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The human trafficking debate: Implications for Social Work Practice

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1 Introduction

Human trafficking continues to be a key public health issue, both nationally and internationally. The co-morbidity of communicable and non-communicable diseases along with mental health issues among trafficked individuals make addressing human trafficking a public health imperative (Welch, 2012). Despite the various efforts to mitigate the problem, human trafficking has remained a major area of focus for academics, policy makers, law enforcement agencies, and non-governmental organizations (Dovydaitis, 2011). There exists debates on virtually all aspects of this issue, including what actually constitutes trafficking and how prevalent it is. As early as 2005, Kempadoo described the debate by stating, "there are competing definitions of trafficking; little consensus or agreement among researchers, policy makers, and activists about the scope of the problem; and scant evidence or substantiation about actual trafficking practices" (p. vii). Competing discourses on trafficking, prostitution, immigration, and their relationship to one another frame trafficked people, particularly women, and their decisions, motivations, needs, and dilemmas in varied ways. The ways in which trafficking and individuals involved in trafficking activities are understood directly shapes both anti-trafficking activities and the eventual success (or failure) of efforts to combat trafficking.

We acknowledge that the human trafficking debate is not a new one and various professions and disciplines such as law enforcement, public health, economics, and psychology have weighed into the debate. Interestingly enough, social work, a profession that is committed to social justice, particularly on behalf of the marginalized and the disenfranchised, has remained somewhat at the outskirts of this discussion on human trafficking (Hodge, 2008) and as a result there is a paucity of intervention models that have their roots in the social work profession. In this paper, therefore we contribute a framework for problem assessment and intervention design that is grounded in social work profession's person- in - environment approach which takes into account both individual and structural factors that contribute to the problem.

We begin this paper by briefly describing the claims making process using a Social Constructionist framework. We then provide a review of literature that include both older and more recent research to illustrate how over time various stakeholders and disciplines have come to describe or claim human trafficking as a problem needing our attention and current interventions based on these various claims. We present a US-centered article framed in UN debates to provide a historic and contemporary overview of the discussion. We argue that while the Social Constructionist framework is useful to understand the process of defining the problem, it does not provide a framework for an integrated response to the problem. Thus in conclusion, we argue for a critical practice framework when intervening with trafficked

individuals that is perhaps more holistic, client centered, and social justice oriented than what is available in current literature to guide social service providers.

2 Claims Making Process: a Social Constructionist Perspective

We approach our study of trafficking from a Social Constructionist perspective, which argues for the importance of understanding how social problems come to be defined and understood. Berger and Luckmann (1966) first used the term "social construction" to describe the process through which people assign meaning to the world and participate in the creation of their perceived reality. According to Schneider (1985), "The central proposition of this tradition is that social problems are the definitional activities of people around conditions and conduct they find troublesome, including others' definitional activities" (p. 209). Under this framework, people create categories of understanding that then become commonsense knowledge. As Ogle, Eckman, and Leslie (2003) state, "knowledge (i.e. 'reality') is at once subjective (i.e., reflective of the ideas of those who construct and embrace it) and objective (i.e., perceived as 'true')" (p. 2).

The constructionist perspective was eventually applied to the study of social problems. Spector and Kitsuse (1977) argued for a consideration of the "subjective element" of social problems, or the process by which people define a recognized condition as a problem. The authors maintain, the "emergence" of a social problem "is contingent on the organization of group activities with reference to defining some putative condition as a problem, and asserting the need for eradicating, ameliorating, or otherwise changing that condition" (p. 415). Thus, according to a constructionist approach, a condition *becomes* a social problem after people *name* it as a social problem and attempt to address it accordingly. Because claims are persuasive in nature, they are not understood as an objective "truth," but as a "form of rhetoric" (Best, 2003, p. 984). Thus claims made about a certain problem may or may not reflect the realities associated with such problem and often, claim makers tailor the description and nature of the problem to invoke certain official response. In this paper, attention is given to "claims-making"— the process through which various interest groups, or "claims-makers" call attention to a particular social problem and demand that something be done about it (Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). According to Best (2003), contemporary claims-making often involves a common set of elements. Claims-makers—which include social activists and non-governmental organizations, scientists and researchers, mass media, and governmental officials and organizations— often define particular social problems and the people impacted by them in various ways in order to encourage specific understandings of these problems and to determine specific solutions. (Best, 2003; Loseke, 2003).

