Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Sexual Minorities

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines human trafficking as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit." Human trafficking occurs in every region of the world and takes many forms. The purpose of human trafficking may be sexual exploiation, forced labor, criminal activity, begging, forced marriage, or any other number of exploitative measures. While anyone of any origin or demographic may become a victim of human trafficking, women, girls, and sexual minorities are at especially high risk. In 2018, for every 10 victims of human trafficking, five were women and two were girls. For women, opportunities for work are often limited because of gender discriminatory hiring practices, generating higher desperation and more risky decision making when seeking employment. Additionally, because the visibility of female-dominated employment sectors is typically low (e.g., domestic servitude), a great deal of harm can be done to victims without knowledge or remedy. Children make up about one third of all human trafficking victims and are the most vulnerable population to human trafficking. Low-income countries are disproportionately impacted by trafficking because of the continued prevalence of child labor in these areas. Additional risk factors for trafficking include
economic need, children with dysfunctional families, an intimate partner as the trafficker, mental, behavioral, or neurological disorders, immigration status, etc.

In 2000, the United Nations adopted "The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons" – a legally binding instrument with the purpose of defining human trafficking and providing tools for the identification of victims and the detection of all forms of exploitation. Though "The Protocol" has been ratified by all but a dozen countries, human trafficking continues to claim millions of victims annually.

Questions to Consider:

What features of your country would make women, girls, and sexual minorities more vulnerable to human trafficking?

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted human trafficking in your country/region?

What methods have been successful in combatting human trafficking both within and without your country? How might they be implemented elsewhere?

Additional Resources:

