



Human Trafficking Issue in ASEAN Countries: A Discussion to Overcome

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Abstract

Human trafficking is a significant issue in ASEAN countries and across the world, characterized by the exploitation and abuse of individuals for forced labor and sexual exploitation. To overcome this issue, various policies and strategies have been adopted by the United Nations and many countries. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is difficult to measure due to the hidden and often under-reported nature of human trafficking. In ASEAN countries, there have been some steps taken to address this issue, such as the adoption of the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, but much more needs to be done to effectively address this persistent problem. Addressing human trafficking requires a coordinated and sustained effort from governments, civil society organizations, and the international community as a whole. The implementation and impact of these policies and strategies must be closely monitored and evaluated to ensure their effectiveness in addressing human trafficking in ASEAN countries and beyond.

1. Introduction

Measuring the success of United Nations (UN) policies and initiatives in difficult to tackle human trafficking because the crime is hidden and rarely reported. However, various studies and reports, such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime

(UNODC) report, have attempted to evaluate the impact of these policies. According to the UNODC study, there have been more human trafficking convictions globally recently, indicating that efforts to prosecute and punish traffickers are having some effect. Numerous studies shed light on the problem of human trafficking and efforts to eradicate it (Konrad et al., 2017; Ryazantsev et al., 2015; Atkinson et al. 2016). However, the research also points out that fewer people are being prosecuted and found guilty compared to the projected size of the issue, showing that much more work has to be done to effectively combat human trafficking.

Another illustration is the yearly Trafficking in Persons Report published by the U.S. Department of State, which offers a thorough analysis of the global efforts being made to combat human trafficking. The subject of human trafficking has been brought to people's attention thanks in large part to this report, which has also inspired nations to implement counteraction measures. The report also provides recommendations for how countries can improve their efforts to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers. While it is difficult to quantify the exact impact of UN policies and initiatives to combat human trafficking, it is clear that these efforts have helped to raise awareness and encourage action on this issue. However, much more needs to be done to effectively address this complex and persistent problem. According to Aronowitz (2017), while it is challenging to determine the precise impact of the United Nations policies and initiatives aimed at combating human trafficking, it is evident that these efforts have contributed to raising awareness and inciting action on this issue. More needs to be done to effectively tackle this complex and persistent problem. Similarly, Liu (2017) emphasizes the necessity of ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking. Boyagoda and Senadhi (2020) also emphasize the ongoing need for action to address the effects of human trafficking, particularly on families.

Human trafficking is still a significant issue, which is well acknowledged in many ASEAN countries and that much more needs to be done to effectively address it. According to a report by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), ASEAN countries are both source and destination countries for human trafficking, with individuals trafficked for a variety of purposes, including forced labor and sexual exploitation. The report also emphasizes the necessity of better regional coordination and cooperation in the ASEAN region's battle against human trafficking. As part of the ASEAN countries' efforts to prevent human trafficking, the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was adopted recently, and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management was established. However, the impact of these efforts remains to be seen, and much more needs to be done to effectively address human trafficking in the ASEAN region. Human trafficking continues to be a pressing issue in ASEAN and more must be done to address it effectively. The aim of this discussion is to gain insight into the progress made in addressing human trafficking in the region. By understanding the current state of affairs, various stakeholders can develop policies to help prevent human trafficking and protect its victims. This issue has been the subject of various studies, including Cockbain et al. (2018), Ryazantsev et al. (2015), and Hopper (2019). Smerchuar and Madhyamapurush (2020) also examined ASEAN's role in combating human trafficking. This conversation attempts to shed light on the developments in

ASEAN's fight against human trafficking. Various parties can create policies that work to save lives from human trafficking based on this understanding.

