

Sexual Exploitation among Youth: An Analysis of the Situation in Romania

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October 17, 2007

Abstract

Sexual Exploitation among youth is a growing problem in Romania. Romania is considered a transit and origin country for human trafficking. Most victims are transported externally to the most developed countries, although many victims will stay within Romanian borders. The Romanian government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders are making efforts to prevent trafficking among youth in Romania. Education has increased awareness of the issue, however, stronger partnerships must be established. This descriptive study examines the actions NGOs in Cluj County, Romania are taking to prevent youth from being victimized, the strengths and weaknesses of existing programs, perspectives from church leaders regarding their roles in preventing human trafficking.

Background-The World View of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking, specifically related to sexual exploitation, is a growing concern internationally.

According to the United Nations (2006), human trafficking is

The action of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim for the purposes of exploitation, which includes exploiting the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or similar practices, and the removal of organs (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, p.xii).

Additionally the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) describes sex-trafficking in its most severe forms as when "a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age" (Department of State, 2007, p.7).

Human trafficking has become an international widespread organized commercial activity and is prevalent in the most developing countries. An estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year, in this "modern form of slavery" (Department of State, 2007).

There is no single "typical victim;" victim profiles can change. Human traffickers generally target women and children Recruitment tactics change very easily. Traffickers use powerful tactics to lure their victims into forced labor or to sexually exploit them

(Department of State, 2007). As these lures shift, potential victims are being warned about dangers of becoming a victim. Traffickers are then left to create new strategies to recruit. Common schemes include advertisements for working abroad and promises of a better life are ways to recruit the most vulnerable people who want a better life or money. In another scenario, a man seduces a woman to fall in love then he sells her. Women themselves may be targeted, but women are used as tools to recruit and traffic victims as well (Surtees, 2005). Victim profiles are based upon a variety of factors: the background of the victim, age, gender, socio-economic status, level of education, and other health disparities.

In May 2000, the United Nations released the Operational Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. According to the protocol, “State parties should adopt appropriate measures to protect the rights and interests of child victims of the practices prohibited under the present Protocol at all stages of the criminal justice process” (United Nations, 2000, Section 9).

The United States became aware of the issue of trafficking in persons in 1994 when the Department’s Annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices revealed the phenomenon. Since 2001, the U.S. Department of State releases a Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report in order to share with other governments about trafficking within their countries (Department of State, 2001). The 2007 TIP Report, published by the United States Department of State, categorizes countries by level of compliance with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). There are four levels of compliance: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List, or Tier 3. A country in Tier 1 is in compliance with the

minimum standards outlined by the TVPA. According to the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (2007), the minimum standards include:

1. The government of the country should prohibit severe forms of trafficking in persons and punish acts of such trafficking.
2. For the knowing commission of any act of sex trafficking involving force, fraud, coercion, or in which the victim of sex trafficking is a child incapable of giving meaningful consent, or of trafficking which includes rape or kidnapping or which causes a death, the government of the country should prescribe punishment commensurate with that for grave crimes, such as forcible sexual assault.
3. For knowing commission of any act of severe form of trafficking in persons, the government of the country should prescribe punishment that is sufficiently stringent to deter and that adequately reflects the heinous nature of the offense.
4. The government of the country should make serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons (Minimum Standards section, para. 1).

When a government is categorized in Tier 2, the government is not in full compliance, but is making a conscience effort to meet the minimum standards (Department of State, 2007). According to the Department of State TIP Report (2007), Tier 2 Watch List means a country's government is not in full compliance with the minimum standards and are making efforts to meet them but:

- a) the absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; or

- b) there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or
 - c) the determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.
- (p.29). If a country falls into the category of Tier 3, the government does not comply with the minimum standards and are not making an effort to meet those standards. In certain cases, the countries with lack of data and information may be classified as a special case and not assigned a Tier placement (Department of State, 2007).

Human Trafficking in Romania

The root causes of human trafficking consist of a range of social and individual factors. Social factors may include but are not limited to low economic opportunities, education levels, underrepresented minority populations, gender differences, and family instability. Individual factors may include a desire to work abroad and going through loop holes to do so, or having unreliable relationships that result in early sexual activity (National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, 2006).

The most frequently targeted groups in Romania are the marginalized groups including the Roma community, women, children, and those who are impoverished. In 2003, 90.9% of victims were women and in 2004, the percentage of women decreased to 78.6%. In 2003-2004, about half of the victims of trafficking in persons were originally from rural areas, but were recruited in urban areas. On average, the level of education of victims of sexual exploitation was equivalent to a middle school level of education (Surtees, 2005).