Often different social issues compete for attention in the issues arena. Thus crucial to this claims making process is the idea of "framing". According to Vliegenthart and van Zoonen (2011), framing entails selecting some aspect of the perceived reality and making them more salient by presenting them in a certain light. Thus framing can be seen as an activity that involves various actors each putting forth their ideas of salience. The aim of framing may be to influence both values and beliefs as well as decision-making and solutions (Kilburn, 2009). Typically, issues that are in some ways attractive or have a level of drama attached to them are awarded with attention and consequently rise to the level of public concern (Meriläinen & Vos, 2015). To that end, various actors or claims-makers frequently use "terrifying examples, usually instances that present the problem in melodramatic terms" (Loseke, 2003, p. 98). Further, claims also encourage people to evaluate the characters involved in these narratives in particular ways, influencing the experiences of those people and the ways in which they are treated by others.

In any public debate, to become a claims-maker or a key player in the framing process, an actor needs perceived and real credibility, legitimacy, and power. Not all actors in a debate will have the same power and in the absence of consensus around a certain problem, those actors that do wield power have the capacity to steer a debate in a certain direction and thus influence subsequent decision making (Meriläinen & Vos, 2015). This is done through the act of "gatekeeping" by which the more powerful actors are able to keep competing claims out of the arena of debate (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Although, originally the news media were considered the mastermind behind issues framing or claims-making, other actors such as political entities and NGOs have in the recent years emerged as powerful framing voices. In fact NGOs have been instrumental in developing laws and implementing policies. None the less, the media plays an important role in the construction of social problems. While sometimes mass-media may serve as primary claims-makers (such as in the case of investigative reporters who are the first to draw attention to a particular issue), more often, individuals from the media play the role of secondary claims-makers who interpret and circulate the claims of others to a general audience (Best, 2003; Loseke 2003; Ogle, Eckman, & Leslie, 2003). Because most mass media outlets usually follow specific formats in their packaging and reporting of news stories, social problems are framed by mass-media in specific ways. Thus, the way in which the media covers a particular social problem influences public understanding of that problem. As authors Ogle, Eckman and Leslie (20003) argue, "Claims presented in the media play a key role in ordering and maintaining audience perceptions of social reality" (p. 3). However, one should also keep in mind that mass media do not always speak with the same voice thus further confounding the already complicated process of claims-making.

An important component of the claims-making process involves constructing particular solutions to social problems (Farrell & Fahy, 2009). Loseke (2003) maintains that population at large, i.e. policymakers, politicians, and social activists will generally not take a problem seriously unless they believe something can be done to change it. Thus, part of the persuasive work of claims-makers involves constructing favored courses of action to stop the harm and suffering caused by the problem. Loseke uses the term "prognostic frames" to describe claims that are constructed as preferred solutions to various social problems; such frames construct both what should be done and who should do it. She states that these claims "are important because they legitimize some solutions (and not others), they construct some indicators of success (and not others), and they assign some people (and not others) the responsibility for changing the condition" (p. 98). Thus prognostic or problem frames can be manufactured or manipulated by claims makers who then use the media to shape public opinion about a certain social problem in a certain specific way. Prognostic frames then, if "successful," provide the momentum for action and social change, most often through the construction of social policy at the local, state, national, or global level, and/or the push for cultural change (Farrell & Fahy, 2009).

Legislative responses to social problems, including policymaking, is often complicated by the existence of competing claims surrounding a singular social problem since constructions of a given social problem are often multiple and varied. According to Best (2003), when a social problem is given increased attention, "new groups enter the domain, and as new definitions of problems and new policy proposals emerge, ideas about the causes of and probable solutions for problems change" (p. 989). Thus, the process of social problem construction and subsequent problem-solving is far from linear and is often centered upon multiple claims and

counter claims. As Loseke (2003) states, "the social problems games is about competitions" (p. 52).

The way in which a problem is framed or constructed is influential to how people respond both to the problem and the groups of people involved with the problem. Successful claims result in social problems work, which involves the development and implementation of policy and the formulation of groups and organizations in order to assist, rehabilitate, or punish those people who are central to the social problems formula stories (Best, 2003; Loseke, 2003). Best (2003) sums up the constructing of social problems as "a complex process, requiring compelling claims, created and disseminated by some combination of claims-makers, eliciting the attention and concern from media, public, and policymakers, and inspiring social policy" (p. 993-4).

