

VULNERABLE PEOPLE: THE HIDDEN WORLD OF MODERN SLAVERY

Abstract

The overarching aim of this essay is to raise awareness of modern slavery practices and highlight possible ways to fight the issue collectively. Modern slavery is a contemporary complex phenomenon which is considered to be the most widespread in the global world, but the least understood. This study identifies vulnerable groups and industries, giving them a voice and visibility which could inform future decision making. It also discusses possible causes and consequences of modern slavery, offering system-wide solutions which involve all elements of society.

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Introduction

Modern slavery is considered as one of the most widespread, complex and misunderstood problems surrounding globalisation. Cockayne and his team (2019) discovered that “modern slavery is actually a product of the way the global political and economic system works: it is a feature, not a bug”. However, there is still limited awareness that a lot of products we use on a daily basis are produced by people living in conditions of modern slavery. This is the topic that this essay seeks to contribute.

This essay will begin by defining modern slavery, which will be followed by a discussion of alarming statistics, vulnerable groups and industries. Next, this essay will navigate through the causes, consequences and solutions to modern slavery. This essay will be concluded with a reflective writing which will provide an overview of my personal learning of modern slavery and the pro-active approach that I have taken as a result of my engagement with the topic.

Defining modern slavery

While slavery has been criminalised and illegal for many years, it still exists in our society (Stronger Together, 2018). The HM Government (2019) state that modern slavery is an umbrella term to describe the exploitation of people leading to criminal gain. The Home Office (2017) categorises four types of modern slavery: labour exploitation, domestic servitude, criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation. Modern slavery differentiates from historical chattel slavery which focused on legitimately selling one’s life to another, in modern slavery victims lose control of their lives through force, deception or violence (Kempadoo, 2015). Therefore, historical slavery and modern slavery differ as historical slavery was legal and institutionalised whilst modern

slavery is illegal, hidden and marginalised (Brown, Boyd, Brickell, Ives, Natarajan, & Parsons, 2019).

The scope of the problem

Although modern slavery is illegal worldwide, there is data to demonstrate its significance in modern society. There are currently 40.3 million victims of modern slavery across the globe, with 25 million involved in forced labour and 15 million involved in forced marriage (International Labour Organisation, 2019). It is difficult to know an exact number, as some countries have a limited ability to collect data, but evidence suggests that numbers are increasing (National Crime Agency, 2020a). Furthermore, global estimates do not include child soldiers and organ trafficking (Global Slavery Index, 2018). Despite the majority of victims originating in developing countries, developed economies benefit the most, where striking figures show annual profits of 34,800 (US\$) per victim of modern slavery (International Labour Organisation, 2020c). Appendix B provides a breakdown of each region's profit per victim.

Vulnerable groups

There are a number of vulnerable groups that are prone to be victims of modern slavery. Evidence shows that migrant workers are most likely to be victims of forced labour (Stronger Together, 2018). They may agree to any working circumstances, as they need to survive. They may also be deceived into paying high recruitment fees (CIOB, 2018). Additionally, their work options may be limited due to language barriers or they may bring previous expectations from their home countries (Stronger Together, 2018). Another vulnerable group is individuals in economically disadvantaged financial situations, as they may have acquired large amounts of debt to cover living costs. In

a search for an alternative repayment method, they can become trapped in debt with a loan handler or pressured into exploitive work (CIOB, 2018). Also, victims of modern slavery are often part of socio-economic groups that are excluded from the labour market. There is a strong relationship between modern slavery and homelessness, as homeless individuals face barriers to employment as well as feeling excluded from society (CIOB, 2018).

If an individual cannot participate in cultural, social, political or economic elements of society, they are described as being excluded from society, for example prisoners (Murray, 2007; Tonry, 2004). Individuals excluded from society are more vulnerable to modern slavery as they have limited access and knowledge of their legal rights, norms, services, participation and income (Babajanian & Hagen-Zanker, 2012). A common misconception is that all victims of modern slavery are low skilled workers or migrants (CIOB, 2018). However, this is only a fraction of the issue as there are many other groups who are subject of modern slavery including women, religious and ethnic minorities and children (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Skrivankova (2014) convincingly argues that regardless of background, demographic and skills, victims of modern slavery share a sense of vulnerability which is the key to their exploitation (CIOB, 2018).

