

## BOOK REVIEW

Preventing Human Trafficking: Education and NGOs in Thailand. By Robert W. Spires (2015), 155pp. ISBN: 9781472443021, Farnham, UK and Burlington, US: Ashgate.

Education is key to countering human trafficking. Not just education as a response, but also having an educated response—based not on mere assumptions but on an accurate understanding of the problem. Robert Spires' *Preventing Human Trafficking* is one scholar's attempt to address both goals. This book is the result of Spires' 2009-2011 doctoral research exploring the role of education in trafficking prevention and rehabilitation by two Thai Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

In building a case for education as a response to trafficking, Spires embarked on his own journey of learning about how complex the issue is, and how education is necessary—but not sufficient—to respond to a fuller understanding of the problem. Spires' initial research question assumed that social capital and relationship-building were crucial to the success of education programmes. However, the pilot study taught him that relationship-building was not as straightforward as it seemed; but instead the multiple political, economic, and social factors that create the context for trafficking require a complex response. Despite the clear connection between education and trafficking in the literature, the simple question: "Does education reduce vulnerability?" cannot be easily answered—at least not without reference to other crucial issues including poverty, statelessness, and other types of vulnerabilities that are not directly related to education, but which have a direct and profound impact on the ability of education to be an effective anti-trafficking response.

In reaching this important conclusion, the book follows a typical dissertation structure. Chapter 1 outlines the importance of trafficking, as well as the relevance of Thailand, NGOs, and education to his inquiry. The most important contribution of this chapter is the realisation that initial assumptions needed to change as he learned the actual on-the-ground reality from the education providers and recipients—the children themselves.

Chapter 2 reviews literature in the fields of human trafficking, globalisation, and education. Spires describes the evolution of the concept of human trafficking and discusses key considerations relevant to trafficking globally. However, there is limited consideration of literature specific to Thailand, or that explicitly examines education as a response to trafficking. There is an even greater dearth of literature available on the impact of education as a response to trafficking—globally and in Thailand—which Spires acknowledges as one of his motivations for this important contribution to the field. The literature reviewed posits that the effects of globalisation (such as economic disparity among countries, shifting labour markets, and undocumented migration) limit access to education by society's most vulnerable. The literature also describes the effect of national education policies, including inaccessibility to stateless people, allocation of resources to urban over rural areas, and language of instruction that excludes minority groups. The literature correlates these global and domestic effects on education with poverty and other marginalisation, with migrant children, child labourers, and orphans being the most educationally disadvantaged. Consequently, Spires argues for a correlation between lack of education and vulnerability to human trafficking. While anti-trafficking experts would agree, this conclusion is drawn from Spires' research experiences and supported only implicitly by the literature reviewed; which is surprising given Spires' claim that there is a clear connection in the literature between education and prevention of trafficking. Nonetheless, the literature review is comprehensive and lays a foundation for the important conclusions drawn by Spires' own research.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology: a qualitative, ethnographic, comparative study of two NGO-shelter education programmes with the purpose of examining the factors that push and pull the students to and from education. An important part of this chapter is Spires' realisation that no single theoretical approach is sufficient to explain all aspects of the trafficking problem. In fact, even social-capital, critical-theory, globalisation, and post-colonial studies combined is insufficient, but rather a comparative perspective is required. This is a critical recognition—given that human trafficking is a multi-dimensional problem that demands a multi-disciplinary response.

Chapter 4 discusses the research results. The research questions can be summarised in two parts: (1) How do the characteristics, processes, and issues of the NGOs impact students and organisations; and (2) what contextual factors impact students and how. The first set of research questions reveal important factors affecting education, including attrition of older children to work, government policy on whether stateless children could attend school, accreditation of in-house educational programmes, validity of non-formal education certificates, and effectiveness of "life-skills" training. The local context is influential, with different official positions and practical implications in different parts of the country. Another important observation relates to life-skills training. Life-skills are widely assumed essential to any prevention or rehabilitation programme. In fact, most NGOs offer some form of life-skills training, while only a few provide more formal education. However, despite the presumptive importance of life-skills, Spires found it "difficult to clearly link these life-skills to actual prevention of human trafficking" and "would infer that there was not a long-term effect of life-skills training preventing the children from exposure to human trafficking" (p.67). Spires admits this conclusion is based on informal conversations and needs further investigation. But, if true, this would have serious implications for the programming of NGOs in Thailand and beyond.

The second set of research questions identify the contextual factors impacting students' education. Three major themes emerged from analysis of the data: goals, benefits, and problems. Goals of the students and NGOs consisted of educational, work, and altruistic goals. Benefits to the students encompassed literacy, life-skills, protection, opportunity, care, confidence-building, relationship-building, and free education. Problems of the students and the NGOs presented the most interesting and important findings. Participants identified three main obstacles: statelessness, poverty, and "secondary problems" (including family and social pressure to earn money, limitations on movement and migration, among others). These obstacles clearly illustrate Spires' crucial realisation that in evaluating the effectiveness of education to prevent human trafficking, a simple examination of the education programme alone in itself is not sufficient, but must be viewed in light of the entire political, economic, and social context that either supports or undermines that education.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the book, outlining implications from the findings and recommendations for action by the Thai government and others, including providing funding, accreditation, and other formal support for NGOs so that their educational efforts are not in vain, and addressing issues of statelessness and migration in ways that reduce rather than increase trafficking vulnerability (directly and indirectly). The chapter (and book) ends with suggestions for further research, including examining how NGOs can effectively provide education to trafficking victims (stateless or otherwise), and identifying and eliminating barriers between NGOs and governments in the provision of education and other care.

While the question of whether education is an effective response to human trafficking may be hard to answer, it is clear from this comprehensive book that the quest for a deeper understanding of the problem is an educational undertaking that all those seeking to end human trafficking should pursue.

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