3 Application of Claims Making Process to Human Trafficking

Given the amount of attention human trafficking has recently received both within and outside of the United States, we argue that it has the potential to serve as a particularly illustrative case study for understanding the complexities surrounding social problems construction and social problems work. More than a decade ago, Cwikel and Hoban (2005) stated that, "many positions and approaches relating to the discourse on trafficking exist, including moralist, crime and border control, labor and occupational, public health, migration, human rights, and feminist" (p. 309). These positions and approaches frame trafficking in multiple and varied ways, resulting in competing claims about what constitutes trafficking, who it affects and how, and how it should be addressed globally, nationally, and locally. In this section we present the most common ways in which human trafficking has been framed since its inception.

The origins of the discussion on human trafficking can be traced back to the end of 19th Century when European and U.S. feminists became concerned with "white slavery"—the abduction of European women for prostitution in South America, Africa, and Asia (Doezema, 2001). This brought the debate over involuntary prostitution to the international platform. As the women's movement gained momentum in the 1990s, the subject of human trafficking emerged within the human rights discourse in the form of commercial, sexual abuses of women and children and human rights were seen largely as human rights of women. Powerful lobbying bodies such as the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights played a key role in the early stages of the framing process of human trafficking (Boontinand, 2005; Chew, 2005). Any and all reports of human trafficking during this period were primarily about sex trafficking and any data on labor trafficking or trafficking data on men or boys were non - existent. Trafficking was framed as a gendered issue and was connected to other gender-based human rights issues such as poverty, domestic violence, and other inequities and media reports on the dangerous conditions faced by women and girls forced into prostitution abounded (Farrell & Fahey, 2009). Nicholson and Chong (2011) call this process of linking one social issue with another "bandwagoning". This powerful strategic framing tactic was used to connect a not-yet salient problem to a more salient one. Thus early definition of human trafficking purported and framed by the politicians and policy makers focused on the recruitment and movement of women across national borders for purpose of prostitution (Boontinand, 2005; Chew, 2005, Sullivan, 2010). In 1949, trafficking was outlawed internationally by the U.N. International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons. The Convention did not define "trafficking" but required all states to curtail trafficking and prostitution, regardless of whether they occurred with the consent of the women involved (Outshoorn, 2005; Sullivan, 2003). Under this perspective, the sex work of

all women was framed as sexual exploitation and all movements of sex workers between countries was framed as trafficking, regardless of whether women were complicit in their participation in the sex work industry and/or their migration (Desyllas, 2007; Sullivan, 2003). Interestingly, according to Soderlund (2005) this framing of trafficking also served as grounds for the creation of an alliance between radical feminists and religious conservatives, who "had seized on the issue of sex slavery in the late 1990s in a self-conscious effort to expand their base and political power through the vehicle of human rights" (p. 68).

This early international definition of trafficking that was included in the 1949 U.N. convention came under severe criticism over the next few decades and paved the way for a prognostic frame that distinguished trafficking in women from prostitution and defined prostitution as a legitimate form of work (Sullivan, 2010). As Sullivan (2003) states, "The sex work approach within feminism aimed to advance the position of sex workers by shifting political (and feminist) debate away from an abstract consideration of exploitation, morality and ethics and towards a concrete consideration of the health and safety of workers, their wages, working conditions and power relations with employers and clients" (p. 70). Advocates from this perspective do not deny that women are often coerced into and/or harmed by the global sex trade, but frame the issues faced by sex workers as similar to those faced by other people in low status jobs (Kempadoo, 2005; Sullivan, 2003). Under this perspective the global sex trade becomes one of many sites in which human trafficking occurs (Kempadoo, 2005).

In response to discursive pressures from the human rights community, the media, and the elite, the earlier prognostic frame of human trafficking gave way to a human rights' framework and a supplement to the trafficking protocol of 1949 (The Polermo Protocol) was passed in 2000 which defines trafficking in persons as: "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation" (U.S. Department of State, 2005). Further, exploitation includes, at a minimum, "the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (U.S. Department of State, 2005). This instrument obligated the state parties involved to criminalize trafficking.

