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Trafficking in Women in Hong
Kong: An Attitudinal Scale**

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Social Attitudes Towards Trafficking in Women in Hong Kong: An Attitudinal Scale

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Abstract

This paper describes the development of the Trafficking in Women Perception scale. The 18-item scale was designed to assess respondents' attitudes towards trafficking in women, in terms of whether or not and to what degree their perceptions were in accordance with current literature on the topic. The objective of developing such a scale was to determine what socio-economic, demographic and experience items and other attitudinal scale scores were correlated or associated with attitudes towards trafficking in women; this paper describes how attitudes towards trafficking in women are related to gender attitudes. The scale was originally designed for use in Hong Kong, but results indicate that the instrument can be used in other contexts, as it has very high internal consistency/reliability and validity.

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Introduction

This paper aims to describe the development of an attitudinal scale measuring perception towards trafficking in women and a selection of results obtained using this instrument. Such a scale, showing whether or not public perceptions matched the current literature, is necessary to both assess public attitudes towards the issue of trafficking in women and show what factors are correlated/associated with this perception. This study of attitudes is important, because the public decides which issues are deemed important for social and political discussion (Special Olympics, 2005) and which are left out of the conversation; the situation is that many people do not want to accept that something as horrible as trafficking exists, preferring instead to deny that it exists at all or blame the victims (Barry, 1983; Revenco, 2006). Even if policies are implemented by the government, unless incorrect attitudes are changed, these attitudes will form a strong obstacle (Special Olympics, 2005); in the case of victims of sex trafficking, the results of monitoring victims within Europe show that over 80 percent are rejected by their families and some are even physically and mentally abused (Revenco, 2006). In both the prevention of trafficking and the rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims, it is necessary that society holds the correct attitudes towards the issue and supports victims instead of dismissing or further oppressing them. Studying attitudes present in society allow actors interested in social change to know the starting point from which they must work and how best to focus awareness-raising campaigns.

Although the very topic of trafficking often brings to mind scenes from developing countries, the destination countries, also known as demand countries, are often highly developed ones (Sesay, 2011). More attention needs to be paid to these developed countries in the fight against trafficking. Sex trafficking is a disease infecting civilisation, and in order to stop trafficking, it is necessary to understand both the disease and the societies that serve as host organisms (Kara, 2009); the author believes this extends to all types of trafficking. It is necessary to understand societies themselves and how they and their members allow trafficking to take place. This is not to suggest that all members of any given society are trafficker, but rather that, as Bourdieu pointed out, the 'The most successful ideological effects are the ones that have no need of words, but only of *laissez-faire* and complicitous silence' (Bourdieu, 1990: 133).

The Context: Hong Kong

Hong Kong is an ideal location for this research. Even though Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China and not actually a country, it is listed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as a country with very high development, and within this list, it ranks first in income disparity (Einhorn, 2009). The territory has a GINI coefficient of 53.3, with 100 representing absolute inequality, worse than China with its GINI of 48.0 (CIA,

2013). The territory is considered to not be making enough effort in identifying victims of trafficking (U.S. Dept. of State, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012).

Hong Kong is known for being a destination for women victims from Mainland China, Southeast Asia and other countries who come to the territory after receiving fraudulent job offers only to be forced into prostitution (U.S. Dept. of State, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Snider, 2011). There are also cases of people being blackmailed into prostitution by threats of revealing sex photos and/or videos (U.S. Dept. of State, 2011). According to the Sun (2010), a study done by Against Child Abuse showed that 90 percent of people in Hong Kong are not aware of the seriousness of trafficking in minors, with only 16 percent of NGOs believing the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation in Hong Kong to be a serious problem.

Hong Kong is also known for being a destination for victims of trafficking for domestic servitude (U.S. Dept. of State, 2012). Many foreign domestic workers face high indebtedness as part of the job placement process, leading to situations of debt bondage especially in cases where local employment agencies illegally withhold documents until the debt has been repaid (ibid). According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), domestic workers around the world have an extremely low status, partially due to the old, socio-cultural bias based on the concept of 'master and servant' (OSCE, 2010). Any policies will not guarantee sufficient protection to domestic workers, especially if they are legally bound to a specific work contract or employer (OSCE, 2010); this applies to Hong Kong, where the termination of a domestic worker's contract requires that the migrant leave the territory within two weeks (Government of Hong Kong, 2010).

