that send male minors to work in mines in Nigeria uncovered considerable intentionality on the part of the youths (Howard 2014). Their migration experiences and physically arduous and risky work would fit the ILO’s definition of “the worst forms of child labor” (long hours, handling of heavy loads, working in hot temperatures, use of mercury to amalgamate gold, working in underground mine shafts). But Howard’s subjects normalized these conditions and viewed their labor migration as an opportunity: It was one of the few ways to earn money to support their families, given the lack of income-earning opportunities in their home villages, and also provided them with social capital to attract marriage partners and personally advance in life. “In my case study villages, work, whether inside the home or for remuneration outside it, is not seen as a damaging ‘adult’ sphere from which under 18s are to be sheltered, nor in fact as anything other than an eminently positive and necessary part of being young and growing up” (Howard 2012, p. 463). A study of youths working in mines in Ghana identified similar push and pull factors (Hilson 2010), and a number of other studies of minors who would legally be defined as trafficking victims have found that many do not self-identify as victims and exhibit at least some agency, but also that their decision to migrate for work is typically conditioned by economic desperation and either filial obligation or outright pressure from family members (Gozdzik 2012, Montgomery 2001, O’Connell Davidson 2005). Facing poverty or starvation, parents in the developing world often feel compelled to ask their children to work.

Minors working in developed countries can profile somewhat differently from minors working in Africa or Asia. Interviews with 90 migrant male minors who sold sex in 18 European cities accented several benefits: “By selling sex, most interviewees were able to work and earn money, afford independent accommodation, remit to their families at home, take care of themselves, and have fun.” Many of them preferred to sell sex because it was less visible to the authorities than some other kinds of work and because it provided them with a type of “social interaction where they are valued and desired” in contrast to other jobs where “they feel undesirable and marginalized” (Mai 2011, pp. 1,244–45). According to their own accounts, it does not appear that these youths were involved in hazardous work, but laws in Europe would define them as trafficking victims by virtue of their status as minors involved in prostitution.

CONCLUSION

The root causes of human trafficking, like human smuggling, consist of structural impediments to migration, whether for work or to pursue other goals: limited opportunities or other push factors at home; immigration barriers in receiving countries; the cost of transit; and the need to rely on facilitators who may engage in deception, coercion, or exploitation. The more restrictive the barriers to cross-border migration, the greater the odds that the migrant will be victimized by third parties: “Enhanced border controls increase the undocumented modes of travel and raise costs, duration, and the likelihood of abuse for migrants” (Andrijasevic 2010, p. 128).

This review shows that migration, trafficking, and labor conditions can vary greatly over time, by location, and from one social network to another. This means that participants’ lived experiences vary along the same axes. Relations between migrants, brokers, and employers range from extreme physical and psychological abuse, severe economic exploitation, and terrible working conditions—qualifying as slavery or slavery-like conditions—to fully consensual and collaborative agreements between the parties. Some brokers are relatives, friends, or associates who recruit others and facilitate migration, individuals who have a very different relationship with migrants compared with those who use force or deception. A growing body of empirical research shows that migration and trafficking—especially when studied at the micro level—can be much more complex and variegated than the image propounded in the dominant, hyperbolic discourse on trafficking. Micro-level research can have important policy and enforcement implications as well: When findings pinpoint specific hot spots of victimization, they can be utilized by the authorities to locate perpetrators and disrupt trafficking rings and by service providers to aid victims in such locations.

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