This ratified definition of human trafficking was a result of negotiation between two very powerful groups who had opposing prognostic frames of prostitution. These were the Human Rights Caucus, which saw prostitution as legitimate labor and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), which saw all prostitution as violation of women's human rights (Doezema, 2002a). The former group's focus on women's agency was in sharp contrast to the victim stance taken by the latter group. The Human Rights Caucus was successful in advocating for the inclusion of men, women and children in the prognostic frame, as well lobbying for the labor and human rights of workers in other industries such as domestic work and agriculture. The opposite feminist abolitionist groups maintained that prostitution was sexual slavery (Farrell & Fahy, 2009).

Although a new United Nation's trafficking definition was agreed upon, it allowed a certain degree of flexibility on part of the signing countries with regards to its interpretation (Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Gozdziak & Collett, 2005). Thus significant discrepancies exist between the International Law and definitions adopted by the criminal codes of the various states

(Dempsey, Hoyle & Bosworth, 2012). In the case of U.S., this leeway then worked in favor of applying a moral lens to women's sexuality and played a major role in ways in which the U.S. anti-trafficking policies were developed. The focus of the anti-trafficking efforts continued to be associated with sexual slavery and the sex industry (Desyllas, 2007). In addition, Doezema (2002b) hypothesizes that U.S. anti-trafficking policies are linked to immigration policies, thereby categorizing migrants into "guilty" vs. "innocent". This led to the dichotomization of good vs. bad and created a distinction between innocent women who deserve the protection of the legal system and guilty women who deserve the circumstances they might find themselves in. Many contemporary feminists have critiqued the reliance on the "pure victim" image by anti-trafficking claims-makers and have pushed for the importance of recognizing the ways in which women are both victims and agents (Chapkis, 2003; Kempadoo, 2005). However, as Kempadoo (2005) argues, contemporary anti-trafficking work often fails to do this and instead utilizes a uniform conception of victim that fails to recognize women's agency and subjectivity.

The intersection of racism and sexism is also clear in U.S. anti-trafficking rhetoric and is reflective of bell hook's (2000) proposition that painting non-Western women as "victims" to be rescued by powerful Westerner reifies the idea of the weak "other" and strips a woman of color of her power and agency. Desyllas (2007) contends that U.S. policies are mired with racism, heterosexism and imperialism and they continue to colonize women through the so-called language of "protection". Thus while in the 1800s it was the Chinese and other women of color who were viewed as overly sexual, deviant and promiscuous and in the 19th century sex slave was a "white woman, victim of animal lusts of dark races, in the 21st century racism painted the new sex slaves as passive, un-emancipated women from the developing world" (Doezema, 1998, p.44). According to Kempadoo (2001), this framing of the human trafficking problem plays a major role in the reproduction of the racial stereotypes and perpetuates the power hierarchy of the U.S. and its cultural imperialism.

Scholars such as Hankisvky (2011) draw our attention to yet another interesting dimension of human trafficking; political and economic factors that push people from the global South to global North. To that end, Saunders and Soderland (2003) highlight the connection between periods of heightened public concern about human trafficking and the periods of increased immigration. They argue that during periods of increased migration, the U.S. government has often borrowed the rhetoric from sex trafficking discourses to create a moral fear and panic over the "other". Thus, many anti-trafficking claims conflate and collapse the issues of trafficking and illegal migration (Sanghera, 2005). This move has drawn criticism by some for failing to recognize the experiences of migrants who do not engage in sex work and for failing to acknowledge women's willingness and desire to migrate, and the reasons they choose to do so (Agustin, 2003; Sharma, 2005). Agustin (2003) argues that "the more influential anti-trafficking campaigns do not see the victims of trafficking as women exercising agency (however much constrained) in crossing national borders" but instead "view women solely as victims forced or duped into migrating for the sole benefit of the predatory trafficker" (p. 90).

Thus far we have described the discursive history and debates over the creation of prognostic frames of human trafficking that focus on the consequences of trafficking. Such framing of the problem tends to overlook its causes, i.e. the geopolitical and the broader socio-economic conditions that feed this problem (Hankivsky, 2011). Scholars such as Chuang (2006), urges us to reframe the problem of trafficking as a "global migratory response to the current globalizing socio-economic trends" (p. 139). This particular frame of human trafficking sees

trafficking as "a product of the larger socioeconomic forces that feed emigration push and immigration pull, towards risky labor migrations practices in our globalized economy" (p. 140). This point of view is reflected by other researchers such as Kapur (2005). This prognostic frame of human trafficking highlights the tension between the economic necessity to migrate on the one hand and the restrictive, exclusionary migration policies on the other. This geo-political and socio-economic reasoning of human trafficking debunks the dominant framing of trafficked "victims" as being forcibly relocated. Thus under this perspective, the onus of the problem falls not on the traffickers, but more so on the wealth disparities between the developed and the developing world as traditional livelihood options in the latter keep disappearing under a variety of international policies such as Structural Adjustments policies that favor the Global North.

