

Students' Sad Stories about Trafficking: A Scourge in Curriculum Implementation

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ABSTRACT Students' trafficking is a human rights violation that rises to the level of slavery. Trafficking is the purchase and sale of human beings for the purpose of exploitation of forced labor, such as sex work or participation in armed conflict. This study seeks to explore the root causes of students' trafficking in Southern African universities and its implications in curriculum implementation. Related literature was reviewed and both interviews and questionnaires were used as research instruments in the study. Thirty- six participants were purposefully sampled. On analysis of data, it became evident that traffickers target students because of their vulnerability and gullibility. Results suggested that trafficking presents grave risks to the physical, psychological, spiritual and emotional development of students. The following themes oil the machine for students' trafficking: economic plight, prostitution and domestic abuse. Implications for curriculum implementation, in terms of prevention and psychosocial rehabilitation of students who have been victimized were also presented. A multi-faceted strategy was necessary to make inroads in combating the multi-dimensional causes of students' trafficking.

I. INTRODUCTION

Although students' trafficking is a global problem that affects institutions of higher learning in the African continent, little research has been done into the situation in the Southern Africa (hereafter referred to as SoA). In 2001, it was revealed that 7000 university students were trafficked from the African continent (Phoenix 2001). In some instances, both parents and students have to blame themselves for the rate of victim precipitation. For geographical distribution, see map of Southern African (SoA) countries in Figure 1.

In this study, the victims were undergraduate students from SoA universities. Undergraduate students refer to first year students who registered for bridging programmes, diplomas and first degrees. Most of these students were aged 17-18. This meant that they were viewed as minors in the eyes of the law and could not take decisions on their own. Undergraduate students' dropout rate from African universities is quite high and it needs serious attention from the Ministry of Education. The gap between high schools and institutions of higher learning has always been wide for students in SoA. Undergraduate students become primary candidates for trafficking and they are needed as cheap labour or for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Various myths, such as the belief that HIV/AIDS can be cured by having sex with a virgin, technological advance (for example, the Internet which has facilitated child pornography) and sex tourism that specifically target students, all add to the vulnerability of students in the 17 - 18 age group (Kloer 2011). The situation is, often hidden and obviously hard to address. Trafficking always violates the students' right to grow up in a family environment.

Teenagers were trafficked as mail-order brides and in most cases, the girls who formed the subject of this research were powerless and isolated and likely to become victims of violence. Undergraduate students who are trafficked face a range of dangers, including violence and sexual abuse. In some instances, they are even arrested and detained as illegal aliens (Ryan 2011). It is worth noting that trafficking is a dynamic process with its own unique route of supply and demand flows which are never static. After sharing their vivid experiences, it became evident that many of the students who were returned to their countries of origin had similar vulnerable profiles which are described below:

- undergraduate students who dropped out of universities and went to cities in search of greener pastures
- undergraduates from families where domestic violence and abuse was prevalent and

