

## Tracking Modern Day Slavery

*NIJ Research in Progress Seminar, "Trafficking in Persons in the United States," Kevin Bales, grant number 01-IJ-CX-0027, available on videotape from NCJRS (NCJ 199458).*

Most people believe that slavery ended in the United States with the passage of the 13th Amendment—but the importation of people into this country for purposes of forced labor and the sex trade continues in the 21st century. Researcher Kevin Bales has documented the extent of this practice both domestically and worldwide; his findings were presented as part of NIJ's Research in Progress seminar series.

### Predictor of Human Development

Bales collects nation-by-nation data on the amount of human trafficking into and out of each country and the percentage of each country's population that can be considered in some way enslaved. These figures were included in a study conducted by Robert B. Smith, currently unpublished, which looked at predictors of "human development" based on the United Nations Human Development Index ("the Index").

The Index gauges the quality of life for residents in a given nation and combines economic well-being with social factors (such as literacy) and health factors (such as longevity). Bales anticipated that the extent of human trafficking and slavery would be a predictor of poor human development.

To Bales' astonishment, the analysis showed that human trafficking and enslavement were not just predictors of a low standard of living—they were by far the strongest predictor. This was true in every region of the world. Extent of democracy, amount of civil conflict, level of national debt, and level of corruption, among other factors, trailed participation in slavery as portents of poor human development.

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### Preliminary Data

But what leads to such trafficking? Early statistical analysis by Bales indicates several "push" factors; that is, factors that seem to enable trafficking *from* a given country. Those that appear to be significant are: (1) government corruption, (2) high infant mortality, (3) a very young population, (4) low food production, and (5) conflict and social unrest. Preliminary data are less clear in indicating factors that lead to human trafficking *to* a country.

### The Dark Figure

The "dark figure" is a term used by criminologists to represent the difference between reports to authorities of a particular crime and the number of instances of that crime that probably go unreported. Generally, the more petty the crime, the higher the dark figure. Bicycle theft is often cited as an example of a crime with a high dark figure. Some surveys have shown that up to 80 percent of bicycle thefts are never reported to police. The dark figure for murder, on the other hand, is expected to be very low.

According to Bales, human trafficking, a crime of extreme severity for the victims, has the kind of large dark figure normally associated with misdemeanors. In 2001, for example, there were 104 prosecutions for human trafficking in the United States, involving 400–500 identified victims. Approximately 1,000 more victims were identified by social service agencies but never brought to the attention of law enforcement (for reasons such as fear of deportation). That same year, a State Department study

estimated that between 45,000 and 50,000 women and children were brought into the United States for illicit purposes.<sup>1</sup>

Bales suggests that international development policymakers need to place forced labor higher on their agendas. And more needs to be done to identify this “hidden” crime in the United States. Extensive consciousness raising among the public, including educating citizens about suspicious activities that they should be aware of in their own neighborhoods, may help to lessen the trafficking of people within this country.

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#### For more information

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#### Notes

1. Richard, Amy O'Neill, *International Trafficking in Women to the United States: A Contemporary Manifestation of Slavery and Organized Crime*, Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, Center for the Study of Intelligence, November 1999 (NCJ 181952).