Internal child trafficking in China

Although transnational trafficking in children has attracted worldwide attention in the last two decades, internal trafficking has been relatively ignored. A number of geographical contexts have been largely neglected by the academic community and one of them has been China; a country with a remarkably long history of the phenomenon and one in which the particular practice is culturally embedded, to the point that it is viewed simply as tradition.

For older children, abduction and/or deception are the most common methods employed. Investigated cases reveal that female traffickers often play a crucial role in tempting children away from their homes. Teenagers (and sometimes their parents) tend to be deceived with fraudulent job offers such as working in factories, building sites, and restaurants.

Demand for children

Traditionally, children have mostly been trafficked from the economically underdeveloped areas (such as Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and Xinjiang) to the more developed areas (such as Shanghai, Guangdong). Demand for children includes: (1) Organisers: individuals in the position to organise and control the entire trafficking process, who have access to potential buyers. Generally, individuals or small groups form temporary collaborations. In the case of systematic or large scale trafficking, the business tends to have a naturally defined horizontal ‘structure’ with independent, autonomous ‘entities’ involved in the process. In some cases individuals act as intermediaries who attempt to sell or buy children, and in other cases, they simply act as facilitators who may or may not be involved in the sale or other aspects of the business. For example, some owners of homes rented by traffickers not only ‘turn a blind eye’, but they also assist by identifying (prospective) buyers.

Different roles exist in the trafficking process, these include: (1) Organisers: individuals in the position to organise and control the entire trafficking process, who have access to potential buyers. Generally, individuals or small groups form temporary collaborations. In the case of systematic or large scale trafficking, the business tends to have a naturally defined horizontal ‘structure’ with independent, autonomous ‘entities’ involved in the process. In some cases individuals act as intermediaries who attempt to sell or buy children, and in other cases, they simply act as facilitators who may or may not be involved in the sale or other aspects of the business. For example, some owners of homes rented by traffickers not only ‘turn a blind eye’, but they also assist by identifying (prospective) buyers.

Supply, demand, facilitation

Child trafficking is not a new crime in China although it remained a ‘new’ tendency in the last two decades or so. In addition to a change in scale, the characteristics of child trafficking have also transformed. As a result it has attracted more attention from the media, which has often been the case where trafficking has been relatively ignored. A number of geographical contexts have been largely neglected by the academic community and one of them has been China; a country with a remarkably long history of the phenomenon and one in which the particular practice is culturally embedded, to the point that it is viewed simply as tradition.

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Notes

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