



Trafficking of children in Albania: Patterns of recruitment and reintegration[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Problem: Many children in Albania and other countries of Eastern Europe are being trafficked as part of the global business of human trafficking.

Objectives: The study sought to identify the patterns of child trafficking involving Albanian children, and especially children's views of the role of family issues and the nature of the trafficking experience.

Method: The study included verbally administered questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and use of already existing reports. Study participants included 61 children who had escaped from trafficking, 22 children from similar at-risk groups who had not been trafficked, 15 parents of currently or previously trafficked children, 10 parents from similar groups whose children had not been trafficked, and 8 key informants.

Results: Children at greatest risk of trafficking had very limited education and frequently were working on the streets. Their families were poor with many interpersonal problems, including violence. They typically belonged to the Gypsy community. Trusted community members usually recruited the children by promising that the children would work to help the family financially. Once abroad, the children were harshly treated, forced to work long hours, physically abused, and isolated from family members. Families did not receive the promised payment. Once returned, children had a difficult time reentering due to family, educational, and economic issues.

Conclusions: Contextual issues supporting child trafficking in Albania include poverty, major internal and external migrations, discrimination, and problems in the legal system. Poverty combined with family problems and membership in the marginalized Gypsy group places children at increased risk of trafficking into harsh labor conditions.

Practice implications: The study of Albanian children who were trafficked suggests that dealing with trafficking of children requires addressing family problems and complex social issues that perpetuate poverty as well as the legal and social structures that place children at risk and continue to marginalize certain communities. As a result, changes in social policies that protect victims and punish traffickers and the development of programs that facilitate integration and promote the economic and interpersonal welfare of families whose children are at-risk have been established in Albania.

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Introduction

Over one million children are trafficked each year (United Nations Children's Fund, 2006). The United Nations (UN) has defined trafficking as the recruitment and transfer of individuals for the purpose of exploitation for sexual or other forms of labor by means of threat or the use of threat or coercion, kidnapping, fraud, or deception that include the abuse of power and control of others. For children, trafficking occurs in any situation in which they are being recruited, transferred, or received for the purpose of exploitation (UN, 2000). Trafficking is a highly profitable criminal business, a global tragedy, and a major violation of human rights (Bump & Duncan, 2003; Lederer, 2001; United Nations, 2004). Children are trafficked to engage in prostitution, domestic and service work, sale of merchandise, agricultural work, petty theft, and a variety of activities in the informal economy (Dottridge, 2004; International Organization for Migration, 2001; Lederer, 2001; Renton, 2001). The International Labor Organization (ILO) (2001) describes trafficking as one of the worst forms of child labor.

Eastern European countries are an important source of women (many under the age of 18) who are trafficked for prostitution as well as the other activities associated with child trafficking (Aronowitz, 2003; International Organization for Migration, 2001; Lederer, 2001; Purvis & Stojaspal, 2001; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Trafficking dramatically increased in these countries during the 1990s as major social and economic disruptions took place (Emigh & Szelenyi, 2001; Melich, 2000;) and their doors opened to the world beyond the Communist sector (International Organization for Migration, 2001). Albania has been one of the key origin and transit Eastern European countries to Western Europe for the trafficking of women and children (International Organization for Migration, 2001). In order to design appropriate prevention and recovery strategies, it is important to understand the specific patterns that occur in the area (Dottridge, 2004). Because of the important role played by Albania in the trafficking process in Eastern Europe, this paper presents findings from a study of the patterns of trafficking of Albanian children, the social context, and policy and programmatic implications and responses.

Literature review

Global trafficking patterns

Children trafficked both within and between countries globally (for example, in Africa, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe) experience physical and emotional abuse and are deprived of their normal developmental needs of education, affection, and safety. They are forced into the world of prostitution, domestic or agricultural labor, or are made to beg or steal for money. Children from the most disadvantaged groups are at especially high risk of being trafficked. They and their parents are frequently misled about the reality of employment awaiting them (Dottridge, 2004; Firoze, 2006; Mattar, 2003; Renton, 2001; United Nations Children's Fund, 2005b, United Nations Children's Fund, 2006; US Department of State, 2005). The illegal and illusive nature of trafficking makes it impossible to identify the exact number of children involved (Dottridge, 2004).

Poverty is a major reason for human trafficking. People take desperate measures to improve their own or their family circumstances. Women and children move from poorer to more developed and wealthier countries or are forced to participate in the sex trade industry within their own countries that typically serves wealthier individuals, frequently from abroad (Bump & Duncan, 2003; Ryan & Hall, 2001; UNICEF, 2005b, 2006). Other important factors contributing to placing children at risk of trafficking include: cultural traditions that support child labor, family breakdown due to the death of parents or other problems, historical migration patterns, ignorance of the reality of trafficking, cultural codes that devalue education of girls, and political instability and corruption (Africa Research Bulletin, 2004; Firoze, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Lederer, 2001; Sanghera, 1999; United Nations, 2004; UNICEF, 2006; US Senate Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, 2000).

Albanian patterns

Child trafficking is a relatively recent phenomenon in Albania because governmental policies isolated Albania from the rest of the world prior to 1990. An estimated four thousand children were trafficked to European countries between 1992 and 2002 (Albanian Ministry of Public Order). Other children have been sold for adoption (especially children from the *Jevgjit* community, a group of about 300,000 Albanian-speaking "Gypsies." (sometimes called "Egyptians" in Albania because they are thought to have originally emigrated from Egypt) (Wood, 2003). In contrast to 2000 during which child victims of trafficking in Greece appeared to come from all backgrounds—White, Roma (a distinct community with its own language and cultural identity), and Gypsy, a 2002 report revealed that 95% of these children belonged to the "Gypsy" community (Terre des Hommes, 2003).

Rapid economic changes, migration patterns, and severe hardships since the fall of Communism in 1990 have strained the Albanian strong emphasis on the family with a patriarchal orientation and intensified problems for children generally. Family violence has increased (Olsen, 2000; Van Hook, Haxhiymeri, & Gjermeni, 2000). A 1999 study estimated that 150,000 (out of approximately 900,000 children between birth and 14 years of age [CIA, 2007]) children had been abandoned by one or both parents and were being helped by their extended families who in turn could only meet basic survival needs (LaCava & Nanetti, 2000). People have tried to escape the difficult living conditions in rural areas by migrating to urban areas or abroad, straining family and urban community resources beyond their limits. Remittances from abroad represent about 25%

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