As is seen from the above discussion, the various trafficking frames are at odds with one another, thereby making the public discussions as well as coordinated efforts to mitigate the problem a difficult one (Barner, Okech, & Camp, 2014; Cwikel & Hoban, 2005). Further, because there does not exist a uniform, agreed-upon definition of what actually constitutes trafficking, there is much disagreement and debate surrounding the prevalence of the problem, nationally or globally. Not only do few countries collect data on human trafficking, but many statistics are centered on mixed data related to smuggling, illegal migration, migrant abuse, and sex work (Chapkis, 2003; Gozdziak & Collett, 2005; Kapur, 2005). Just as the definition of trafficking varies, so do the statistics, resulting in "confusing and unreliable" data (Gozdziak & Collett, 2005, p. 108). The numbers of reported trafficking victims worldwide vary greatly. Logan, Walker and Hunt (2009) indicate that currently in the U.S. there does not exist a uniform system of data collection tracking the number of individuals trafficked. Gozdziak and Collett (2005) state, "It is noteworthy that despite the difficulties in establishing clear and reliable statistics, the trafficking phenomenon has often been described as mushrooming or being on the rise globally, while in fact these assertions are often based on very few cases" (p. 110). This has led some to argue that these tactics have resulted in the creation of a global moral panic surrounding the issue of trafficking (Chapkis, 2003; Sharma, 2005).

The ways in which trafficking victims are framed have real consequences. Loseke (2003) states, "when social problems formula stories lead to social intervention, real people can find themselves evaluated on the extent to which they seem to be instances of expectable story characters in expectable story plots" (p. 142). For example, through her interviews with migrant women in Europe who are paid for domestic, "caring," and sexual services, Agustin (2005) demonstrates that the women's own perceptions of their actions are at odds with how they are characterized in dominant trafficking discourse, particularly in terms of "passivity, ignorance, and force" (p. 98). Agustin states that "the problem is that many migrants do know what is ahead of them, do earn a large amount of money in a short time selling sex, and do have control over their working condition" (p. 101). Sharma (2005) also interviewed 24 women migrants from China who were part of a larger group of 599 migrants who had traveled to Canada—with the aid of smugglers—via ships. The women and children (yet not the men) were deemed to be "victims of trafficking" by various groups who advocated for them. However, through her interviews of the women migrants, Sharma found that there was "a significant disjuncture between their lived experiences, their self-identification as migrants, and how they were represented in the mainstream media, in government statements, and by feminist advocates using the anti-trafficking framework" (p. 97). The women had actively sought out people to smuggle them into Canada and some of them chose to engage in sex

work in order to economically survive once in Canada. Sharma concludes that anti-trafficking discourse failed to portray these women's experiences in ways that resonated with the women themselves. This sentiment is reflected by Sullivan (2010) who argued for a definition of trafficking that would go beyond sexual exploitation and would be situated in the lived experience of the trafficked individuals.

From the above discussion we can conclude that human trafficking has been on the international and national agenda for decades. Through a brief review of the extant literature on the topic, we have presented the popular prognostic frames that have been used over the years by the various claims makers to define the social problem.

4 Current Interventions

Needless to say that such disparate claims to the problem have created disparate solutions and the lack of agreement on the definition of human trafficking on part of the various stakeholders have led to different anti-trafficking efforts. In reviewing the literature on response to human trafficking, we identified two main tracks of interventions – those that focus on the causes and those that focus on the consequence of trafficking. Those interventions that target the causes or "push factors" of trafficking with an eye on prevention include micro-enterprise and economic capacity building efforts, community development, more stable government, and impartial law enforcement, all factors that create an environment less conducive to trafficking (Roby, 2005; Hodge, 2008). The interventions that focus on the consequence of trafficking can be further divided into a victim centered approach and a law enforcement approach (Zimmerman et. al., 2006; Moser, 2012). The interventions that target the trafficked individual address their various health and mental health needs, housing needs, legal services, and life skills training (Busch-Armendariz, Nsonwu, & Cook, 2011, Clawson, Dutch, & Wliiamson, 2008). Although, as Okech, Morreau, Benson (2012), indicate current service delivery system does not empower trafficked individuals to seek help.

