

The Influence of the Internet and Cell Phones on Human Trafficking

CSci 289 Social Implications of Computer Technology

Lindsey Wingate

December 10, 2015 (Fall 2015)

Abstract Human Trafficking, also known as modern day slavery, has become one of the biggest international crises to date. People are sold for sex and labor in all countries throughout the world. This issue has become more complex since the technology boom. The internet has provided means for trafficking to go unnoticed, even on popular social media sites. Even when illegal activity is noticed, the offender may easily switch websites, profiles, or IP addresses. Similarly, cell phones provide human traffickers with simple, easily disposable communication devices that are difficult to track. With tools like these available to crime lords, human trafficking continues to increase. It is our responsibility to become educated and educate others on the dangers of Human Trafficking.

1. Introduction

Human Trafficking, also known as “modern slavery” or “trafficking in persons” refers to the act of taking someone against their will. According to the State Department’s 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report, these are umbrella terms to describe “recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion” (1). I became aware of Human Trafficking when I was a young teenager. I read an article in Seventeen magazine about a girl who was walking home from school and was abducted. She was kept hostage in a house close to her own home for weeks, repeatedly raped and abused. Eventually, she escaped. I was impressed with this girl’s determination to survive and horrified people would sexually assault a young girl. I had a desire to fight back. This report will focus on what Human Trafficking is, how it happens in the United States, how it has increased

since the introduction of the Internet and cell phones, and what we can do to help ourselves and current victims from being involved in Human Trafficking online.

2. Topic Description

According to the United Nation's International Labour Organization, Human Trafficking is an estimated \$150-billion-dollar industry (7). It is important to keep in mind the statistics on Human Trafficking vary considerably. In the 2014 Human Trafficking Report the State Department notes "reliable statistics related to human trafficking are difficult to find" (4). The nature of this industry makes it incredibly difficult to maintain any statistics because the number of traffickers and people being trafficked is variable.

Human Trafficking is classified into seven categories. The first, Sex Trafficking, is "when an adult engages in a commercial sex act, such as prostitution, as the result of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion or any combination of such means" (1). The second, Child Sex Trafficking, is "when a child (under 18 years of age) is recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided, obtained, or maintained to perform a commercial sex act" (1). Both of these and lead to "devastating consequences...including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDs), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and even death" (1).

Other forms of Human Trafficking include Forced Labor (when someone is coerced or threatened to work) and Debt Bondage (when someone is forced to work off a debt). Many people are taken advantage of when they attempt to immigrate to the United States. They are promised a job and good compensation. Instead, they arrive and are forced to work to make up the cost of their trip and more. Usually their debt increases as they continue to work for low wages and are required to pay for food and board. Although Bonded Labor is outlawed in the United States, many immigrants are still subject to working off illegal debts (1).

Another form of trafficking is Forced Child Labor. This refers to children being forced to work (usually in terrible conditions with little or no pay). Similarly, Domestic Servitude refers to people being forced to work in a private residence (also with low wages and poor living

conditions). Finally, the Unlawful Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers is a classification of Human Trafficking but more common in other countries and will not be a point of focus in this report (1).

In the past, human traffickers picked up vulnerable people in the streets. Now, criminals have taken to finding people online. “Kendis Paris, who runs the U.S.-based Truckers Against Trafficking mobilizing lorry drivers against domestic sex trafficking, said social media was a ‘massive entry point’ ... “(7). He has also said children were easy to manipulate, “especially young girls... looking for love” (7). FAIR Girls, an organization dedicated to help girls escape the sex industry, declared “90 percent of the people it helped in Washington D.C. and Maryland had been sold online”(7). Vulnerable web users have become the main targets in the sex trafficking industry.

There are many examples in the news of sex trafficking as a result of people meeting online. A man named Everett Arnold Walker “was sentenced to four years in state prison for pimping a woman in Orange County, [California] after meeting her on an online dating website” (5). Similarly, a man named Douglas Davalos Jackson was convicted for “pimping out” a 15-year-old girl throughout the Midwest. While they were together, he would advertise “the girl’s services on the website backpage.com upon arriving in each city.” (6). In these situations, the internet was used as a mechanism to contact victims and to propel sex trafficking business.