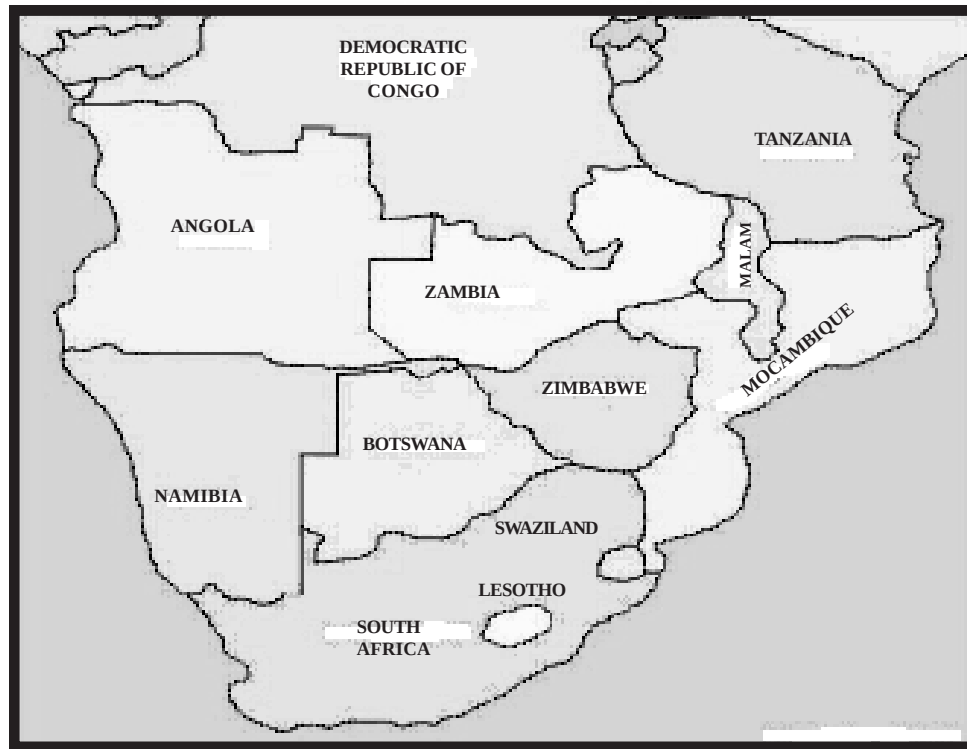


Fig. 1. Southern African countries

- undergraduates from poor, disadvantaged and often dysfunctional families.

Theoretical Framework

Two of the most relevant criminological theories underpin this study: General Strain Theory (GST) and Labelling Theory (LT). These theories focus on the position of women and how they slide into prostitution. Females who work in the sex trade would declare that their life-long career goal was to become a sex worker (Brants 1998). The GST states that crime, especially trafficking and prostitution occur as a result of the feelings generated by negative relationships with others. Much of the literature on sex workers paints a portrait of early childhood abuse, neglect and confusion. This theory, further argues that it is the experience and feelings of anger and frustration from failed attempts at achievement, failure of primary relationships with caregivers, or victimization that leads to the experience of strain. How people cope with that strain appears to be one of two ways. The cop-

ing may be inner directed, accompanied by feelings of depression, or through substance abuse to mute emotional pain. Alternatively, the coping may be directed outwardly, (for example, as violent anger). In the case of sex workers, it is clear that the strain is mainly inner directed (de Graaf 1993).

Labelling Theory (LT) has its roots in the early 1930s, in the studies of George Herbert Mead, a symbolic interactionist, who believed that the self is totally constructed in relationship to others in society. Labeling has been called one of the most prominent theories in criminology, although it has attracted a great deal of criticism. One of the biggest criticisms is that labelling focuses on people from the 'lower classes' while ignoring 'white collar' crime (Ryan 2011). Once a woman enters into prostitution, often as a result of difficulties in childhood or her teen years and often coerced by relatives or pimps, it is very difficult for her to exit this lifestyle. This is where labelling theory proves useful. Once labelled as promiscuous or as a sex worker by the police or peers, the road to a nor-

mal way of life for these women is often virtually impossible to navigate successfully. LT is especially applicable to transgendered prostitutes; people who are doubly stigmatised both by their gender differences and their prostitution, such people have to deal with a host of issues, ranging from sexual identity conflict, shame, and isolation (Weitzer 2000).

II. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was considered suitable for this research. Both focus group interviews and observations were employed as research instruments for data collection. The qualitative approach described and analysed students' individual and collective social actions, thoughts, feelings, opinions, experiences and perceptions. From a population of sixty-six universities in the region, the study used purposive sampling to identify six universities. One university was chosen from each of the following SoA countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling, identified participants who had relevant data about the study and who had firsthand experience pertaining to students' trafficking and its implications for curriculum implementation (Symon and Hornby 1994). Six students from each of the six universities were purposefully sampled, these were four females and two males. The total number of participants in this study was thirty-six (36). For ethical reasons, the vowels A-F and the numbers 1-6 were used to ensure confidentiality (see Table 1 for universities sampled in the study).