Laws must be recognised as not ends in themselves but the beginning of a process towards social justice (Spivak, 2010), and it is useful to discuss the legal situation in the territory in terms of trafficking. Hong Kong is not a signatory of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and it is not covered by China's 2010 accession (UN, 2013). It is also not a signatory of the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ibid). The SAR has also not ratified the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, a 2011 convention that has only been ratified by three countries so far (ILO, 2013). The low number of trafficking victims identified by the government, only twelve between 1 Mar 2011 and 29 Feb 2012, combined with the fact that a victim of trafficking of labour was found to be in prison raises questions, and the outdated interpretation of trafficking there as a movement for prostitution requiring transnationality shows that the laws related to trafficking there are not up to international standards (U.S. Dept. of State, 2012). Whether for sex or domestic labour, victims are not allowed to work or study during the period of their trials, and they are not given permanent residency status even when repatriation carries a risk of retribution from traffickers (ibid).

In this environment, the researcher's PhD project was carried out, and as part of this project, an attitudinal scale was created, tested and used. An 18-item scale named the Trafficking in Women Perception (TWP) scale was produced. This paper describes the methods used to do this, a selection of the results obtained and a discussion on these results.

Methods

Context of Scale

This scale was designed as part of a survey for the researcher's PhD thesis for use in Hong Kong as she could not locate a scale which could measure attitudes towards trafficking in women. The entire questionnaire was designed to be implemented in the form of an online survey, distributed via snowball sampling, although printed versions were also given to and collected from respondents who did not have access to computers. The data used to determine the reliability of the scale was also collected as part of said thesis. The full questionnaire contains items which are independent variables, including socio-economic status, demographic information and experience. The questionnaire also included items from two other scales and the results were used to determine if scores were correlated with one another. The three scales used in the questionnaire are briefly described below:

- the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) scale, which has been used with both men and women in countries such as Brazil, China, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (Nanda, 2011);

- the Humanitarian-Egalitarian (HE) Scale (Katz and Hass, 1988), which has been used in various studies studying inequality, such as gender and sexuality (Case, Fishbein and Ritchey, 2008); and

- the Trafficking in Women Perception (TWP) scale, which was constructed for this research specifically.

It is important to note that scoring direction of the scales vary. The lower the GEM score, the more accurate a respondent's gender attitudes are; the higher the HE score, the more egalitarian a respondent's attitudes are; and the lower the TWP scale, the more accurate the attitudes towards trafficking in women are.

The Scale

In order to design this scale, the researcher first composed a set of 31 questions based on her literature review, experience presenting the topic to others and content analysis, the last of which was also part of her PhD research project. The researcher then used the face validity method to measure validity, asking fellow students and others, such as Prof. W.T. Chan, an expert on quantitative research, whether the questions measure the concept they are intended to measure (Singh, 2007). Then the content validity (Lawshe, 1975) of the scale was ensured by asking five international experts on human trafficking, who were also academics and/or community workers, to rate whether or not they

thought items were essential; any item that was marked not essential by at least one expert was removed. This resulted in a 7-point Likert scale with 18 items. The entire questionnaire, including this instrument, was then professionally translated in Traditional Chinese, and this translated version was checked by a bilingual educator in Hong Kong and the researcher, to ensure that Traditional Chinese version matched the English version.

In order to pre-test the instrument, both English- and Traditional Chinese-versions of the questionnaire were sent to the actual organisations participating in the study to (1) ensure suitability and (2) request participation in pre-testing the instrument. Both versions were pre-tested by 10 individuals of various backgrounds, including domestic workers, employers of domestic workers, people who had purchased sex before and sex workers; in total, 20 people participated in the pre-testing of the instrument. Additional feedback for the Traditional Chinese version was received via email from another local educator and a community worker; feedback for the English-language version was provided at a meeting with the Mission for Migrant Workers. Changes were made in accordance with the feedback received.

Using a seven-point Likert scale, respondents indicate how much they agree with the statements, with higher scores indicating that a person has attitudes more in line with myths about trafficking in women than with findings from research in this area. Some of the items were reverse scored. Table 1 shows the items used in the study and which of these were reverse scored..

The Study

Due to the clandestine nature of trafficking and the sensitivity of the topic, the study used snowball sampling via both acquaintances and NGOs. Over the first two months of the year 2012, this survey was carried out utilising both the Traditional Chinese and English versions of the online questionnaire; some NGOs and others chose to distribute these surveys in paper form. Statistical analysis was carried out in SPSS v. 19 to determine the existence and strength of the relationship between various variables.

Results and Discussion

Of the 182 volunteer respondents, in terms of age, age ranged from 17 to 70, with one respondent's being 17; 32.8 percent of the respondents were in the age group 22-27. As for language, 53.3% chose to answer the survey in Traditional Chinese, with the remaining 46.7% choosing to answer the survey in English. Concerning gender, 58.8% identified with being female, 29.7% with being male, 1.1% with being both and 0.5% with being other; 9.9% chose not to answer this question. These respondents consisted of people with experience in sex and/or domestic work, some of whom were potentially trafficking victims, and members of the general public.