Modern slavery in industries

Industries rife with labour exploitation usually share characteristics such as competitive markets, cost focused business models, and the isolation of workers (Lalani & Metcalf, 2012). Vulnerability is created in industries through business regulations with limited worker rights, policies that exclude people from formal work, self-regulation of a sectors economy and labour standards that lack enforcement (Allain, Crane, LeBaron, & Behbahani, 2013). Globally there are certain industries that

are prone to modern slavery such as domestic work, construction, manufacturing, agriculture and fishing (International Labour Organisation, 2020).

While some people might consider that modern slavery in the UK is hidden or doesn't exist, Allain et al. (2013) argue that labour and supply chains link modern slavery to the formal economy. Graig (2017) found that 71% of industries in the UK suspect modern slavery is in their supply chains. This is particularly problematic in the hospitality and service sectors (Harris, Sheehan, Toft, & Weatherburn, 2014). Another industry which demonstrates high risk of modern slavery in the UK is construction (HM Government, 2019). The sector could be described as having two faces, publically it produces innovative and inspiring buildings but it has a hidden side which is a large contributor to modern slavery (Chartered Institute of Building, 2015). According to Allain et al. (2013) it is an unpredictable sector due to production falling faster than GDP, resulting in a reliance on agency work, subcontracting and self-employment. Furthermore, the sector has long, informal supply chains which makes it easier for modern slavery to thrive (Allain et al., 2013). For example, looking at the North East of England particularly, migrant workers in the construction industry are experiencing labour exploitation, poor living conditions, controlled bank accounts, language and communication barriers (Fitzgerald, 2006). There are also documented cases of migrant workers who experienced violence when they demanded their wages from their employers (Lalani & Metcalf, 2012).

Causes

Modern slavery has a complex range of causes. According to the ELCT Foundation (2017) the main causes are poverty, war and conflict and contemporary business models. Individuals living in poverty are often lured into modern slavery as they have

a lack of alternative resources (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Currently, 10% of the global population is living in extreme poverty with limited access to education, housing, food and electricity (World Bank, 2020c). A victim's journey can begin by simply looking for employment and a solution to their financial situation (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

War and conflict are another causal factor of modern slavery due to the interference and loss of infrastructure, the rule of law, education access, and basic needs such as food and water (Global Slavery Index, 2018). War and conflict cause instability and leave citizens unprotected against militant groups capturing individuals for modern slavery practices (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Countries involved in war and conflict have some of the highest levels of modern slavery, such as South Sudan, Afghanistan and the Central African Republic (Global Slavery Index, 2018). Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic resulted in an estimated 806 children being recruited for labour exploitation (United Nations, 2019b).

Furthermore, businesses have an increasing focus on reducing costs and creating additional revenue (Collier & Evans, 2014). One way organisations look to do this is by reducing labour costs and their risk by having more control of workers (Allain et al., 2013). These organisations are caught in a global trend of reducing costs and prices (Chartered Institute of Building, 2015). Revenue is created through the theft of benefits or charging for ancillary services, which involves turning workers into customers for accommodation, food and transport (Allain et al., 2013). The Council of Foreign Relations (2020) suggest there are other common causes of modern slavery such as natural disasters, people displacement, a population boom and an absence of the rule of law.

Consequences

As modern slavery is a complex phenomenon, it leads to detrimental consequences for society and individuals. On a societal level, victims of modern slavery are denied legitimate employment opportunities, resulting in a loss of output and time for the formal economy (Home Office, 2018). This means that there is a loss of contribution to a country's prosperity and growth. Modern slavery contributes to an increase in organised crime, tightened border control operations result in increased criminal activity to transport victims, creating a higher risk for victims (CIOB, 2018). Poverty and inequality can be seen as both a cause and consequence of modern slavery (Barner, Okech, & Camp, 2014). Modern slavery traps victims in an on-going cycle of poverty, unable to access legitimate forms of employment (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020). The implementation of modern slavery in organisations and supply chains create a more competitive cost structure, which will lead to higher profits for companies and lower prices for consumers (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020). However, this comes at a societal cost, as fast-fashion, cheap products and cheap labour is a result of potentially vulnerable people losing their freedoms.

