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A Quantitative Analysis of Gender Inequality on Efforts to Reduce Human Trafficking in
Countries

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Senior Honors Project

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements
of the Westover Honors College**

Westover Honors College

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Abstract

The phenomenon of human trafficking is a growing problem that affects millions worldwide. Literature on the subject suggests that inequality between men and women can be a crucial factor in determining national efforts to combat trafficking in persons. This research studies the association between a country's efforts to reduce trafficking with the measure of inequality being the literacy rate difference and unemployment rate difference between men and women in each country. An analysis of variance yielded statistically significant results that national efforts to combat human trafficking were associated with inequality between men and women in those nations. Discussion on how these results can inform efforts to combat trafficking is included as well as application of routine activities theory and feminist theory.

Introduction

In August 2022, USA TODAY published a report about a nationwide FBI operation called “Operation Cross Country” that led to many victims of human trafficking being rescued throughout the United States. This operation resulted in the recovery of 141 adult victims of human trafficking and 84 minor victims of child sex trafficking (Mendoza, 2022). In addition, 85 alleged perpetrators of human trafficking and child sexual exploitation were arrested or identified (Mendoza, 2022). However, it is important to note that the number of victims that are reported to be recovered only scratches the surface of the scale of human trafficking as a whole. This illicit, international trafficking of human beings takes place every day in every part of the world.

According to the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, “human trafficking is a multi-dimensional threat: it deprives people of their human rights..., it is a global health risk, and it fuels the growth of organized crime” (U.S. Department of State, 2008). Ghala Waly, who is the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, further explains the extent of damage human trafficking causes by saying, “Every day, in every country in the world, human traffickers exploit people for profit. The poor and the vulnerable are most at risk. Over 70 percent of detected trafficking victims are women and girls, while nearly one third are children” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). The disparity in the number of female human trafficking victims is important to explore.

Data shows that there are millions of trafficking victims around the globe, and furthermore, this illegal travesty creates billions of dollars in revenue globally each year. Bradley Myles, the CEO of Polaris, a U.S. nonprofit that oversees the National Human Trafficking Hotline, states that the business of human trafficking profits approximately \$150 billion dollars annually (Niethammer, 2020). As reported by the International Labor Organization (ILO), there are 50 million human trafficking victims of modern slavery in the world as of 2021 estimates. (International Labor Organization, 2022). It is important to note that the United States recognizes

two forms of human trafficking: forced labor, which includes domestic servitude and forced child labor, and sex trafficking. It is vital to understand their differences. From the 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report issued by the United States Department of State annually, their distinctions are below (United States Department of State, 2022).

Forced Labor

Forced labor, sometimes also referred to as labor trafficking, encompasses the range of activities involved when a person uses force, fraud, or coercion to exploit the labor or services of another person (United States Department of State, 2022).

Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking encompasses the range of activities involved when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to compel another person to engage in a commercial sex act or causes a child to engage in a commercial sex act (United States Department of State, 2022).

While not recognized as one of the two primary forms of human trafficking in the United States under federal law, the United States Department of State defines forced marriage as “a marriage that takes place without the consent of one or both people in the marriage” (*Forced Marriage*, 2018).

Human trafficking is a global crisis that is plaguing millions of victims. This study aims to analyze the relationship between a country’s U.S. State Department tier ranking (a measure of a country’s efforts to reduce human trafficking) versus their literacy rate difference between males and females in addition to their youth (ages 15 to 24) unemployment rate difference between males and females as a measure of gender inequality. This is an important association to explore due to the fact that inequality can lead to poverty and unemployment, which is a major risk factor in being vulnerable to trafficking.

Literature Review

In order to better understand global efforts to reduce human trafficking, this review will first look at the historical evolution of efforts on a global level and the various definitions associated with human trafficking. The discussion will then turn to examining the extent and

patterns of human trafficking (How many people are trafficked? Who are the victims of trafficking? Who are the most vulnerable?). Finally, a review of the literature will explore the potential relationship between efforts to reduce trafficking and gender inequality in countries.

The History of Global Efforts to Reduce Trafficking Of Persons

For the United States, many efforts have been undertaken over the years to reduce trafficking in persons, mainly through legislation. In the U.S. Constitution, in accordance with the Thirteenth amendment, human trafficking is outlawed. In 2000, Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) to tackle the insufficiency of prior legislation and law enforcement's attempts to prevent trafficking. The TVPA has three main focal areas for the reduction of human trafficking: prevention, prosecution, and protection (Mollema, 2015).

International efforts have been recognized as key to combating trafficking. From the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, many of the most notable global anti-trafficking organizations were founded. For example, The Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women was established in 1994, Free the Slaves in 2000, the Polaris Project (now Polaris) in 2002, and Not For Sale in 2007 (Foot et al., 2015). These organizations pushed for transnational efforts to fight trafficking in person such as international treaties with some notable successes.