It is imperative to note that prior, informed consent was obtained from all the participants in the study. Informed consent implied that all adequate information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures that will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which the respondents may be exposed, as well as the credibility of the researcher, be rendered to potential participants or their legal representatives (Williams et al. 1995: 30; DeVos et al. 2003: 65).

The right to privacy was discussed with all the participants. Singleton (2004: 422) is of the opinion that the right to privacy is the individual's right to decide when, where, to whom, and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed. Privacy

implies the element of personal privacy, while confidentiality indicates the handling of information in a confidential manner. Sieber (2002: 146) views confidentiality as a continuation of privacy, which refers to agreements between persons that limit others' access to private information. Information was provided anonymously to ensure the privacy of both participants and institutions. Thirty-six interviewees were identified for the interview process in their own institutions. These interviews consist of focus groups of six members each per institution. In a brief time, the researcher created a thoughtful, permissive atmosphere, provided ground rules, and set the tone of the discussion. Participants were informed that there are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. They were also made to feel free to share their point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. The sad stories related in participants' research interviews formed the research findings, and as such, were subject to analysis. The institutions of Higher Learning chosen from the above countries were selected on the basis of their documented high statistics of student trafficking (See Fig. 2 for statistics relating to these SoA universities).



Fig. 2. Students' trafficking in Southern African universities

In the interview process, the researcher made sure that students' sad stories did not lose their authenticity in that he made a point of maintaining a close and healthy relationship with the interviewees. The students were viewed as experts on the researched subject of trafficking and all participants were allowed a great deal of flexibility in terms of how the interview unfolded. Respect for one another in educational research helps to generate and test valuable knowledge. It also calls for moral awareness and an agreed framework for conduct (Whitehead 2006). The

researcher treated all participants with respect at all times. To capture the actual words of students, a tape recorder was used. Students did not object to this because they were given ground rules including research ethics prior to being interviewed. Permission was also granted by universities registrars and they, too, were assured of complete confidentiality.

III. RESULTS

Schwier et al. (2007) are of the opinion that, to obtain results, prior personal experiences need to be shared through conversation and construction of new knowledge products. In this study, results were obtained through the interviews and questionnaires both of which focused on students' trafficking. The analysis of students' sad stories included brooding and reflecting upon all the data collected. When the raw data was analysed, the key themes became apparent in the stories (Plummer 2001). The analysis of data was arranged thematically. The rationale for engaging in the thematic research analysis was to identify emerging trends in students' responses and thus formulating results based on general patterns and trends. In the analysis of data, it became evident that students' trafficking has various causes categorised in the form of three themes such as: *economic plight, sexual exploitation and domestic abuse*.

What was noteworthy was the degree of similarity, in the findings across the above identified thirty- six (36) participants (see Table 1 for universities sampled in the study) from the different universities in the SoA region (see Table 2 for participants in the study). The authentic data from the students' stories were provided in each theme in the form of extracts. A detailed discussion emerged about each of the themes identified in the students' sad stories about trafficking.

Table 1: Universities sampled in the study

University	Country	City	African Language
A	Botswana	Gaborone	Setswana
B	Lesotho	Maseru	Sesotho
C	Mozambique	Maputo	Portuguese
D	South Africa	Johannesburg	Isizulu and other 9
E	Swaziland	Mbabane	Siswati
F	Zimbabwe	Harare	Shona and Ndebele

Table 2: Participants in the study

University	Participants	Gender	Total
All six universities	Students	2 males and 2 females	6 x 6 = 36