In the human trafficking business, some countries serve as transit countries from which humans will be captured and other countries are destinations for these modern day slaves. Romania is both a transit country, where victims will be transported to countries such as Italy, Spain, and Germany, but Romania has also become a destination for internal trafficking. The fall of communism in Romania followed by the booming need to globalize resulted in the highly facilitated transportation of victims across international borders. Romania lacks the necessity of visa restrictions and allows free entrance into the Schengen Region which makes monitoring for victims impossible. For those who stay in Romania, sexual exploitation is very common (Limanowska, 2005).

Romania is subject to the United Nations and the protocol established as well as abiding to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). The Romanian government took action in 2001 in order to pass legislation to help protect and assist victims and their families. Law no. 678/2001 was created to combat all forms of human trafficking. In order to measure whether or not victims are protected, Law no. 211/2004 was introduced. Law no. 211/2005 entails informing the victims about their rights, having counseling, and free legal assistance available to them (National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, 2006). Another issue to be concerned about is the involvement of lenient punishments, which according to the laws mentioned above vary from three to twelve years; however few traffickers receive the maximum punishment. With this being said, traffickers do not view the penalty of trafficking in persons as threatening. The number of victims identified in Romania in 2004 was 456 (Limanowska, 2005). The number of Romanian victims assisted in Romania from 2000-2004 was 1054, and the number of international victims was 31 (Surtees, 2005).

From all the forms of exploitation through human trafficking whether it be through involuntary servitude, labor, or sexual exploitation, sexual exploitation is the most common among Romanian people, mostly girls and women, surpassing delinquency, begging or labor. Sexual exploitation accounted for 86.1% and 85 % in 2003 and 2004 respectively. As predicted, the majority of the assisted Romanians trafficked for sexual exploitation in 2003 and 2004 are aged 18-25 (74.7% and 62.2%) (Surtees, 2005).

In addition to methods of combating human trafficking, such as law enforcement or sentencing the traffickers, which are not victim oriented, prevention should be the basis of any program aiming to address the root causes of the phenomenon (Limanowska, 2005). Governments, especially those like Romania, face numerous difficulties due to populations at high risk, socio-economic problems, differences among certain segments of the population, massive migration, unemployment, and level of education. These risk factors all contribute to placing an individual in a victim profile, thus, subjecting the individual to increased vulnerability and greater risk of being trafficked.

Trafficking Prevention and Intervention

Romania has a little amount of information regarding services for victims of human trafficking in Romania and what actions need to be taken if someone happens to come across a victim of trafficking (Limanowska, 2005). One way to prevent human trafficking is to educate youth about the lures of traffickers, and the effects of becoming a victim, and what actions need to be taken if an individual becomes a victim. In most cases, victims are sent back to their native countries, but some are allowed to stay temporarily in the designated country, provided the victims agree with assisting

authorities. In some instances, victims prefer to stay in the designated country they were trafficked to, because conditions back home were far worse. Depending on the country, some victims have the option of staying 2-3 months to recuperate and reflect, but the victims can choose whether or not to work with authorities. (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2007).

Romania had 9 shelters for sexual exploitation victims in 2005. These 9 shelters are temporary places where victims may go in order to seek shelter. Shelters provide a place for victims to stay, provide legal assistance, and medical assistance. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) will assist them financially until the victims have to leave the shelter. There are two types of shelters: government run and NGO assistance for middle to long-term stay shelters that offer reintegration services. Currently Law 678 encourages Romania to have 10 temporary shelters for victims to turn to. In addition to staying in the shelters, victims need to cooperate with authorities; otherwise, the shelters will not receive funding (Surtees, 2005). There are many problems associated with shelters in Romania that do not benefit victims of trafficking. There is a lack of funding for shelters, victims are left without rehabilitation, and shelters in Romania are temporary.

In Romania, there are five ways victims of trafficking in persons are identified and referred: by destination or transit voluntary return programs, NGOs, deportation from destination countries, law enforcement, self referrals, and embassies. The Romanian government does not have a system to screen, refer, or identify victims (Surtees, 2005). With a centralized system of screening, identifying, and referring victims, the process for NGOs and shelters assisting victims will be more organized. Romania is gradually

making efforts to comply with the TVPA standards. In 2006, \$250,000 was allocated to agencies to help prevent human trafficking. The government also created a national database to help with referrals and victim identification (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2007).