As an example, in 2000 more than 80 countries met in Italy to sign the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (United Nations, 2013). Another example is the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (European Trafficking Convention) was ratified by more than 40 countries (United Nations, 2013). Both of these legislations signified an international effort to end trafficking (Foot et al., 2015). Ten years after the U.N. Protocol was first passed, the "Global Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking" was passed by the U.N. General Assembly. The Global Plan urged every government to collaborate with each other to "promote comprehensive,

coordinated and consistent responses at the national, regional and international levels, to counter trafficking in persons” (Foot et al., 2015).

A further example of cooperation between countries to fight trafficking is the U.N. Global Initiative to Fight Trafficking. In 2007, it was initiated by the International Labor Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Organization for Migration, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Foot et al., 2015). Through these global efforts and various organizations, there are various definitions of human trafficking. However, according to the U.N. Protocol, human trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, transport, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.).

Extent and Patterns of Human Trafficking

Research has shown that trafficking in persons occurs in every region of the globe and can happen to anyone. According to the U.S. Department of State, “there is no single profile of a trafficking victim” (United States Department of Justice, 2020). Anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education level, or any other characteristic. However, there are certain characteristics that can make someone more vulnerable to be preyed upon by traffickers. These include being poor, living in an unsafe or unstable environment, or searching for a better life (United States Department of Justice, 2020). Furthermore, according to the 2006 TIP Report, various factors can supply traffickers with victims. Such factors include “poverty, the attraction of perceived higher standards of living elsewhere, lack of employment opportunities in the immediate area,

organized crime, violence against women and children, and discrimination against women” (United States Department of State, 2006).

Globally, women and children are victims of trafficking disproportionately. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), “the inequalities women face in status and opportunity worldwide make women particularly vulnerable to trafficking.” The ACLU further states that factors such as “poverty, gender discrimination, illiteracy and low levels of education, regional conflicts and a lack of job opportunities affect women in great numbers” (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). The International Labor Organization (ILO) states “women and girls are disproportionately affected by modern slavery, accounting for 28.7 million, or 71 per cent of the overall total.” More specifically, 99 percent of forced labor victims in the commercial sex industry are women and girls. They also account for over half in other sectors (International Labor Organization, 2017).

Similar to there being no “one-type-fits-all” trafficking victim, traffickers can also differ. Human trafficking perpetrators can be any race, ethnicity, and gender. They can work alone or part of an organized crime network (United States Department of Justice, 2020). According to Polaris, traffickers can include business owners, gang members, or even family members of victims. Traffickers also use many tactics to control and take advantage of their victims, such as physical, emotional, and economic abuse, and isolation. Victims are then trapped due to psychological trauma, emotional attachment, or threats (Polaris, 2022).

The Relationship Between Trafficking and Gender Inequality: A Global Perspective

There has been a multitude of research completed on the correlation between gender inequality and human trafficking. Research has shown there are a variety of consequences social inequality has on a person, such as violence, victimization, and mental illness (Sampson, 2008). Studies have also indicated that poverty and injustice increases as social inequality increases on a

global level (Barner et al., 2014). Violence against women and sexual victimization tend to be higher in localities with higher levels of unemployment and poverty (Martin et al., 2006; Vyas & Heise, 2016). Additionally, people who are socially unequal are less likely to have social capital (Barner et al., 2014). Social capital is important in the fact that it helps a person be successful in their lives and have a network of people to rely on.

One of the most critical effects of inequalities between and within nations is the occurrence of human trafficking (MacKinnon, 2012). Poverty and following economic migration have long been asserted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) as a primary cause of human trafficking (International Labor Organization, 2016). Moreover, “lack of resources, jobs, and educational opportunities combined with promises of employment abroad can motivate women to leave their home countries, which can lead to adverse experiences such as sexual exploitation and indentured servitude” (Cho, 2015; Jespersen, 2019; Vijayarasa, 2012). For example, economically impoverished families in underdeveloped nations can be enticed by the promise of income that can benefit the whole family by sacrificing a member of the family in the form of a child (Roby, 2005).

Furthermore, past studies have shown that human trafficking is primarily a female-centered problem, with sex trafficking affecting women disproportionately (Amahazion, 2014; Cho, 2015; Crawford, 2016; UNODC, 2018a, 2016b). Limited educational and employment opportunities have also been linked to higher rates of trafficked women and in many regions, it leads to higher rates of violence against women (Barner et al., 2014; Cho, 2015; Fawole, 2008; Vyas & Heise, 2016). Moreover, the overall vulnerability of women has been exacerbated by discriminatory behaviors related to educational pursuits, training, and employment that has contributed significantly to the feminization of poverty (Cameron & Newman, 2008; Chuang, 2006; Kligman & Limoncelli, 2005).