Theme1: Economic Plight

Poverty is a major factor that "oils the wheel" of trafficking on the African continent. It goes without saying that the economic disparity that exists both within and between countries is another factor that encourages trafficking. The flow of trafficking takes place from low-income to high-income countries; in the high income countries, there is a demand for cheap and low status labour (Castillo and Jenkins 1994). Although this research was conducted in the SoA region, South Africa's economy is currently the most stable on the continent. In fact, South Africa is viewed as Africa's "New York". Traffickers target male and female students who are economically disadvantaged in their home country and transport them to South Africa and wealthier countries abroad that support the commercial sex industry (Angelique 2009). A male student (4) from Mozambique related the following story;

"I applied for scholarship to study medicine at Harvard University in the United States of America. I got a call congratulating me of the achievement. There was excitement in the family. I deregistered at the university. The passport and visa were organized within a short space of time. I flew to USA. I did not know that it was a fake scholarship to lure me to hardship. Despite this promise, I was forbidden to go to universities, often beaten, fed on leftover food scraps, and forced to work abnormal hours without salary. I bribed the security guard in order to escape from this atrocious life."

When the student left home, he did so willingly, with a sense of joy, not trepidation. In this case, the trafficker promised free tertiary education and a regular income. To his horror, however, he ended up as a domestic worker in the city. Student 1 from Lesotho was trafficked for forced labour in street vending, agriculture and stone quarries. Although universities warned students of the danger of being trafficked, these warnings went unheeded. Student 6 from Botswana had the following story to tell,

"During free periods, boys are seen running behind trucks carrying goods to South Africa

and other neighbouring countries. Some of them miss their lectures, whilst some enjoy it because they end up with pocket money. They get addicted to this habit in such a way that they cannot afford to miss this exercise. When they write tests and examinations, they fail dismally."

In Swaziland and Zimbabwe, poverty compels 49% of students to drop out of university every year. These students often leave their homes with the consent of their parents who are poor to provide for them. Some of them are breadwinners who are supposed to work during vacations. They get two or three temporary jobs working in cities. In some of the jobs, they work for long hours, without remuneration. When they knock off from one job, they go to the next one to supplement their income. Although the salary is peanuts, they end up working permanently. Given this situation, it is clear how impoverished circumstances lead to the practice of human trafficking.

Young girls from remote villages are even lured from their homes by relatives or neighbours with the pretext of better job opportunities. These girls are sold for amounts as small as R2000 to brokers who deliver them to brothel owners abroad. This purchase price, plus interest becomes the debt that the girls must work to pay off. It is unfortunate that this process sometimes stretches on indefinitely (Brewer 1997). Student 5 from South Africa gave the following account;

"For the first four months I did not earn a salary. I was told I was expensive when I was sold to my boss. I have to offset the balance in four monthly installments prior to earning a salary. Despite the hard work I was doing in the house, the only thing I got was food which was not enough. I will not forget the day I was bitten by the dogs when I was feeding them. Although blood was oozing, I could not be taken to a doctor. I was told there is no money because I still owe my boss. I blamed myself for being a university drop out."

Only the brothel owner knew the terms of the debt, and girls were clueless about the terms for repayment. The house was tightly controlled, and the girls were under constant surveillance. The owner was ruthless and walked around armed with a firearm. He used threats and severe beatings to keep inmates in line.

At its core, students' trafficking is a result of women's unequal economic status. Of the

world's poor, large numbers are women. The number of women living in poverty has also increased disproportionately to the number of males. Women, far more frequently than men, have the additional economic burden of caring for children. Women also face discrimination that limits their employment opportunities (de Graaf 1993). 75% were lured from their families for scholarships, 96% indicated job opportunities whilst 65% was for holidays. This shows, yet again, that poverty is a stumbling block to students' future and an issue that requires serious attention. In most cases the future of an uneducated child is doomed to failure.