According to scholars such as Dempsey, Hoyle and Bosworth (2012) and Chung (2006), a majority of anti-trafficking efforts have targeted traffickers and have their root in the Polermo Protocol and thus have been from a criminal justice perspective. Typically such efforts utilize a three-pronged approach – prosecuting traffickers, protecting trafficked individuals, and preventing trafficking. Although in reality, the emphasis of these responses has been to prosecute rather than to protect and prevent. While these anti-trafficking efforts have armed law enforcement with instruments to fight against human trafficking, unfortunately there have not been comparable contributions to aid social service providers in their work with trafficked persons (Struhsaker Schatz & Furman, 2002). Furthermore, not only current efforts fail to view trafficking in the broader frame as a problem of labor "migration, poverty, discrimination and gender based violence" (Chuang, 2006, p. 138), they continue to prioritize the needs of law enforcement over the rights of trafficked person. Most government interventions include regressive immigration policies that often expose the trafficked person to more harm and deprive them of access to justice and undermine the efforts to prosecute traffickers (Pearson, 2002). According to Desyllas (2007), such policies by ignoring contextual differences tend to homogenize experiences of all trafficked individuals and disregard the unique historical, cultural, geo-political and socio-economic conditions of the trafficked individuals.

A majority of academic research has focused either on the causes of human trafficking or in assessing the efficacy of prevention efforts (Maney et al., 2011). There have been only a handful of studies on service providers and their needs. Busch, Fong and Williamson (2004)

suggest the need for cross-cultural competence in servicer delivery, the creation of community support, and education and awareness in human trafficking among staff and client. Clawson and colleagues (2008) point to a lack of knowledge and availability of services as a barrier to effective service provision. The authors identify the need for further research in this area and the development of a consistent framework to address the multidimensionality of the human trafficking problem.

5 Implication for Practice

Human trafficking is an assault to human dignity and impacts the biological, psychological and the social dimensions of the trafficked individual. "Though it is difficult to mend completely the wounds of a trafficked victim, service providers can certainly help survivors to restore their dignity, to build new lives, and to organize and ensure justice for themselves and other survivors" (Maney et al., 2011, p. 11). Given that the current anti-trafficking policies mainly guide law enforcement and tend to be myopic in its framing of the problem, there is a dire need for a consistent theoretical framework that would promote effective service delivery by the various social service providers coming from multiple disciplines that study trafficking issues (Dovydaitis, 2010). In this section we offer a critical practice framework for social service provision that is more holistic, more social justice oriented, and that keeps the trafficked individual at the center of the problem solving process.

Critical practice is based on Critical Theory and its key components take into account a combination of both macro- and micro-level factors impacting a phenomenon and values social justice and empowerment of oppressed populations (MoyaSalas, Sen, & Segal, 2010). The origins of the school of thought known as Critical Theory date back to the 1920s and 1930s with the social philosophers, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Held, 1980.) Horkheimer promoted the idea that the foundation of knowledge in social sciences was reflexivity. Reflexivity meant questioning and analyzing the existing social order and the way power was distributed in order to understand and explain human condition (MoyaSalas, Sen, & Segal, 2010).

The general tenets of critical theory are that by focusing on the power and domination within a social structure, one can become more conscious of the need for change and in turn work towards that change. It posits that by reflecting on the individual places we hold in the societal structure (as determined by our sex, gender, sexual orientation etc.); we can take a conscious part in the empowerment process of the self and others. The key components of critical theory are: 1) Examining historical and geo-political context, 2) Considering power distribution. 3) Engaging in self-reflection. 4) Practicing non-judgmental inquiry, 5) Acknowledging value, and 6) Realizing that from greater awareness come action.

Given these tenets, we argue that a critical practice framework informed by Critical Theory is an excellent model for working with trafficked individuals. Such critical practice would include three main areas that incorporate the above six tenets and these are: a) Being aware of the historical and geopolitical context, b) Being aware of practitioner's own positionality and values (self – reflection), and c) Engaging in respectful partnership with clients. When intervening from such a framework one does not view all trafficked individuals as a monolithic group and recognizes the complexities of a personhood created by the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexual orientation etc.