The preceding review of the literature illustrates how the topic of human trafficking on a global level and its potential relationship to gender inequality is an important topic that has been researched substantially. However, questions still remain on this possible correlation. The present study aims to analyze the relationship further.

Methods

The preceding review of the literature demonstrates that the question of whether there is a relationship between a country's efforts to reduce human trafficking and a country's gender inequality is a crucial one to understand. This research project aims to examine this question by examining the following research question: there is a relationship between efforts to reduce trafficking and gender inequality in countries.

The project explores that question by engaging in a secondary data analysis study. A secondary data study is one that uses existing statistics rather than original statistics from the researcher of the current study. This secondary data analysis study focuses on 170 countries

around the world. This population is necessary to focus on because human trafficking is a global issue that mainly involves migration between and within the countries of the world.

This project conceptualizes the dependent variable of tier ranking for each country as “the extent of government efforts to meet the TVPA’s minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking” (United States Department of State, 2022). It is operationalized by the U.S. State Department applying the criteria in the definitions below to the countries to rank them. The TVPA defines the tier placements as follows:

Tier 1

Countries whose governments fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.

Tier 2

Countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

Tier 2 Watch List

Countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards, and for which:

- the estimated number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing and the country is not taking proportional concrete actions; or*
- there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year, including increased investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of trafficking crimes, increased assistance to victims, and decreasing evidence of complicity in severe forms of trafficking by government officials.*

Tier 3

Countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA's minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. (United States Department of State, 2022).

Therefore, the options for tier rankings include 1 for Tier 1, 2 for Tier 2, 2.5 for Tier 2 Watch List, or 3 for Tier 3.

This project conceptualizes the independent variable of literacy as the difference between male and female literacy rates which is defined as “the ability to read and write at a specified age”. It is operationalized by the CIA World Factbook using UNESCO's percentage estimates for populations aged 15 years and over (CIA World Factbook, n.d.).

This project conceptualizes the independent variable of unemployment as the difference between male and female youth unemployment rates which is defined as “the percent of the total labor force 15-24 unemployed during a specified year”. It is operationalized by the CIA World Factbook for populations aged 15 years to 24 years (CIA World Factbook, n.d.).

Results

The preceding statement of the problem and literature review has established that it is crucial to know more about the influence of gender inequality on countries' efforts to reduce trafficking in persons. The methods section explains how this study aims to explore that influence by conducting a secondary data analysis to examine the research question of: there is a relationship between countries' efforts to reduce trafficking and that country's level of gender inequality (using literacy differences and unemployment differences between men and women). This research project performs first a univariate analysis of the variables, then a bi-variate Pearson's correlation analysis and finally a listwise regression to further explore the connection.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of tier rankings by gender difference in literacy rates and unemployment rates

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tier	2.049	.571
Literacy	4.857	7.764
Unemployed	3.767	8.676

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations for the dependent variable (United States Department of State tier rankings of countries' anti-trafficking efforts) and the two independent variables of the differences, by country, in male and female literacy and unemployment rates.

A Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed to analyze the relationship between tier ranking and literacy rate differences and tier ranking and unemployment rate differences, respectively.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Correlation between:	Correlation	Significance
Tier and Literacy	.259	<.001
Tier and Unemployment	.080	.453

Table 2 shows that there is a positive correlation between tier ranking and literacy rate differences. This correlation is statistically significant on a .05 level with a significance of <.001. The second independent variable, unemployment rate differences, also has a positive correlation

with tier ranking, but this correlation is not statistically significant with a significance of .453. Therefore, we can conclude that the gender difference in literacy rates is associated with differences in tier ranking, while the unemployment rate differences likely do not. A regression analysis was performed in order to better understand the relative influence of the independent variables.

Table 3. Regression model statistics

Adjusted R Square	.063
Significance	.001

Table 3 shows that the model (both independent variables included) have a small, but statistically significant association with tier ranking.

Table 4. Beta coefficients of independent variables

	Beta Coefficient	Significance
Literacy	.019	<.001
Unemployed	.005	.279

Table 4 shows that on a .05 significance level, literacy is the only independent variable that is statistically significant with a significance of <.001 while unemployment is not statistically significant with a significance of .279. The implications of these results are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

The statement of the problem and the literature review portions of this study covered the dangers of human trafficking from a global perspective. This is why it is key to understand variables, such as a country's gender inequality rate, that may be a contributor to trafficking. In order to better understand this subject, this project aims to explore the following research

question: there is a relationship between a country's efforts to reduce trafficking and gender inequality.

