

Human Trafficking: Conceptualising definitions, responses and 'what needs to be done'

EVENT ONE: CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Background

Trafficking in human beings is a worldwide phenomenon requiring an urgent and effective response. It is a growing problem across the UK; with Scotland required to meet UK-wide and international legislative obligations. This has resulted in the introduction of procedures and processes aimed at identifying and responding to the victims of human trafficking and measures to tackle the organised trade in the movement and exploitation of people. However, there has been little opportunity for reflection in the development of policies and practices; for the collation and application of empirical evidence; or for experts from academia, policy, and practice to reflect upon current practice and how best to take this forward. In particular, opportunities to determine theoretical imperatives underpinning definitions, estimates and responses have been limited. Aspirations to prioritise a human rights model within a wider discourse of 'vulnerable people' on the move has frequently been overtaken by law enforcement and border control priorities. This programme aims to provide a unique opportunity to develop interdisciplinary collaboration in a space conducive to reflection and deliberation. Firstly, a clear theoretical and conceptual understanding of the issues will be considered and, secondly appropriate responses and support programmes will be examined.

The importance of interdisciplinary participation is crucial for this proposed programme. To date, internationally three priorities have tended to dominate international responses to trafficking: law and order; migration; and public morality. Responses have accordingly been directed towards: crime prevention, law enforcement and prosecution; tightening of border controls and restrictions on visa regulations; criminalisation of victims. Non-governmental organisations, by contrast, have consistently called for the prioritisation of a human-rights focused approach, where trafficking is equated with a fundamental violation of human rights. One of the key challenges for developing responses is the extent to which agencies have competing priorities, thereby posing significant challenges for the development of coherent interdisciplinary work in framing responses to victims. This programme provides an opportunity for participants to 'step outside' their organisational priorities and into a space, both actual and conceptual, from which innovative and creative solutions can emerge.

The event will seek to address a number of key issues over two days:

Day 1 - what are the conceptual and definitional issues that affect understanding of, and responses to, human trafficking across the globe?

Aims:

- a) to locate human trafficking in a theoretical framework of global political and economic development
- b) to develop a common conceptual understanding of human trafficking and exploitation that will aid identification and responses (with particular consideration of the Scottish context)
- c) to identify models that can begin to develop a common approach to information gathering in order to inform further research, policy and practice.

Objectives:

- a) to bring together researchers and policy makers who have been involved in the analysis of trafficking trends and patterns and development of international guidelines
- b) to learn from previous successful, and not so successful, international developments about effective and appropriate responses
- c) to share the expertise that has informed global responses to date.

Day 2 what is the relationship between trafficking in humans and other associated issues eg ‘organised crime’, ‘smuggling’, ‘migration’, ‘immigration’ and ‘child protection’?

Aims:

- a) to consider the cross-over in defining and understanding trafficking in humans in relation to linked social and economic issues
- b) to examine these links in relation to the social, economic and political contexts and consequences that underpin human trafficking
- c) to consider the issues in relation to both international and ‘domestic’ trafficking of people.

Objectives:

- a) to identify awareness of the wider international factors that underpin human trafficking in its various forms; e.g. sexual exploitation; forced labour; domestic servitude
- b) to consider how national and international responses have developed in recognition of this relationship
- c) to explore the implications of these wider contexts for research and data collection.

Key areas for discussion will include the following:

- How is a ‘victim’ defined; what are the challenges in defining ‘trafficking’?
- What constitutes a ‘child’?
- Who has the responsibility to identify a ‘victim’ and what processes are in place?
- Perceptions of ‘choices’ and ‘victimhood’
- What is the significance of ‘vulnerabilities’ – what makes someone vulnerable?
- Internal and external trafficking (and sexual exploitation)
- Human rights legislation and criminalisation – victims of human rights abuses and/or crimes?
- How is organised crime defined and responded to?
- Identification, prosecutions (why so few?)
- How useful is existing statistical data, how does it inform responses to organised crime?
- What are the implications for developing a human rights approach to human trafficking within a context where prevention, law enforcement and prosecution is at the forefront of attempts to address organised crime?
- Demography of victims in Scotland in relation to international demographics of victims.