The Scale

Cronbach's Alpha was 0.818 for the 18 items used. As the validity of the items was substantiated via various methods previous to the deployment of the scale, the high reliability indicates that the scale can be tested in other cities or countries and used either separately or as part of a comparison study. Item analysis of the data collected indicates that the 18 items were correlated with the total within the .01 level of confidence. Table 1 shows the 18 items, and indicates which were reverse scored and the item to total correlation.

Correlations and Associations

There is a strong correlation between the GEM scale and the TWP scale (Spearman's rho (r_s) = 0.646, significant to the 0.01 level), but the HE is relatively weak in its correlation with these scales, with r_s (GEM-HE) = -0.263, significant to the 0.01 level; and r_s (TWP-HE) = 0.297, significant to the 0.01 level. This suggests that although the three sets of attitudes are tied to each other, trafficking in women is more of a gender issue than one of equality. This supports MacKinnon's theory in *Are Women Human Yet* (2006); MacKinnon's theory is that women do not yet have full human status in a reality in which human rights and relevant discussions do not make room for the ways women are deprived of these human rights (ibid). This finding deserves further research, but for this paper, the message is that, in order to fight trafficking in women, there needs to be awareness raising on gender issues as well.

As for personal attributes, this study found no association between gender, experience, language and marital status with the attitudes measured in this study. However, there is a weak correlation between both the year a person is born and number of children, and the GEM scale (r_s = -0.183 and r_s = 0.2325 respectively, both significant to the 0.01 level) indicating that younger people and those with less children had more accurate gender attitudes. There is a moderate correlation between the number of children one has and the TWP scale (r_s = 0.258, significant to the 0.01 level), suggesting that those with more children have less accurate attitudes towards trafficking in women. Other research on social attitudes has already suggested that younger people are more susceptible to attitudinal change and should, therefore, be the targets of education programmes (Special Olympics, 2005). However, this does not mean that older people should be ignored in educational efforts on the issue of trafficking; instead, further research into this is necessary to determine how to best reach and raise awareness amongst older members of the population.

In line with current literature, results also indicate that those with higher socio-economic status, as indicated by parental income, personal income and personal education, have more accurate attitudes towards gender issues and trafficking in women. The r_s between TWP scores and parental income, parental education, respondent income and respondent education are -0.409, -0.299, -0.389 and -0.353 respectively, significant to the 0.01 level. The r_s between GEM scores and parental income, respondent income and respondent education are -0.251, -0.322 and -0.246 respectively, significant to the 0.01

level. While all of these correlations were moderate, the one between TWP scores and parental income were strong. As there was no significant correlation between HE scores and socio-economic status, these findings are not due to a lack of humanitarian-egalitarian attitudes in any particular social class. Instead, the author hypothesises that the findings can be explained by people from lower socio-economic backgrounds in Hong Kong have a lower chance of exposure to correct attitudes concerning gender and trafficking in women; people from higher socio-economic backgrounds, on the other hand, have a higher chance of exposure to correct attitudes in these areas from international media sources, such as CNN and MTV, which have had awareness raising campaigns concerning human trafficking in recent years, and local, high-end media sources competing with these international outlets. This is not surprising as repeated exposures to novel stimuli, such as ideas, with neither positive nor negative reinforcement result in a positive shift in attitude towards these stimuli (Cacioppo, Petty and Crites, 1994). As such, awareness raising campaigns concerning gender and trafficking in women in Hong Kong need to be especially careful that they reach members of lower socio-economic groups in order to cover the whole population.

Significance of Findings

These findings, along with others in the author's PhD research, provide insights into current attitudes towards trafficking in women which are valuable in the fight against trafficking. The public needs to have better attitudes towards the issue of trafficking in women and the victims so that trafficking can be prevented and victims can be rescued, rehabilitated and reintegrated into society.

The findings illustrate the importance of educating the public on gender issues in the fight against trafficking in women, instead of just regarding trafficking in women as a human rights issue and trying to raise awareness as such. The findings also suggest that, while it is important to target younger audiences who are more open to attitudinal change, more research must be done on how to better raise awareness in older audiences as they too are part of society. The results also indicate that people with lower socio-economic status need to be targeted more in awareness raising campaigns regarding both gender issues and trafficking in women due to lack of exposure to the issues.

It is necessary to raise public awareness on the issues and change popular attitudes, and in order to do that in the most effective way, it is imperative to have the information found in this study to know the starting point from which agents must act and how they should act. Using the TWP scale developed for this project, researchers around the world interested in trafficking in women can compare their results with those found in Hong Kong and one another's locations.

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