



Effect of anti-trafficking interventions not known

This user abstract presents the following Campbell systematic review: van der Laan P, Smit M, Busschers I, Aarten P. Cross-border trafficking in human beings: prevention and intervention strategies for reducing sexual exploitation. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2011:9. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2011.9.

There is growing international concern over trafficking for sexual exploitation. Many policies and interventions to combat trafficking have been initiated; however, a new Campbell review concludes that there are currently not enough rigorous evaluations to determine their effect.

CROSS-BORDER TRAFFICKING: A GLOBAL PROBLEM

Human trafficking generally involves the use of force, fraud or coercion to enslave people in situations that are exploitative and in many cases illegal and dangerous. It occurs in a variety of sectors and industries. Cross-border trafficking for sexual exploitation has traditionally been the most commonly reported form of trafficking and accounts for the majority of all trafficking cases. The number of cross-border trafficking victims is estimated at anywhere from 600,000 to 2 million per year.

The goals of anti-trafficking policies and interventions vary. They range from awareness-raising and providing education and employment to victims, to changing legislation and prosecuting perpetrators. The literature suggests that most interventions focus on prevention activities directed at high-risk populations, victims, perpetrators, policy makers and/or the general population.

A DIFFICULT TOPIC TO RESEARCH

This review found that due to a lack of high quality evaluation studies on anti-trafficking measures no conclusions can currently be made regarding the effectiveness of these policies and interventions.

Though unable to come to reliable conclusions about the effectiveness of anti-trafficking initiatives, the authors make some pertinent observations based on a narrative review of four studies. Firstly, evaluation studies are becoming more common in this field, which may indicate a growing interest in evidence-based practice. However, challenges regarding methodology and ethical concerns remain. The vulnerability of the target population and the secrecy of the crime make it a difficult topic to research.

Secondly, the goals of evaluation and monitoring activities range from evaluating the implementation of the intervention to evaluating the experiences of the individuals concerned. The diversity in measured outcomes poses problems when summarizing the research.

Thirdly, there is inconsistency across studies regarding the distinction between

prostitution, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and voluntary migration for sex work. This confusion makes it difficult to compare interventions.

Finally, there seems to be a lack of reflection in the implementation of anti-trafficking policies and interventions. New interventions are being planned before ongoing interventions are properly evaluated. This approach is not only costly, but it can also be damaging to the end goal of preventing or suppressing trafficking. The authors emphasise the importance of effect studies in order to understand which support is valuable to victims and potential victims, and to which areas funding is best directed.

FACTS ABOUT THE REVIEW

This review searched for studies which examined the effectiveness of anti-trafficking measures (policies and interventions) to prevent or suppress cross-border trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Studies were not limited in terms of the population being studied (perpetrators, policy makers or victims) or where the intervention was implemented.

Of twenty studies which examined anti-trafficking interventions, none fit the criteria of being effect studies of potential sufficient quality i.e. experimental or quasi-experimental. Four of the twenty studies, however, were appropriate for a narrative review. These studies looked at anti-trafficking interventions aimed at cross-border trafficking for sexual exploitation. The results of the narrative review are outlined above.

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Further information

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