The 2006-2007 Romanian National Action Plan strongly focuses on prevention. The objectives consist of raising awareness and reducing the risk for vulnerable populations (eg. Roma communities, elderly, and individuals with disabilities). Prevention campaigns consisting of creating educational materials about human trafficking; training individuals who may come in contact with victims including a section in all schools' curriculum; generate economic and social opportunities to decrease poverty, the unemployment rate, and discrimination among the minority groups; and improve gender equality. Efforts are being made to have the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons and the National Authority for the Protection of the Children's Rights to collaborate in order to meet the needs of the human trafficking victim (National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, 2006).

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study has to offer a comprehensive description of the current situation of trafficking in persons in Romania. Attempts were made to point out the key activities, determine the stakeholders, address the barriers encountered in prevention of human trafficking, and offer possible solutions.

Objective 1: Analyze the current programs in Romania and identify what the strengths and weaknesses are.

Objective 2: Understand the personal opinions of professionals working in the field of human trafficking and capture an insight to potential future trends.

Objective 3: Gather data and offer recommendations to existing and future programs.

Interview Methods

Interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of four professionals in the field who work to combat and prevent human trafficking in the Cluj County region and religious leaders. The methods used were on site interviews and personal interviews. Interviews conducted with NGOs and public institutions were conducted during June 2007. Two interviews with a Catholic priest and an Orthodox priest were conducted in July 2007. All of the interviews were conducted both in English and Romanian and translated to English to facilitate the interviews and to assist in this research study. The organizations and public institutions interviewed were chosen based on upon previous efforts regarding prevention programs. The representatives from the organizations and public institutions included were Artemis Center, Ratiu Center for Democracy, the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, County Police Department Preventing Criminology, and religious leaders within Cluj from a Baptist church, a Catholic church, an Orthodox church, and a Pentecostal church. The religious institutions represented were chosen based upon the majority percentage of religious affiliations of individuals in Romania.

The main open-ended research questions addressed in the semi-structured interviews were:

How does your organization contribute to preventing human trafficking?

Describe the governmental laws about implementing prevention programs, national action plans or strategies?

How successful were your campaigns and how did you evaluate them?

Have you collaborated with other organizations?

How is your organization funded?

What policies and laws need to be changed or enforced?

Do you think The Church can play a vital role in human trafficking?

Participants were asked to participate and informed that they could refuse to answer any questions.

Results

The organizations represented in this study sample were all from the Cluj County region. The presence of NGOs in the activities developed in this area is unique as they are mostly focused on the prevention area. The Ratiu Center for Democracy located in Turda and The Artemis Center from Cluj both contribute with campaigns developed in their immediate region. The Artemis Center is restricted by the lack of funds and was able only to support campaigns and projects concerning prevention and to represent an active regional partner in the programs initiated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Eva Laszlo, personal communication, June 4, 2007 and June 15, 2007).

Outreach and Education Activities

The Ratiu Center was assisted by 18 volunteers who set up booths downtown in Turda and asked people to fill out questionnaires about human trafficking in order to gain a better understanding of what people know about the topic and also to create and perform a theatrical play about human trafficking. Recently, they have toured educational

institutions with their performance. The group also traveled to Bucharest to film it and participated in a recorded debate. Brindusa Faur Apostol, the project coordinator in charge of the human trafficking campaigns within this organization hopes to reach as many teenagers as possible with the theatrical play. Creating a theatrical play about this topic is also a plan for the Artemis Center, who has already tested the effectiveness of such an activity by creating and performing a play on domestic violence.

Eva Laszlo, psychologist from Artemis Center for Counseling against Sexual Abuse and Violence in Cluj, was one of the 30 participants at the IOM rehabilitation workshop that trained individuals from professions in Psychology, Criminology, Medicine, and Social Work in order to prepare other individuals for reintegration assistance. Laszlo used this knowledge along with her colleagues by developing a rehabilitation counseling orientation within the Center. Artemis encountered their first victim of trafficking in 1999, and between the years 1999-2001, they have housed 16 victims of trafficking in their shelter, but after its dissolution they have provided social, psychological assistance, accompaniment and support to the doctor, police, and legal adviser for 26 or more victims (personal communication, June 15, 2007).