On an individual level, modern slavery strips individuals of their human rights (Babajanian & Hagen-Zanker, 2012). The UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework (UNGPR) outlines that businesses need to comply with universally and globally recognised human rights such as avoiding causing or contributing to any activities which may cause human rights abuse (ACSI, 2019). Victims experience psychological effects after they have felt powerless and experienced fear (Skrivankova, 2014). They can experience anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and many other mental health issues (Scott, Craig, & Geddes, 2012). Physical health is affected through poor work conditions and work-related injuries being untreated

(Skrivankova, 2014). Injuries often occur through controlling measures or assault (Home Office, 2017). All of these consequences need careful consideration and attention.

Solutions

A strong commitment from a variety of societal levels is required to bring future changes and fight modern slavery (ECLT Foundation, 2017). The United Nations are addressing burning contemporary problems in their sustainable development goals. For example, there is an ambition to eradicate modern slavery by 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals Fund, 2020). This is reflected in sustainable development goal 8 which expresses commitment to sustainable economic development, employment and decent work for all (United Nations, 2020). Target 8.7 concerns ensuring actions are taken, immediately and successfully, to eliminate forced labour, human trafficking and modern slavery (International Labour Organisation, 2020a). Additionally, target 8.8 promotes safe working conditions and rights (United Nations, 2020). One way to achieve goal 8 is through an annual discussion, facilitated by the Secretary Council of the United Nations, to explore the connections between modern slavery and the threats to security and peace among countries and nations (Wheeler, 2016). The United Nations aims to ensure that the private sector aligns with this goal (United Nations, 2019a). Additionally, the United Nations could create a team of experts to investigate the efforts of the private sector (Wheeler, 2016). Furthermore, Wheeler (2016) argues that the United Nations should review their own contributions to modern slavery, reviewing their supply chains as they lose integrity when trying to push changes, as it has reports of modern slavery within its own practices (Wheeler, 2016).

On a governmental level there are also possibilities to fight against modern slavery. The current narrative and perspectives on modern slavery presents the state as a neutral party between villain perpetrators and victims, which undermines and ignores routine exploitation (Davis, 2018). However, it is important to look beyond the initial figures of economic growth and decent work. For example, the UK has good economic indicators such as GDP steadily rising since 1960 and over the last 10 years rising from 2.475 trillion (US\$) in 2010 to 2.855 trillion (US\$) in 2020 (World Bank, 2020a). Furthermore, the UK has a positive economic indicator of employment rates steadily and consistently rising from 57% in 2009 to 59% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020b). Despite this, almost 7,000 UK modern slavery victims were identified in 2018 with estimates of actual figures reaching as many as 136,000 (Migration Yorkshire, 2019). The UK government need to recognise that forced labour is not hidden (Allain et al., 2013). On a practical level, governments can amend and standardise current policy, as there are key policy differences across England, Scotland and Wales such as the criminalisation of victims (Graig, 2017). Furthermore, to reduce modern slavery in the supply chain there needs to be increased regulatory enforcement, social auditing of labour providers (Allain et al., 2013). A monitoring system needs to be implemented to measure the success and effectiveness of policies, monitor gaps and analyse data (Graig, 2017). When labour is subcontracted into supply chains, it should be the responsibility of the intermediary to ensure ethical practises, such as national minimum wage (Allain et al., 2013).

Organisations can also take a variety of actions, across different functions, to combat modern slavery. Many organisations now have a focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR), which also includes ethical labour practices (Kanji & Chopra, 2010). A common strategy is using the triple bottom line theory, looking beyond profit