Social media sites are easy to access, use, and play a large role in trafficking. They allow users to contact unlimited other users. A trafficker could contact hundreds or thousands of lonely, vulnerable young girls. "If just one of them answers ... traffickers can make thousands of dollars off that girl very quickly” (7). Social media has now extended from chat rooms to personal applications on people’s phones. The many new tools of communication increase the likelihood of being contacted by someone unknown. It is easier than ever to respond and maintain a relationship with untrustworthy people because of these technological developments.

Cell phones are dangerous tools of sex trafficking. Mark Latonero, an assistant professor at the University of Southern California, has performed vast research on technology

1 and human trafficking. In his report “The Rise of Mobile and the Diffusion of Technology-
2 Facilitated Trafficking” he emphasizes the following:

3 “While the sex trafficking of minors continues to expand across
4 multiple media platforms, our research indicates that the rise of
5 mobile technology may fundamentally transform the trafficking
6 landscape. No other communication technology in history, including
7 the Internet, has been adopted so rapidly around the world...
8 Mobile’s ability to facilitate real-time communication and
9 coordination, unbound by physical location, is also being exploited
10 by traffickers to extend the reach of their illicit activities.
11 Traffickers are able to recruit, advertise, organize, and communicate
12 primary – or even exclusively – via mobile phone, effectively
13 streamlining their activities and expanding their criminal networks”
14 (8).

15 Maintaining traces on *all* the cell phones that may be used in the Human Trafficking industry
16 has proved an impossible task. Tracking illegal postings on the Internet has proved equally
17 challenging. These technologies have allowed traffickers to speed up their business and leave
18 justice workers behind.

19 Although a lot of victims are not trafficked directly through social media sites or apps,
20 many suffer from the globalization brought on by technological developments. Traveling
21 around the world has become easier due to the Internet and cell phones. The increase in
22 international travel has allowed traffickers to prey on those that are weak, especially people
23 looking for better job opportunities to take care of their families. People in other countries often
24 see America as a beacon of hope and jump at the opportunity to work here. This idea allows
25 traffickers to take advantage of people and introduce them to an unfamiliar world. Once they
26 arrive in the United States, they are left without their families and friends and no way to escape.
27 CAST, a Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking, includes the survival story of John on
28 their website:

29 “John was trafficked into the United States from Indonesia through
30 promises of legitimate work at an assisted living community. John jumped at
31 the opportunity because he hoped it would help him fulfill his dream of
32 becoming a nurse. Upon arriving in the U.S. however, John found himself in
33 a completely different situation than he had expected.

34 John and several other victims from East Asia were deceived into
35 working for a couple who forced them to work long hours, which went easily
36 unnoticed as they were all forced to live onsite. After several months of
37 working under constant fear of physical abuse and deportation, John and two

1 others were liberated by the FBI, which had been conducting an investigation
2 of the business and its practices” (11).

3
4 Globalization has made it much easier for traffickers to take advantage of immigrants.

5 6 **3. Social Implications**

7 People have begun to take a step back from socialization in the real world to socialization
8 on the Internet. Cell phones and the internet provide communication options that encourage less
9 responsibility and anonymity. For some people, mostly younger generations, “the whole of
10 technology can see like a giant playground, with its devices like toys to be explored and enjoyed”
11 (9). There is no filter for what some deem worthy of posting online.

12 As more technology is introduced to society, we need more technological responsibility.
13 If greater precaution was taken with what information was put on the internet and who we talked
14 to online, Human Trafficking would decrease significantly. This will not solve the problem of
15 international human trafficking, but it is a start. To prevent Human Trafficking online, the flux in
16 what is appropriate to share and what isn’t must be contained.

17 As technology continues to develop, computer etiquette must be included in general
18 education. An article by Caroline Knorr entitled “7 Rules to Teach Kids Online Etiquette”
19 reviews steps to allow internet interaction to be “a little more civil” (10). A few steps include:
20 checking the context of what is written and make sure it is appropriate for the situation, double-
21 check to be sure something is not misinterpreted, and do not involve yourself in rude
22 communication; it is very likely to escalate. Last, maintain the privacy of your life and others.
23 Once information is on the internet, you can never get it back. I would add not talking to
24 strangers is extremely important. As children we learned not to talk to people we are unfamiliar
25 with in the street; the same rule applies to the internet.