6 Critical Mode of Practice

6.1 Being aware of historical and geo-political context.

As has been indicated by many scholars one of the biggest criticisms of the current anti-trafficking efforts is that they are divorced from any contextual analysis of the problem (Desyllas, 2007, Chuang, 2006). Thus practitioners working with trafficked individuals need to be aware of the historical and socio-political contexts of their client. With that in mind an important question to ask would be - what factors over time has contributed to this issue? This is where perhaps the phenomenon can be studied as a problem of migration, poverty, discrimination and gender based violence. As Chung suggested practitioners could explore with the individual whether trafficking might have been "an opportunistic response" (Chuang, 2006, p.140) and understand the larger emigration "push" factors and immigration "pull" factors created by wealth disparities between the guest and host countries. As we have seen many claims makers tend to favor the "victim" portrayal of the trafficked individual and it is still the dominant frame within the U.S. that guides anti-trafficking efforts (Desyllas, 2007). However, as scholars such as Gallaghar (2001) suggests that contrary to popular image of trafficked person as being kidnapped and coerced into leaving their homes, more often than not the initial decision to migrate is a conscious one driven by what she calls *migration for survival* to escape from repressive economic, political and social conditions. Thus for a practitioner it would be crucial to note the contextual conditions under which trafficking has occurred, what events preceded the trafficking and an assessment of the current conditions in which the individual finds herself or himself in.

Coming from a Critical Theory framework, it is imperative that any such analysis of contextual conditions also include an analysis of power. As we have seen in the previous discussion on the claims making process how dominant claims emerge. The claims making process is but a narrative of power in society. It tells the tale of how powerful groups can shape public opinion about trafficking and define concepts related to trafficking which then become legitimized as knowledge and truth in society. This in turn impacts official responses in the forms of international and national policies (Doezema, 2002a; Doezema, 2002b; Meriläinen & Vos, 2015). It is therefore, crucial that a practitioner working with a trafficked individual is cognizant of the claims making process and the role it plays in defining the client. In order to mitigate the hegemonic position of the global North that dominates the trafficking discourse it is important that a practitioner allows the voice of the client to emerge in order to understand how global inequities as well the intersectionalities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, immigration and socio-economic status, etc. play a role in creating the experiences of the trafficked individual. Thus it would be critical for the practitioner to engage in an authentic discussion about power with the client. This could involve examining how power situates the practitioner and the client differently and relationally. This could also include an exploration of the power position of the client and of social - groups that have relatively more power than the client, particularly in the claims making process. Coming from a strengths perspective a practitioner could also explore the structures that create privilege and oppression in society and their relationships with the client.

Often social service providers, particularly social workers find themselves in a quandary over whether to provide direct service to clients or advocate for social change. It can be inferred that social service providers working with trafficked individual may find themselves facing a similar dilemma – should a practitioner focus on meeting the needs of the trafficked

individual such as food, safety, financial support, help with documentation related to immigration, etc. or advocate and work towards changing oppressive societal structures that create the circumstances in which our clients find themselves in. A critical practice framework presented here can help a practitioner transcend this false dichotomy. Such a framework suggests that personal (micro) and social or structural (macro) changes rather than being dichotomous are interconnected and must be unified. Therefore, meaningful and effective social service provision entails not only assisting individuals in getting their needs met but also altering conditions that are oppressive (Mullaly, 2007). Thus the work with individuals and families that have been impacted by trafficking would entail providing resources, skill building and perhaps therapy to deal with the repercussions of trafficking. However, it would also require facilitating the connection between private issues and structures of domination such as racism, Eurocentric hegemony (Desyllus, 2007), geo-political and economic factors (Hankivsky, 2011; Kapur, 2005) that create the conditions for human trafficking, thereby empowering individuals and communities to define their own best interest and promote self-sufficiency.

6.2 Being aware of practitioner's own positionality and values.

Another goal of critical practice with trafficked individuals would be to deter from making superfluous assumptions regarding the victim status of the client and engage in cross-cultural work that would transcend the practitioners' own cultural biases. It is to be noted here that we do not refer to culture in the narrow sense of ethnicity but as a composite of all social position variables of an individual practitioner that helps to create her/his worldview. This requires practitioners to utilize critical thinking skills and evoke their own positionality or awareness about their own social position to understand the dynamics of power, privilege and oppression not only of their clients' but of their own as well. This would allow the practitioner to be attentive to the story that client tells of one's self rather than pigeon holing the client into the practitioner's perception of a trafficked individual. This approach is even more critical given that the social construction of this problem and individuals impacted by it are often side-stepped by powerful lobbyists demanding amelioration of the problem (Kempadoo, 2005). In this effort a practitioner can be guided by idea presented by Green (1998) which differentiates between a categorical and a transactional view of ethnicity. Categorical approach leads to stereotyping whereas in a transactional approach the meaning of a concept is co-created and results from an exchange between the client and the practitioner. This transactional approach is congruent with the critical practice framework and allows for the meaning of trafficking and trafficked to emerge as a result of authentic exchange between the practitioner and the client.

