

Understanding the Role of Transportation in Human Trafficking in California

Project 2108
November 2022

Kezban Yagci Sokat, PhD



Introduction

Human trafficking, a form of modern slavery, is the recruitment, transport, and/or transfer of persons using force, fraud, or coercion to exploit them for acts of labor or sex. According to the International Labor Organization, human trafficking is the fastest growing organized crime with approximately \$150 billion in annual profits and 40.3 million individuals trapped in slave-like conditions. While it is not compulsory to involve transportation for human trafficking, the transportation industry plays a critical role in combating human trafficking as traffickers often rely on the transportation system to recruit, move, or transfer victims. Recognizing the importance of transportation, multiple anti-trafficking stakeholders in California have started initiatives to address the problem. This research investigates the role of transportation in combating human trafficking.

Study Methods

This multi-method study utilizes a multi-disciplinary practitioner survey followed up with semi-structured in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. The experts include diverse individuals from various positions, backgrounds, and roles from inside and outside the transportation industry. The expert input is supplemented with labor violations and transit accessibility analysis.

Findings

74% of the participants state that transportation is used in trafficking operations to transport and control the victims. While the type of vehicle changes based on the type of trafficking, industry, geography, and distance, private cars and ridesharing are the most commonly used vehicles for human trafficking. 64% of the participants state that they do not collect data pertaining to transportation in human trafficking. Labor violations, which can be indicators of human

trafficking, and transit accessibility analysis show that there can be relationships between labor violations and accessibility for temporary workers with H-2A or H-2B visas.

"As a survivor, I had contact with law enforcement, the department of agriculture, DOT [the US Department of Transportation], and highway patrol, and none recognized me (as a victim)."

Policy/Practice Recommendations

Experts emphasize the importance of education, training, and awareness efforts combined with partnership, data, and analysis. Screening the transportation industry personnel for human trafficking is another step that the industry can take. Particularly, sharing perpetrator information and transportation related trends among transportation modalities and local groups could help all anti-trafficking practitioners. Also, the transportation industry can support the victims and survivors in their exit attempts and post/exit life. Examples of this kind of support include serving as a safe haven and providing transportation to services. Transportation should ensure that all of these efforts are survivor-centric, inclusive for all types of trafficking, and tailored to the needs of the modality, population, and location.

About the Author

Kezban Yagci Sokat, PhD

Dr. Yagci Sokat is an Assistant Professor of Business Analytics at San José State University with a passion to use analytics for alleviating human suffering in the areas of public health, humanitarian logistics, and human trafficking. She received her PhD in Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences from Northwestern University.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2108



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.