to consider people and the planet (The Economist, 2009). A business following the triple bottom line approach would provide a safe working environment, healthy working hours and would not exploit its workforce in any way (Okafor, 2013). However, an increasing use of CSR suggests that market orientated reform policies prevent free will and is one way of economic and cultural imperialism, extending power and influence in developing countries, which ultimately leads to more labour exploitation by large organisations (Kanji & Chopra, 2010). Furthermore, a positive relationship is found between incorporating CSR and a rise in profits, suggesting an alternative motive (Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003). Organisations could be conducting workplace investigations to both suspicious and non-suspicious working environments (Stronger Together, 2018). Companies can look within their legitimate supply chain processes as routine and banal exploitation is often implanted, leaving a knowledge gap in this area as the extremes are often the focus (Davis, 2018). For example, underpayment and poor conditionals are illegal if reported, but, long hours, repetitive work and extreme temperature are more routine (Davis, 2018). For example, one UK retailer now requires their suppliers and intermediaries to provide documentation on their employee's working hours and conditions (Multinational Retailer, 2018). Organisations could provide training on modern slavery and labour exploitation, to equip employees with the knowledge of how to spot victims and what to do (CIOB, 2018). Training can be provided in many forms such as formal training sessions, information booklets, videos and e-learning (Home Office, 2020). Addressing modern slavery requires the United Nations, governments, organisations and individuals collectively exercising a variety of solutions.

Reflection

On an individual level it is easy to think that there is nothing we can personally do to stop modern slavery. I had a similar misconception when I started engaging with the topic, because modern slavery is complex and interwoven through our culture, industries and backgrounds. However, while conducting my research I recognised that we can share information about the topic to raise awareness, reflect on our business practices, recognise how common the problem is, and join campaigns and communities committed to fighting modern slavery (50forfreedom, 2015).

I have taken a pro-active approach to this gripping topic. I have contributed to student awareness by preparing a video presentation for first year students studying a global business environment module. Appendix C is a screenshot of lecture materials, including the video, that have been developed in partnership with my lecturer and used in a Global Business Environment Module. The materials were used to engage students in the topic of modern slavery, improve lecture content and encourage students to take part in the PRME writing competition.

I have joined a Model United Nations society at my university and have participated in discussions of modern slavery. This experience was particularly valuable as countries such as the UK, US, Russia, Qatar and Saudi Arabia were represented. This created a challenging debate, demonstrating the difficulty in reaching a common solution due to cultural and political differences between countries. The solutions suggested in the draft resolution included a cash transfer scheme to encourage mothers to choose schooling over child labour, a UN Anti-Slavery fund and the criminalisation of forced marriage. Appendix D details the draft resolution.

As an undergraduate student at Northumbria University, I was curious as to what universities in the North East are doing about modern slavery. I was surprised to find out that one university in particular followed the government recommended framework and have produced a modern slavery statement on their efforts to fight modern slavery (North East University, 2020).

On a personal level, engaging with the topic of modern slavery has increased my sensitivity towards particular business practices. I find myself questioning every day interactions and purchases. I ask myself, who has been involved in the supply chain of this product? Does the person I am speaking to have appropriate working conditions, are they showing any indicators of modern slavery? Alongside my studies, I work in the care industry which is known to be rife with labour exploitation. I am concerned about the working conditions of my colleagues and friends.

As an undergraduate business management student, thinking of myself as a future business manager, I need to be aware of certain practices and develop myself as a responsible leader. Therefore, I am now viewing the world through a different lens, challenging common assumptions and gaining sensitivity and knowledge on the topic of modern slavery.