The intention was to gather different and relevant perspectives, the team juxtaposed to the nongovernmental approach to the one pertaining to the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (NAATP) which is a government funded agency and is the organization dedicated to prevent human trafficking in Romania and the County Police: Department for Analyzing and Preventing Criminology. Cooperation between the two is very close and both can assert their collaborative efforts in prevention activities. Anamaria Simon, the Coordinator of NAATP Cluj regional center spoke about

numerous prevention projects and campaigns developed at the national level and during the last year, at a regional level too, through the medium of regional centers created all over the country during this time. The department for Preventing Criminology helps combat human trafficking by collaborating with the institutions and NGOs that are, or could be involved. Gina Pop, the coordinator for preventing criminal acts in Cluj County mentioned collaborative efforts made with the Ratiu Center for Democracy and the Artemis Center. The event included an educational program that involved students from the Art and Design University and consisted of painted pieces on human trafficking, which was displayed in the Center for Tourist Information in Turda (personal communication, June 27, 2007).

Funding

A common difficulty for both NGOs and public institutions came into prominence in the discussions with NAATP and County Police representatives. Governmental agencies lacked funds as Cluj County was not considered a high risk area; therefore, financial requests are hard to come by (Ana Maria, personal communication, June 27, 2007). An instrumental role for both NGOs' activities of prevention was played by volunteers. There is a lack of support and partnerships among organizations and there is a competition for funding.

Even if the statistics for Ardeal region are not overwhelming at present, the number of victims admitted to be increasing. A fact confirmed both by the County Police: Department for Preventing Criminology and the NAATP in Cluj. Pop understands that the dissolving of the borders brought along with the integration of Romania in the

European Union, has led to the inability to obtain actual data of victims transported abroad (Gina Pop, personal communication, June 27, 2007).

The NAATP's efforts in preventing human trafficking include a hotline for victims, relatives, or for the general public who want more information and support about human trafficking and tips about working abroad. NAATP's efforts are dedicated towards reintegration assistance, but efforts have not included a shelter in this region, professional counseling services from psychologist, or assistance from social workers. The support that they provide for victims is very helpful, though, as the trials can last to one year. Many reasons for the vulnerable and traumatized victims to give up if they are not morally supported (Gina Pop, personal communication, June 27, 2007).

Although agencies were open to collaboration, their various limitations led them to consider the creation of a regional network in Transylvania. This was attempted by the Department for Preventing Criminology and The Ratiu Center for Democracy along with other agencies but that attempt is still in working progress.

The County Police: Department for Preventing Criminology and the NAATP are motivated because of the general lack of funding in the western part of the country precisely because the issue is more prevalent in eastern Moldova. A functioning network of NGOs has been built there with the help from the NAATP, which is currently developing many programs, most of which are national, but focused mainly on the target population in eastern Romania where the risk factors are substantial.

Religious Community Response

A third approach was to seek out the position of the Church, as an institution, towards human trafficking. The Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches

were the ones chosen to inquire, the first two being the most representative for the Romanian population, and the other two, attempting to comprehend the large spectrum of possible visions towards this phenomenon. The awareness of the critical issue, as well as the strong belief in human value and dignity, led all four church representatives to collaborate and to be involved in a regional network. The priests were not approached by victims, except for the Catholic Priest, Fr. Timar Zoltan who encountered two cases of trafficking, and who emphasized his resentment towards his impossibility to help them more than spending time talking and giving them money to buy a train/bus tickets, that enabled them to get to a safer place (personal communication, July 12, 2007). The Church can be included in prevention programs and plays an important role. Although priests do not receive any special training in seminary school in Romania, a step forward has been made by IOM who approached the Orthodox Church to inform the priests about human trafficking, and train them to respond if a victim does approach them. Fr. Catalin Polimaru continued to mention that no victims have approached him personally and he believes none of his colleagues have been approached. Still, he and his colleagues addressed human trafficking in their sermons, because they wanted to offer a perspective about this problem especially to the youth in the church (personal communication, July 12, 2007).

Explanations of the differences between a victim and prostitute are often ignored, however, the interviews with the Church representatives revealed the importance of distinguishing the two, as they all stated their differentiating views they make between the two terms and the treatment they would offer for the two. They strongly discourage prejudging and disrespectful manifestations towards any human being.