2. Methods

This study is qualitative approach. The article is the author's opinion and is based on several related secondary source documents. Cooperatively, concepts were created to find consensus on the subject of human trafficking. The final study was obtained after three rounds of discussion. Data were gathered for this study using a qualitative methodology that was based on a literature review. The literature review is seen as a sequence of tasks pertaining to the procedure for reading, recording, and processing research information. The information was gathered from a variety of sources, including literature books, scholarly publications, theses, research papers, and other references that are pertinent to the topics the author discusses. Also used as secondary data sources are news stories and website papers from online media that are relevant to Internet conversation. The trend data was obtained from Google Trends over the past five years in the four countries studied. In order to acquire access to even the smallest groups of trafficked individuals, it is crucial to include local scholars, NGOs, and communities.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Findings

According to Google Trend data over the past five years, as shown in Figure 1, there is a common trend in the topics of human trafficking, poverty, and education. This indicates a correlation between the three issues. However, the intensity of these issues appears to be higher in Indonesia compared to other countries. The issue of human trafficking seems to dominate in three countries (Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand), while in Indonesia, the issue of poverty seems to be more dominant.

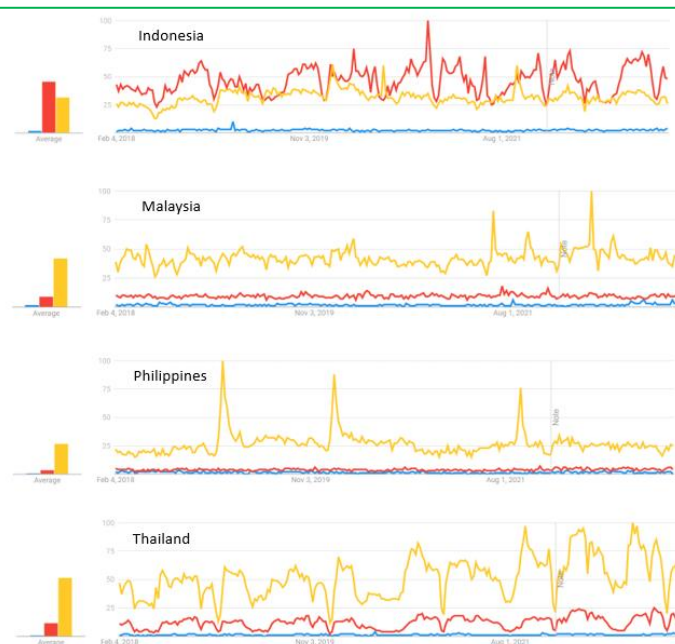


Figure 1. The trend of human trafficking, poverty, and education topics years 2017-2022

The same data is also shown in Figure 2, which highlights the study of human trafficking in the four countries. From the figure, it becomes increasingly clear that this issue has a similar trend in the four countries. This result can certainly serve as an illustration of the issue of human trafficking in ASEAN.