Routine Activities Theory

One major criminological theory that could explain vulnerability to trafficking is Routine Activities Theory. Originally developed by criminologists Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson, this theory states that most crimes occur due to three factors: 1) a motivated offender, 2) a suitable target, and 3) the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Routine Activities Theory can help us understand why victims can be taken advantage of and become targets to predators.

First, perpetrators of human trafficking can be motivated by the lucrative monetary gains that trafficking victims provide and the sense of control and power. Secondly, many trafficking victims lack a capable guardian due to the fact that victims leave their families in search of a better life or to work to provide for their families. In turn, they are alone and left endangered to traffickers. Lastly, victims of trafficking can be suitable targets due to their vulnerability because of several factors, such as being poor, uneducated, unemployed, or discriminated against. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the lack of educational investment and opportunities for women relative to men in many nations could leave them more likely to be poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable as targets.

The Feminist Approach to Human Trafficking in the Lens of Policy

It is important to analyze the different perspectives of human trafficking in the lens of international law and policy implications. Jennifer Lobasz, author of *Beyond Border Security: Feminist Approaches to Human Trafficking* explains the two approaches to international human trafficking regarding international law, security, and policy - the traditional approach and the feminist approach (2009). The traditional approach's security focus is on states with the security

threat being traffickers and undocumented migrants (Lobasz, 2009). Policy is focused on border security, migration control, and law enforcement cooperation with the traditional approach (Lobasz, 2009). However, many feminist scholars argue that the traditional approach is deficient as there are various ways to view human trafficking's threat.

On the other hand, the feminist approach's security focus is on the individuals involved and the security threat includes human traffickers, law enforcement officials and border patrol agents, and abusive clients and employers (Lobasz, 2009). The policy focus of the feminist approach are social services, human rights, safe migration, and protection of workers (Lobasz, 2009). Feminists challenge the traditional approach in several ways.

A feminist approach first forgoes the traditional approach by focusing on the security of the trafficking victims as well as recognizing that traffickers and the state itself can pose security threats (Lobasz, 2009). Secondly, as a matter of ethics, the violation of human rights that trafficking victims endure should be of foremost importance. With the traditional approach's focus on the state's security threat, the voices of trafficked persons are ignored even though the state is legally obligated to protect their human rights (Lobasz, 2009). Feminists believe that instead of solving the issue of human trafficking, the traditional approach worsens the problem (Lobasz, 2009). Another way that the feminist approach differs is that it emphasizes the importance of gender that human security theories and the traditional approach do not.

According to feminist scholar Hilary Charlesworth, in *Feminist Approaches to International Law*, the practices of human trafficking exploit women "not on the simple basis of inequality or differences among individuals, but as a result of deeply ingrained constructs of power and dominance based on gender" (Charlesworth, 1999). Charlesworth goes on to point out that economic interests also play a part in exploitation of women. In third world countries,

growing economic inequality on a national and global level increases the extent of trafficking in women (Charlesworth, 1999). Lobasz also incorporates gender as an important point of analysis in human trafficking.

The prevailing constructions of human trafficking depend on and bring about gender and racial stereotypes (Lobasz, 2009). Furthermore, feminist approaches focus on “gender-related human rights abuses” in addition to studying how gender stereotypes affect the issue of human trafficking (Lobasz, 2009). All in all, the feminist approach establishes that gender and the victims themselves are of foremost importance in analyzing trafficking in persons.

Implications of Results

Analysis demonstrated strong evidence for the relationship between the first dependent variable, literacy rate differences between men and women, and tier ranking since it had a statistically significant, positive correlation. The second dependent variable, unemployment rate differences between men and women, also had a positive correlation with tier ranking, however, the correlation was not statistically significant. Therefore, we can conclude that the gender difference in literacy rates is associated with differences in tier ranking, while the unemployment rate differences likely do not.

Limitations and Future Research

This study did have several limitations. First, this study only examined two major independent variables. This could involve a more complex problem that would require other variables other than literacy rates and unemployment rates as a measure of gender inequality. Secondly, the data from this study comes from the most recent year literacy rate data and unemployment rate data was published for a particular country, therefore the years vary. Finally, the tier rankings come from the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report that is issued by the U.S.

Department of State annually. These rankings could be viewed as coming from a particular government, which could be a source of bias.

Future research on this association could be improved in various ways. First, future analyses should examine multiple independent variables and use an advanced multivariate analysis. Next, projects following this one could use data from a uniform year. Finally, this study could be improved by using a data source that is not from a government to prevent potential bias.

Conclusion

Even with its limitations, the present study found evidence that in countries where gender inequality rates are higher, their efforts to reduce human trafficking is lower. This major discovery could be the foundation of future endeavors to reduce trafficking in persons through reformations of gender inequality.

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