Theme 2: Prostitution

The trafficking of female students into the commercial sex industry is primarily to countries in which prostitution and the provision of other sexual services are legalised (Charter 2008). Trafficking in girls and young women is related to the existence of legal and illegal sex markets, and the existence of these sex markets is directly connected to the fact that there are men who are prepared to pay for sexual activities. Prostitutes do not become sex workers in a vacuum. African women, who seek help in leaving the prostitution racket, suffer from a high prevalence of multiple health-related conditions, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Studies have found that posttraumatic stress afflicts women involved in the sex trade regardless of race, national boundaries, or socioeconomic differences (Angelique 2009). In South Africa, girls are moved around in provinces and ultimately end up abroad for the purpose of sexual exploitation, the making of pornography, and prostitution. The pimps use the same manipulative and coercive techniques to recruit and control girls in SoA (that is, internal trafficking) as they do in transnational trafficking. Photos and prices for minors who are forced into prostitution are presented in menu form for potential clients (Brants 1998). Arriving in foreign countries such as Europe and America, girls are taken to beauty clinics where their nails are painted and their hair dyed. Officials from "women's boutiques" are hired to dress them in miniskirts and high heel shoes meant for prostitution. Their documents are falsified with immediate effect and their names changed. Deceived by what they imagine is a luxurious life, these young girls

found themselves prostituting. Tight security makes it impossible for them to leave the premises. The following statement was made by an emotional female student (6) from Mozambique—needless to say, this student was extremely emotional as she recounted her story:

“We were five girls kept in a brothel. We lived in windowless rooms that were filthy, dark, and cramped. The room had a terrible stench of sex. There was usually only enough room to sleep, which was virtually pointless being that we will not be able to sleep through the night or day because clients arrive 24 hours. Most victims do not have access to condoms and even if they do have one, we are forced to have sex without condoms because their clients refuse to use one. Thank God I am not HIV/AIDS positive. Some of the victims died from this pandemic.”

The above story shows the cruelty of brothel owners whose sole concern is profit and nothing else. Girls are expected to pay Euros and Dollars to their madams for monthly rentals. Although in this case the rooms were almost never cleaned, the rent was extremely expensive. The victims were also expected to contribute a certain amount of money on a weekly basis for their food and for the provocative clothing they had to wear.

Student 3 from Lesotho reported the following:

“Competition is stiff. We had to vie for clients. When we did not earn the money our madam required, she pressed a hot iron on our breasts. When one client leaves the room, another client walks in. Other clients will be in a waiting room. The one who finishes earlier will go and serve the first in line. The bulk of the money would be taken by madam.”

Student 1 from Swaziland shared this story;

“We were forced to receive as many as thirty clients per day regardless of whether we were sick or menstruating. We suffered from physical injuries, including; injuries from physical abuse, skin irritations, headaches, fevers, backaches, STDs and all forms of sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV and AIDS. Some of the clients smelling with liquor and cigarette will kiss you. I remember the day I vomited when I was kissed repeatedly by someone that I believe has not brushed his teeth for more than a month. His gums were bleeding.”

Whilst sharing this story, she shed tears. Between 2006 and 2011, about 3500 Southern

African girls are said to have died on the streets of Spain and United States of America while prostituting (Lloyd 2010). Senior government officials often promote trafficking and prostitution and the unscrupulous policemen themselves are reluctant to act against those using young girls, simply because many of these men are powerful and well-known public figures. Parents sometimes lose their children to prostitution unexpectedly. All students reported that 50% to 60% of prostitutes in SoA universities were believed to be minors. Undergraduate students and their families are often unaware of the dangers of trafficking; believing that better employment and a life is to be found by relocating abroad (Newman 2010). 92% of the participants reported that the rate of prostitution is high at SoA universities and this, obviously, has implications for students' throughput rate. This will impact on the time span and completion of a four year undergraduate degree.

Theme 3: Family Abuse

Domestic abuse is one of the most widespread violations of women's rights globally (Weitzer 2000). As a result of feeble legal mechanisms and in many communities, a lack of support for abused women, girls and women often find it extremely difficult to end the abuse. This study suggests that victims of family abuse, particularly, girls and women, may also be at risk of becoming victims of trafficking when they seek employment abroad in order to escape the abusive situation at home.