26 Even if these social implications are acknowledged and general education is improved on
27 computer etiquette, Human Trafficking is already an international problem. Just as John’s story
28 displayed a desperation for a better life, people will continue to follow in his footsteps. People are
29 still stuck in the sex and labor industries with no escape. The 2015 Trafficking of Persons Report

1 “places a special emphasis on human trafficking in the global marketplace. It highlights...the
2 steps that governments and businesses can take to prevent trafficking, including a demand for
3 transparency in global supply chains” (1). Trafficking has officially captured the attention of the
4 United Nations and governments all over the world. It is only a matter of time before law
5 enforcement methods catch up.

6 There are many things Americans can do to help minimize Human Trafficking. First,
7 gaining an understanding is essential to understanding what is currently happening in our world.
8 Many non-profit organizations such as Walk Free and The Polaris Project maintain active
9 websites promoting events to fight slavery. There are also sites where you can report odd activity,
10 specifically [fbi.gov](https://www.fbi.gov). As emphasized many times, avoiding people online you do not know is
11 essential. Even if you add them and never talk to them there is always a chance they begin
12 conversing with your friends or contacts.

13 The last and most important action we can take against Human Trafficking is *not*
14 watching porn. “Even if a porn explicitly states that all actors are over 18 and have consented to
15 being filmed, that just may not be true...The trafficked actresses may simply be trained to look
16 and act older” (2). There is no way to tell when a XXX video was made legally or not. Avoiding
17 porn guarantees you are not supporting Human Trafficking in any form.

19 **4. Conclusion**

20 Human Trafficking is a real issue in the United States and abroad. The changes in social
21 and computer etiquette have lead people to Sex Trafficking, many when they are still children.
22 Internationally, technology has initiated globalization for good and bad. The same open
23 channels that allow cultures to learn and understand one another also allow vulnerable
24 immigrants to become slaves. We must call upon our common sense to keep ourselves, our
25 families, and our friends from danger and use technology for good to fight Human Trafficking.

1

2 **5. References**

- 3 1. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, July 2015,
4 <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>
5 2. Eleanor Goldberg, *10 Things You Didn't Know About Slavery, Human Trafficking (And*
6 *What You Can Do About It)*, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/15/human->
7 [trafficking-month_n_4590587.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/15/human-trafficking-month_n_4590587.html), January 1 2014
8 3. The Polaris Project, polarisproject.org, 2015
9 4. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2014,
10 <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/index.htm>
11 5. Robert J. Lopez and Ben Welsh, *Man gets four years in pimping of woman he met on*
12 *online dating site*, Los Angeles Times, May 6 2014,
13 [http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-man-convicted-pimping-woman-](http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-man-convicted-pimping-woman-20140506-story.html#lightbox=80124533)
14 [20140506-story.html#lightbox=80124533](http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-man-convicted-pimping-woman-20140506-story.html#lightbox=80124533)
15 6. John Hogan, *Man who 'pimped out teen in seven states gets prison*, WZZM, December
16 4 2015, [http://www.wzzm13.com/story/news/2015/12/04/sex-trafficking-of-](http://www.wzzm13.com/story/news/2015/12/04/sex-trafficking-of-minors/76795972/)
17 [minors/76795972/](http://www.wzzm13.com/story/news/2015/12/04/sex-trafficking-of-minors/76795972/)
18 7. Alex Whiting, *Tech-savvy sex traffickers stay ahead of authorities as lure teens online*,
19 Yahoo! News, November 15 2015
20 8. Mark Latonero, *The Rise of Mobile and the Diffision of Technology-Facilitated*
21 *Trafficking*, November 2012
22 9. Chris Nickson, *How a Young Generation Accepts Technology*,
23 <http://www.atechnologysociety.co.uk/how-young-generation-accepts-technology.html>,
24 November 23 2015
25 10. Caroline Knorr, *7 Rules to Teach Kids Online Etiquette*,
26 <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/blog/7-rules-to-teach-kids-online-etiquette>, May 5
27 2011
28 11. CAST: Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking, *About the Issue*,
29 <http://www.castla.org/john>, December 2015

30
31
32 **6. Appendix**

33 See attached pages.