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Appendices

Appendix A

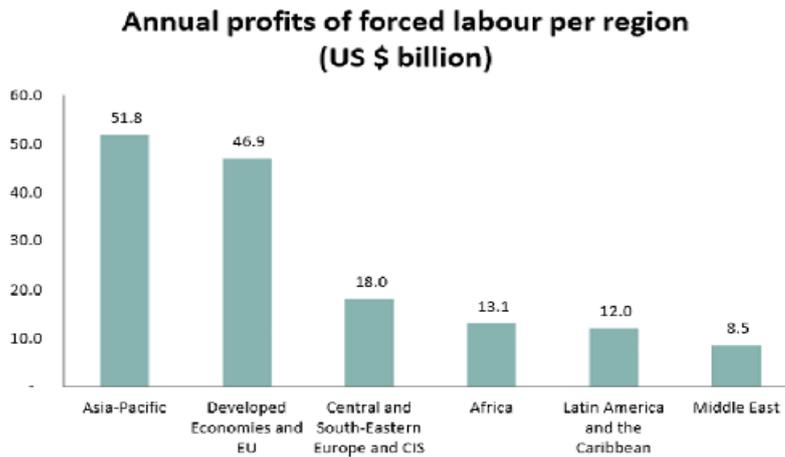
Details of entry

The idea of this essay has been developed from my learning journey and engagement in my first year with such topics as sustainable development, corporate social responsibility and globalisation. Particularly, I have been very interested in exploring how globalisation affects vulnerable and underprivileged people worldwide. The initial interest in this topic has been sparked by my first-year module Global Business Environment where we discussed contemporary issues such as poverty, inequality and youth unemployment. In the classroom discussion we tried to identify the ways in which businesses could address these global problems. During these discussions I realised I had limited knowledge about the impact of global business practices on vulnerable groups of people in both developed and developing countries. I also reflected on my personal work experience in the care industry and I recognised that more can be done to protect disadvantaged people in organisations.

Although this essay is not part of a university assignment, it allows me to explore the topic of modern slavery, beyond the curriculum, which I have become passionate. By submitting my entry, I believe I could attract more attention to this topic from professionals, educators and students.

Appendix B

Bar chart showing the annual profit per victim



Source: ILO



Source: ILO

(International Labour Organisation, 2020c)

Appendix C

A screenshot of the lecture content, including student video, created and used in “Global Business Environment” module (1st year UG module)

Northumbria University
NEWCASTLE

SM9411
Global Business Environment

Lecture 3
Sustainable development, CSR
<https://www.nedtrips.com/GBSM411>

Modern slavery project

SLAVERY IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Prevalent and the most profitable form of human trafficking in the world today, modern slavery is a crime that is often hidden in plain sight. It is a global issue that affects millions of people every year. For more information, visit www.modernslavery.org or call 0800 012 790.

Northumbria University Newcastle

Modern slavery project

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Modern slavery

- Modern Slavery is a term for exploitation of people both localised and global (ILO Convention, 2016)
- There are 3 types of modern slavery:
 - Labour Exploitation, Domestic Servitude, Forced Exploitation, Sexual Exploitation and Child Labor (Home Office, 2017)
- The UK government defines modern slavery as:
 - When someone is:
 - Forced to work through mental or physical bond;
 - Deceived or misled by an employer, usually through mental or physical abuse;
 - Dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as property;
 - Physically constrained or have restrictions placed on their freedom of movement. (Morgan, 2016)
- There are **40 million** victims of modern slavery although many victims are not recorded
- 77% of global population believe there is modern slavery within their supply chains (Ernst & Young, 2017)

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“The more we look, the more we find.”

Number of potential victims of modern slavery 2015-2018

Year	Geographical subunits	UK subunits
2015	~3,500	~1,500
2017	~4,500	~2,500
2018	~5,500	~3,500

Recent number of slavery victims referred to UK Home Office

Referrals to National Referral Mechanism scheme
Source: National Crime Agency

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Tackling modern slavery.

MARK & SPENCER

Modern Slavery Act 2015

stronger together
tackling modern slavery in supply chains

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

With 40 Million Forced into Modern Slavery, Third Committee Urges States to Protect Rights of Women, Girls, Companies Must Remedy Violations

Appendix D

Draft Resolution created by Northumbria University Model United Nations



Draft Resolution

Date: 28/02/2020

Agenda: Modern Slavery

Countries presented: UK, USA, The Czech Republic, Russia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and France

Recommends that members introduce a conditional cash transfer scheme

- a. A program within countries that provides stipends to mothers who withdraw their children from labour and work and enrol them in school;
- b. Creates an opt-in UN Anti-Slavery fund
 - i. An executive committee is established with 15 members. 5 permanent members made up from the top contributors to the fund and 10 rotating members.
 - ii. The executive committee will be responsible for deciding on the eligibility of countries seeking to receive this fund.

Encourages countries to criminalise forced marriage and forced labour, so that perpetrators are held accountable.

Approves the partnering of the United Nations with Non-Governmental Organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to launch an information campaign about slavery, as well as how to combat and report it