Student 4 from South Africa reported that after the death of her father, her mother remarried. Her step father ill-treated her, he did not want to give her tuition fees and pay for her transport to the university. He always complained that electricity was expensive and she must not study beyond nine o'clock. He even burnt her books. She continued her story as follows;

“The worst he did was to rape me repeatedly; I was also subjected to other forms of torture, to severe beatings and exposure to HIV and AIDS. I reported the case to the nearest police station and the culprit was apprehended. After a day he was released on bail. She lost the case at court when the stepfather's lawyers cross examined her.”

When he got home he expelled her and threatened to kill her if she refused to leave. Unfortunately, the mother could not come to her rescue. Her last resort was to seek employment in Johannesburg. It was sad indeed to learn that this student sells liquor in a beer hall. When she knocks off after 12 midnight, she goes into another demanding job. This is what she said;

"When I knock off, I go out with different men in the streets of Hillbrow. In the morning, I have to be ready for my lectures". In the class I will be dosing because of fatigue. After the last lecture, I go back to my daily routine. My future is already bleak because I have not even passed a single test or an assignment since the beginning of the first semester. Lecturers complain about my performance and I do not see myself going through."

Student 6 from Mozambique reported that her parents divorced and remarried new partners. She decided to stay behind with her father. Little did she know that her life was going to become a significantly harder. Her stepmother came to the family with her three young kids. Things were quite different from what she had expected, and after refusing to do domestic work all the time, she was savagely beaten and maltreated, not only by her stepmother but also by the stepchildren. The student became a stranger turned in her own home.

"I prepared meals for everyone on a daily basis and also did laundry for everyone. I was not allowed to open the refrigerator nor watch the television. Although I reported the incident to my father it was a futile exercise. Instead my stepmother together with her children shouted at me in the presence of my legitimate father. I sleep in the kitchen on the floor. I vacated my bedroom for the three kids who came with my stepmother. I am even struggling with my academic work. I have given up because I failed all modules in the first semester."

IV. DISCUSSION

In the analysis of these sad stories, it was evident that such stories were based on students' personal experiences and are a true reflection of the trafficking of students at universities in Southern Africa. In their painful stories, the students speak of themselves and give meaning to their experiences, which makes their stories subjective than objective. While this analy-

sis is useful in explaining the complex nature of undergraduate students' trafficking, the factors that play a role in trafficking are actually interwoven. The questions to be posed are: to what extent are students' stories constructed and how do they relate to the past reality of trafficking? To address the gaps between reality and experience, stories have to reflect past life and realise its events and accounts of reality as filtered through students' consciousness (Antikainen and Houtsonen 2001). The stories relate to personal change which is linked to behaviour change. Trafficking in young girls and women has proven to be a lucrative business that has become a significant source of income for organised crimes syndicates. Accumulated knowledge from field work in SoA universities has shown that students' victims generally fell into two categories: adolescent girls between 17 and 19 years of age (for the purposes of sexual exploitation); and children under 13 years of age (for the purposes of forced labour), begging and, occasionally, (for the sale of organs) (Phoenix 2001). The sad stories recounted to the researcher not only reflect who the undergraduate students are, but also explain how these students became victims of trafficking. Questions to be posed are: what is the significance of storytelling? What lessons can be learnt from this horrendous crime of trafficking? How can parents and other students learn from these stories? What is the impact of trafficking in curriculum implementation? How can traffickers be deterred from committing this crime?

