Trafficking in women has grown significantly in the past decade. Although this has been a phenomenon of long standing in Asia, the phenomenon has spread to many more regions of the world. Trafficking was once primarily concentrated within a particular region of the world but with globalization it has become a trade that connects many far-reaching regions.

Analyses of the rise of trafficking can be divided into the following three categories of analysis. These include the gender perspective, the human rights perspective and the market driven perspective. All of these perspectives contribute important insights to the phenomena. Little analysis, however, of the business practices of the transnational crime groups that traffic women have been done. Understanding the diversity of trafficking organizations has important implications for the ways that policy makers address the problem.

Four different business models of trafficking are outlined below. Each of these models is associated with a different national group and reflects deep historical influences, geographical realities and the market forces that drive the trade. These are ideal types and every crime group from a particular region does not fit a model.

The natural resource model: Post-Soviet organized crime. This model pertains almost only to the trafficking of women. It does not reflect an integrated business but its focus is on short-term profits with little concern for the maintenance of supply and the long-term durability of the business. Post-Soviet organized crime sells women as if they were a readily available natural resource such as timber or furs.

This model does not maximize profits and profits are not repatriated or used for development. This model results in very significant violations of human rights because the traffickers have no long-term interest in wresting long-term profits from these women and have no connections to their families.

The trade and development model: Chinese traffickers. This model is most applicable to the smuggling of men but also is used to traffic women who may represent as much as ten percent of the total human trade. Chinese operate as a business that is integrated from start to finish allowing for maximum long-term profits. Much of the profits are repatriated and fuel development. Assets are laundered back sometimes through wire transfers but multi-millions are returned through the system of Chinese underground banking such as through gold shops and other similar techniques.

This model results in less significant violations of human rights than in model 1 because the smugglers and traffickers have long term interest in wresting long term profits from these women and often have connections to their families.

The supermarket model — low cost and high volume: U.S.-Mexican trade. The trade is based on maximizing profits by moving the largest numbers of people and not charging significant sums for each individual. Trafficking patterns resemble those used in the larger trade of smuggling. Most of the “people movers” are specialists in this trade that is based on large-scale supply and existing demand. The investment patterns of the traffickers resembled those of people who were smuggled rather than those of drug traffickers. Traffickers buy land and build homes.

This model results in many significant violations of human rights and even fatalities of those smuggled. Because there is little profit to be gained from each individual who is moved, smugglers are not often concerned about the safe delivery of those smuggled to...
their ultimate destination.

The violent entrepreneur model: Balkan crime groups. This model pertains almost exclusively to the trafficking of women. Balkan traders in women run an integrated business and are middlemen for the groups from Eastern Europe. This is an opportunistic model in both the source and recipient countries. At home, they capitalize on instability and civil conflict and in existing markets in Continental Europe and Great Britain they use force to achieve dominance. The high profits from this trade appear to be used to finance other illicit activities at home and for investments in property and trade businesses overseas.

This model results in very significant violations of human rights and terrible violence against trafficked women. This model’s reliance on violence in all stages of its operations makes it the most serious violator of human rights.

Policy conclusions. This analytical approach leads us to the following conclusions on the ways to address the problem. Different investigative approaches must be used to address different organized crime structures. Following the money trails of the crime groups is needed to combat the problem. Freezing and confiscating the significant assets of these crime groups is needed to stem their growth. Addressing the human rights of the victims must be integral to any strategy to address the business organizations that traffic in women.

International cooperation is essential in combating this problem. The international community at the multilateral and the national level must understand that trafficking is a growing problem of transnational crime. Public information programs in recipient countries need to complement those in source countries. In developed countries, citizens need to understand that trafficking violates human rights and fuels the growth of transnational crime.

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