Thoughts on Work to do

Border control and security is a major concern because the borders are open. The interviews revealed a joint opinion about the necessity to implement efficient policies starting with the promulgation of adequate legislation, raising awareness and creating of departments specialized in the field within institutions and organizations. Efforts should not to be postponed but continued. The County Police: Department for Preventing Criminology and the NAATP believe there needs to be a regional network that ensures collaboration among stakeholders. The lack of cohesion of the activities developed by organizations is perceived by the interviewees as a diminishing factor of the impact of their efforts in fighting this phenomenon.

Recommendations

The major stakeholders including the government, police, department of organized crime, National Agency against Human Trafficking, public and private organizations, churches, communities, and the media can make a huge difference if they all work to prevent human trafficking.

Ways to prevent:

- Train individuals in well respected positions as well as individuals working with populations who are at high risks in order to inform them about what to do if they encounter a victim.
- Include subjects in school curricula planning in order to help educate youth.
- Encourage collaboration among all the major stakeholders.

- Establish a protocol for the stakeholders who do not directly work or assist victims.
- Promote hotlines to assist families, victims, or individuals who might encounter a victim.
- Encourage government officials to help strengthen international borders.
- A regional network consisting of various private and public organizations should collaborate to prevent human trafficking and assist victims.
- More programs need to be established to address the most vulnerable populations.
- Professionals are trained to assist victims of trafficking, but are not training others to assist victims.

The catalyst of a new, improved system of prevention could definitely be the 2007 National Action Plan, whose main objectives are to form a centralized data system and increase inter-institutional cooperation. A national database would allow access and constant exchange of information between NGOs and at the same time monitor the implementation of the National Strategy against Trafficking in Persons.

Theoretical Model

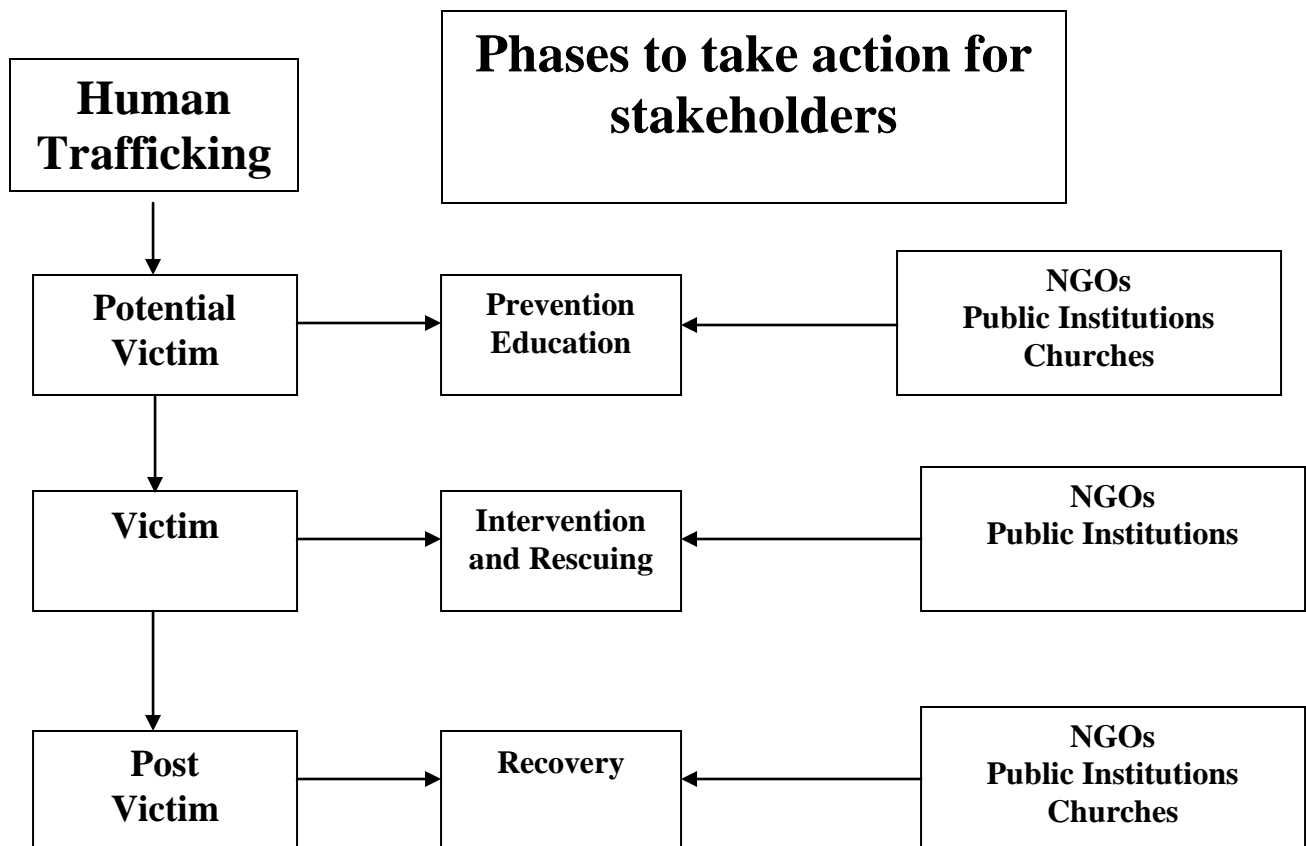
A theoretical model of organized intervention with a large applicability should be created, besides the dividing of responsibilities and time-framing them, each entity should know exactly when to intervene and who to contact for support.