V. CONCLUSION

The literature review identified the conceptual framework that informed the study. It was through the telling of the exploited students' stories that we observe how the two theories appeared to reinforce prostitutes' entry into, and their inability to exit, the world of prostitution. The growing body of research into this issue enables us to state unequivocally — that the stories recounted here, support the two general theories referred to earlier on: General Strain Theory and Labelling Theory. Women's entry into prostitution often starts with strain and their situation is then exacerbated by labelling. Emerging from this study, the three themes identified were viewed as "oiling the wheel" of students' trafficking in SoA universities. The sharing of

experience between the researcher and students who had suffered the consequences for trafficking led to the acquisition of knowledge and behavioural skills which were refined during the process of curriculum development. One of the limitations of this study is the very small sample size in relation to a big population group. Although six universities were sampled from six countries with sixty-six (66) universities, the results can be generalisable to all other universities. Poverty was viewed as one of the reasons why students got trapped into trafficking. Economic hardship led to a deprivation of basic needs. Poor living conditions led students to look for better options elsewhere. The greater the intensity of impoverishment, the higher is the risk of falling prey to trafficking. Students were trapped physically, psychologically, financially and emotionally by their traffickers. Addressing such an egregious crime on a global scale is obviously a daunting task requiring both expertise and dedication. While the results of this study confirm what is already known about students' trafficking within a specific context, further research needs to be conducted into this distressing phenomenon.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

From a Southern African perspective, it is evident that a multi-faceted strategy approach will be needed to make inroads in combating the multi-dimensional causes of students' trafficking.

➤ Awareness Campaigns

The "be alert and safe" brochures that describe the tactics criminal groups use to coerce and traffic in young women should be made available at all universities. There should also be a website focusing on this heinous crime and the strategies of empowering young women on what to do to protect themselves against illegitimate groups. Indeed, the researcher believes that this issue should become a compulsory module in the curriculum. Newspapers, radios and television channels should also alert the general population to the dangers of trafficking. Media coverage on the rights of human beings and trafficking and on cases of serious maltreatment of trafficked students could definitely have a significant impact.

Government officials, rural elders, pastors, civic organisations, women and youth, trade unions and media should also join hands in addressing this horrendous crime. Parental poverty should not be allowed to ruin young people's lives. Parents should obviously not give their consent to the traffickers and also guard against traffickers who come to them with a "dangling carrot" of free education and job opportunities outside the continent. Parents should also be exposed to the implications of domestic violence and abuse. Victims should also be provided with counseling, medical and material assistance, and employment training and opportunities to facilitate transition and reintegration.

➤ Training and Career Development

The Ministry of Education in SoA countries should develop and implement a Women Apprentice Programme that provides training and local career development opportunities for young women living in rural area. There should also be greater flexibility and communication between schools and community organisations to more effectively address problems with young people's participation. An integrated single income and support payment which provides adequate assistance for young people should be introduced. Let there be a target for extra resources and tailor-made programmes aimed at reaching the high percentage of unemployed young people concentrated in a small number of local government areas.

➤ Trafficking Laws

Human trafficking laws must provide serious penalties against traffickers, parents and friends who play a role in promoting trafficking. Their property should be confiscated. At the very least, traffickers property should be confiscated. At the same time, vigorous training is needed to ensure that an insensitive investigation and prosecution process does not further traumatise trafficking victims. It is also imperative that law enforcement agents ensure that their efforts to punish traffickers are implemented within a system that respects and safeguards the rights of the victims to safety and privacy at all time. When there are universities functions held at night, security guards should always be seen patrolling. Arrangements should also be made with the nearest police station so that they

should be visible on campus. Pedestrians and motorists should be searched when entering and exiting the premises. Given the heinous nature of this crime, the researcher strongly believes that the death penalty should be introduced in the SoA region specifically for those found guilty of trafficking.

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NOTES

1. The acronym SoA is used interchangeably for Southern Africa.
2. South Africa has eleven official languages including Afrikaans, English, Isindebele, Siswati, Isizulu, Isixhosa, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.
2. Botswana: English, Tswana. Bemba, Gujarati, Hindi, Luyana, Nyanja and Urdu,
3. Lesotho: Southern Sotho and English.
4. Mozambique: Portuguese, English, French, Greek, Gujarati, Kabuverdianu and Xitsonga
5. Swaziland: Siswati and English.
6. Zimbabwe: Shona, Ndebele, English and Kalanga.

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