We argue that one cannot engage in such an exchange without self-reflection and acknowledgement of values; that is an exploration of a practitioner's own values, beliefs, and experiences related to human trafficking. It also requires an exploration the values of the clients and client systems about trafficking and how do these compare to those of the practitioner's. This examination of values is tied to the large idea of practitioner's positionality that prompts one to ask the question as to how her/his own race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, socio-economic status sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political beliefs, religion, and mental or physical ability contribute to these values and beliefs, and how might a practitioner's identity affect her/his interactions with the client and vice versa.

We also posit that such meaningful exploration and exchange between a practitioner and client requires the utilization of nonjudgmental inquiry and being vigilant of the ways in which the practitioner's value judgments and power might creep into the process of designing interventions. Therefore, it is imperative to ask questions such as: are all viewpoints (particularly the client's) being considered in good faith? A critical practitioner would need to ensure that one is truly invested in the client's well-being and interest and not in other vested interests such as promoting a philosophical agenda. Finally, such a practitioner would need to have enough intellectual humility to accept errors in one's inquiry.

6.3 Engaging in respectful partnership with clients.

The exploration of socio-political context and authentic exploration of client-practitioner positionalities described above help create the foundation for the most critical part of any social service intervention, i.e. engaging in a respectful partnership with clients in order to arrive at solutions and action plans. Critical practice urges practitioners to adapt an approach of working with clients that is characterized by a spirit of inquiry and collaboration.

In this process of building respectful partnership it is imperative to view the client as an "expert" of her/his own realities. Thus it would be important for a service provider working with a trafficked individual to create a "space for dialogic encounters, where workers will allow themselves to experience, understand and learn from clients and where clients may be able to benefit and change from the interaction (Yang & Wing as cited in Drabble, Sen, & Oppenheimer, 2012, p. 209). Green's (1998) idea of cultural salience in problem definition and intervention selection can provide some guidance. He urges social service providers to pay attention to "what may be salient for clients, their way of comprehending and working with a problem, the "commonness" of their common sense…" He is also of the opinion that "as "knowers" their experience is rich in matters that I know little or nothing of, but about which I need greater familiarity so I can better meet their needs" (p.166).

Thus in creating a respectful partnership with trafficked individuals social service providers could explore areas such as, what steps can be taken to improve client's current well-being and address social change? How can one engage the client in developing a plan for action that addresses both the personal and political situation related to trafficking? How would one ensure that this action leads to changes in the client's context? , and what ways would one enhance client's awareness of how the current social order perpetuates the situation?

7 Conclusion

Human trafficking is one of the most challenging social problems of our time. The causes and consequences are intricately woven together and no easy solutions are readily available. Various academic disciplines, human right activists, law enforcements and public health officials and human service providers have studied this issue in depth. We saw through the review of literature that such a multipronged look at the issue has also led to disparate claims about the true nature of the social problem and the "trafficked" individuals, thus giving rise to distinctly different solutions to ameliorate the problem. Typically, efforts to reduce trafficking have focused on the consequences rather than the causes of the problem. In addition, these interventions have targeted either the trafficked individuals or the structures that perpetuate the problem. Literature also identified a lack of research on the needs of service providers and a need for developing cross-cultural problem solving strategies. We think that social work with its person-in-environment focus is in a unique position to address these issues. To that end, in this paper we offer a critical framework of practice that is not only grounded in social work values of dignity, justice, and empowerment, but also highlights the importance of

creating interventions that take into account both human agency and structural factors. Such a framework prevents solutions from being dichotomized into focusing on either human agency or structural determinism. Based on this framework we argue that in order to better serve their clients social service providers need to be: a) attentive of historical and geopolitical contexts of their clients, b) cognizant of their own positionality and values and how these shape their perception of issues surrounding human trafficking, and c) able to promote mutual respect between their clients and themselves in order to arrive at solutions that ultimately empower the clients.

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