To start with, a prevention campaign should systematically address each of the risk factors and target the messages towards the population with a high risk of being trafficked, according to the characteristics of that region. It might appear that the national campaigns are not well directed, since their spectrum is too large, the message will not get through and the impact will not be the one predicted. To avoid this, research should be conducted in the area of action before planning a campaign; a researcher needs to investigate the specific causes and characteristics of the population. For example, when designing a campaign in a region where most of the young people leave the country for work have only middle school education, the activities would aim at decreasing the target group vulnerability by discouraging school abandonment among students. Materials would be displayed in bars, coffee houses, venues rather than on usual streets or during social events.

Based on the results gained from this research study, the theoretical model for human trafficking should include NGOs, public institutions, and churches. All stakeholders will be responsible for assisting victims whenever intervention is possible. There are three phases in which those stakeholders can take action in: prevention, rescuing, and recovery. Stakeholders can help in prevention by educating and informing potential victims. Prevention can be in the form of campaigns targeting specific populations. Public institutions, NGOs, and churches should have no problem with carrying out initiatives for prevention. The next phase of action can take place by intervening and rescuing victims. At this moment churches may not have too much control of the situation, but certainly NGOs and public institutions can help investigate and rescue victims. The last phase of action is recovery. During this phase all

stakeholders should be present. NGO's can help assist and reintegrate victims into society by offering social and psychological assistance as well as opportunities to develop professional skills. Public institutions can make sure victims get their lives back together and punish those individuals who committed crimes against them. Priests are able to help restore faith in the victims and offer spiritual guidance. Individuals within churches can provide support and welcome victims so they can be integrated in a small community. Existing victims need to have a support system; if existing victims do not, then they will be more vulnerable to be trafficked again.

Theoretical Model for Human Trafficking



Conclusion

Sexual exploitation is still a major issue especially in Romania. NGOs and public institutions are making efforts to prevent trafficking among youth, but there needs to be stronger prevention methods. Partnerships need to be formed and NGOs and public institutions need to create a network that is easy and convenient for them to work together. NGOs and public institutions should also include churches in their network as well as prevention campaigns.

If churches, communities, schools, NGOs, the Romanian government, professionals working in occupations mostly exposed to vulnerable or underprivileged populations, and the youth in Romania collaborate to work together, then preventing would reach far more people. When someone becomes a victim, the key stakeholders mentioned earlier can intervene to assist the victim. A protocol needs to be created, so if any of the individuals encounter a victim, they have been properly trained to respond effectively. The future will remain in the hands of these stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my warmest thanks to the University of Iowa and the Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training (MHIRT) Program for allowing me to expand my horizons overseas and sending me to Cluj-Napoca, Romania in order to gain experience as a researcher. This opportunity has left a memorable impact on me and has inspired me to continue researching and look into the field of Public Health.

I also want to thank Razvan Chereches for taking me in as an intern at the Center for Health Policy and Public Health (CHPPH). Your philosophy and guidance has helped me understand the fundamental components of research. I have been inspired to fulfill my passion of combating human trafficking through this experience. Chereches is the Executive Director of the CHPPH which is an operating component of the Institute for Social Research. CHPPH is the newest research structure at the Faculty of Political Administration and Communication Science at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. CHPPH is involved with the continuing development of scientific research networks and providing opportunities for individual researchers

Lastly, I would like to express my gratifications to my research team: Noemi, Georgiana, Susan, and Anca. Without your hard work, this could not be possible. It has been a pleasure working with you all, and I can not thank you enough.

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