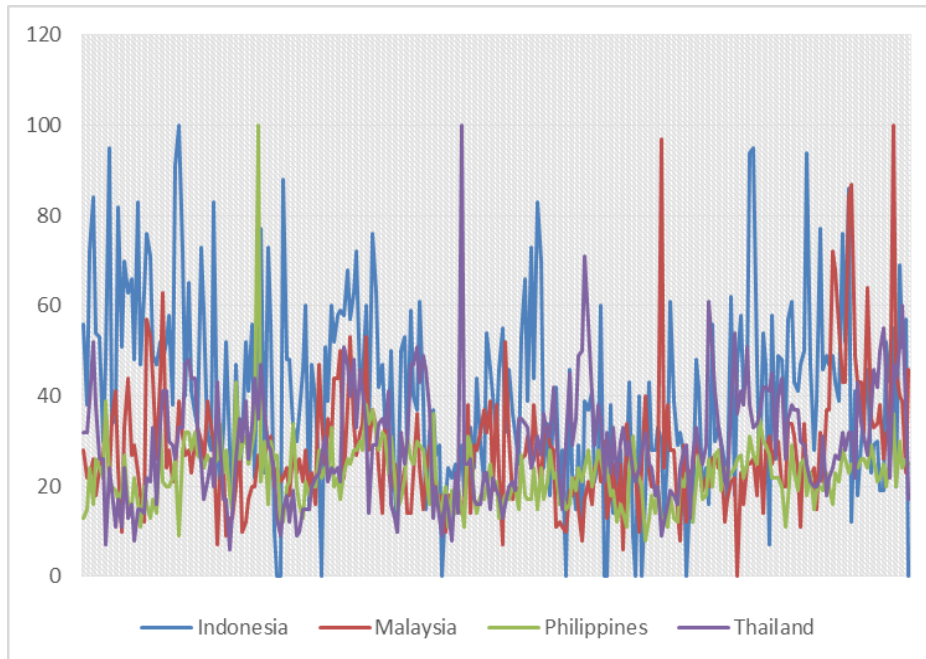


Figure 2. The trend comparison on human trafficking in four countries in 5 years 2017-2022

Human trafficking, poverty, and education are interrelated issues that have a significant impact on individuals and societies. Human trafficking is a sort of exploitation that frequently preys on those who are uneducated and living in poverty. People who lack knowledge are more likely to be drawn into human trafficking by phony promises of work or a better life. Google Trend data over the past five years shows a significant increase in the search interest for all three topics, indicating a growing awareness and concern. The correlation between poverty and human trafficking is clear, with higher search interest in countries with higher poverty rates. The relationship between education and human trafficking is also apparent, with lower search interest in countries with higher levels of education. Addressing poverty and increasing access to education can help reduce the vulnerability of individuals to trafficking. Education can empower individuals to make informed decisions and recognize potential trafficking situations. Addressing the root causes of poverty, such as lack of access to resources and job opportunities, can also reduce the likelihood of individuals falling victim to traffickers. Human trafficking, poverty, and education are closely intertwined and addressing one can have a positive impact on the others. Governments, organizations, and individuals must work to address these problems and make the world a safer, more fair place for all.

3.2 Discussions

The discussion is intended to interpret the research results according to the theory used and not just explain the findings. The discussion must be enriched by referring to the results of previous research that have been published in scientific journals.

UN concern on Human Trafficking Issue

The United Nations (UN) has taken many measures to combat the issue of human trafficking because it is worried about it. Here are some of the main policies and initiatives implemented by the UN:

1. UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Persons Trafficking, Particularly of Women and Children: This protocol, which is a part of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, offers a thorough legal framework for fighting human trafficking and contains rules for safeguarding victims and pursuing traffickers in court.
2. Global Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking: The international community is to take the actions outlined in this plan, which was adopted by the UN in 2010, to stop trafficking, protect victims, and hold traffickers accountable.
3. UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking: This fund gives funding to agencies that aid people who have been trafficked..
4. UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): The UNODC is the lead UN agency responsible for addressing human trafficking and provides technical assistance and support to countries to help them implement anti-trafficking measures.
5. UN Voluntary Reporting Exercise: This exercise provides a platform for countries to report on their efforts to address human trafficking and exchange information and best practices.

These initiatives demonstrate the commitment of the UN to addressing human trafficking and working to prevent this form of exploitation and abuse. The UN continues to work with its member states and other stakeholders to implement effective measures to combat human trafficking.

Human trafficking issue in ASEAN

Human trafficking is a significant issue in Southeast Asian countries, including those in the ASEAN region. The region is both a source and a destination for people trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation. The progress to overcome this issue has been slow, but there have been some efforts to address it. The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which aims to coordinate initiatives in preventing trafficking, defending victims, and prosecuting traffickers, has helped ASEAN nations make headway in combating human trafficking. Some nations have enacted laws and established agencies to combat trafficking, and international organizations have provided support for anti-trafficking initiatives. Despite these efforts, the problem remains prevalent due to underlying issues such as poverty, conflict, and corruption, and sustained and comprehensive efforts are needed to effectively address human trafficking in the ASEAN region. This is further highlighted in the research done by Konrad, Trapp, Palmbach, and Blom (2017) who emphasize the need for operations research and analytics to overcome human trafficking.

The global diffusion of law and its impact on human trafficking is discussed by Simmons, Lloyd, and Stewart (2018). Normandin (2022) highlights the importance of transformational leaders in addressing the global problem of human trafficking. The ASEAN member countries have taken several collaborative actions to address the issue of human trafficking. These include:

1. ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children: This convention, signed by ASEAN member countries in 2015, aims to coordinate efforts to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers.
2. ASEAN Plan of Action to Address Trafficking in Persons: This plan outlines specific steps that ASEAN member countries can take to combat human trafficking, such as strengthening laws, increasing public awareness, and enhancing cooperation between countries.
3. Joint Operations and Coordination Centers: Some ASEAN countries have established Joint Operations and Coordination Centers to facilitate the sharing of information and resources and enhance cooperation among law enforcement agencies in the region.
4. Regional Cooperation: Countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also take part in regional and global forums to discuss human trafficking, for instance, the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime.
5. International Support: Initiatives to combat trafficking are supported by international organizations like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in the ASEAN region.

These initiatives demonstrate the commitment of ASEAN member countries to addressing human trafficking in the region, but more sustained and comprehensive efforts are needed to effectively tackle the issue.

The Strategy on Facing Human Trafficking issue

Several countries have devised innovative strategies to combat the issue of human trafficking. The EU adopted the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in 2012 in an effort to strengthen cooperation between EU countries in their efforts to eradicate human trafficking, protect victims, and hold traffickers accountable. Many European countries have developed their own National Action Plans to combat human trafficking, outlining specific steps to be taken to address the issue at the national level. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act, passed in the United States in 2000, offers a thorough framework for the government to handle human trafficking. It contains provisions for prevention, victim protection, and criminal prosecution of traffickers. In order to coordinate operations among many agencies, the U.S. government established the Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2002. As cited in Atkinson et al. (2016), the US state laws addressing human trafficking and the education of mandatory reporting by health care providers and other professionals have been studied, and according to Okech et al. (2018), the literature on human trafficking research in social work has been reviewed. The topic of human trafficking has also been examined from interdisciplinary perspectives in Burke (2022).

These examples demonstrate the ongoing efforts by countries around the world to address the issue of human trafficking. While progress has been made in

some areas, the problem remains widespread and much work is still needed to effectively tackle it.

Factors influence the human trafficking

Human trafficking is a complex issue influenced by several factors, including:

1. Poverty: People living in poverty are more vulnerable to being trafficked because they may not have access to education, employment, or basic necessities, and may be more likely to seek out opportunities that turn out to be fraudulent or exploitative (Okech et al., 2018).
2. Conflict and instability: Conflicts, wars, and other forms of instability create an environment that is ripe for human trafficking as people are displaced from their homes and become more vulnerable to exploitation (Weitzer, 2015).
3. Corruption: Corruption and lack of effective governance can make it easier for traffickers to operate and harder for authorities to intervene (Weitzer, 2015).
4. Lack of awareness and education: A lack of awareness and education about human trafficking can make it easier for traffickers to find and exploit vulnerable individuals (Russell, 2018).
5. Weak law enforcement: Weaknesses in law enforcement and the justice system can make it difficult to prosecute traffickers and protect victims (Russell, 2018).
6. Demands of the market: The market for human trafficking is driven by the demand for inexpensive labor and commercial sex (Weitzer, 2015).

These are some of the main factors that contribute to the prevalence of human trafficking. Addressing these factors and improving the economic, social, and political conditions in affected countries is crucial for effectively combating human trafficking (Hopper, 2019).

4. Conclusion

A serious problem both in ASEAN nations and around the world is human trafficking. The use of victims for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other forms of exploitation is what makes this crime distinctive. The United Nations and many countries have taken steps to address human trafficking, including the adoption of policies and initiatives to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers. However, the impact of these efforts remains difficult to measure due to the hidden and often under-reported nature of human trafficking. In ASEAN countries, there have been some steps taken to address this issue, including the adoption of the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, but much more needs to be done to effectively address this persistent problem. Addressing human trafficking requires a coordinated and sustained effort from governments, civil society organizations, and the international community as a whole

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