
The Social Issue Of Human Trafficking in Jamaica: Who Is At Risk And What Are The Ways Of Regulation And Punishment

Human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar silent industry that regulates business internationally in both urban and rural areas. Adults, children, and even tourists are at risk. It has claimed the lives and denied freedom of over 40.3 million people (International Labour Organization, 2017). Jamaica has been greatly impacted by human trafficking, and the U. S. Department of State declared Jamaica as a tier two country in the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report. The government has made some strides towards curbing the human trafficking problem, but has yet to fully comply with minimum human trafficking elimination standards. Since 2010, Jamaica has gone back and forth from being on the tier level two watch list to not being on the watch list (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2017). There are many factors that have influenced and made it incredibly easy for human trafficking to exist within Jamaica. The factors include the severe poverty, lack of convictions for human traffickers, and amount of all-inclusive adult resorts scattered throughout the country.

History and Background of Jamaica

Jamaica has experienced a vast amount of highs and lows throughout its history. The Arawak Indians were the original inhabitants of the territory today known as Jamaica. They used the land primarily for fishing, farming, and hunting (Jamaica Information Service, 2018). On the 5th of May in 1494 Christopher Columbus made contact with the Arawak Indians on his second voyage to the West Indies. A couple years later the Spanish destroyed the Arawak Indians' settlement, and English disease threatened the lives of the natives. The Spanish used the territory as a supply base for America because it was relative in location (Jamaica Information Service, 2018). They used the territory to stock up on food, prepare men, and bear arms.

On the 10th of May in 1655, Admiral William Penn and General Robert Venables attacked the Spanish settlers and the Spanish eventually left the territory (Jamaica Information Services, 2018). The English wanted to grow crops that would be profitable and easy to sell in England. The territory's soil was rich and full of nutrients which made growing sugar cane easy. As they began to sell the sugar, the sugar cane industry began to grow drastically. Over a sixty year time frame three hundred and seventy-three new plantations were operating (Jamaica Information Services, 2018). The industry was flourishing and the English needed more help harvesting their crops, therefore, English began to experiment with using African slaves to work in the plantations harvesting crops. African labor was inexpensive, readily accessible, and the slaves maintained a great work ethic. This made the slave trade very popular within Jamaica. It was so popular that the route from Africa to the West Indies became known as the Middle Passage (Jamaica Information Services, 2018).

In January of 1808, the Abolition Bill was passed which ended slavery. It was only passed because the slaves were revolting and rebelling. After the passing of the Abolition Bill many of the English settlers fled the area, and the plantations were bought new owners (Jamaica Information Services, 2018). There was finally a glimpse of hope for Jamaica. The economy,

health care, social services, transportation, and education began to improve. Then Jamaica's government and economy began to collapse again in the 1930's when the Great Depression hit. Jamaica was struggling from unemployment, Panama industry Disease, and dropping sugar cane prices (Jamaica Information Services, 2018). When Jamaica gained independence from England August 6th of 1962, the country began to slowly restore its economy, government, and programs. As of today, Jamaica is still struggling from poverty, unemployment, and disorder.

Data on trafficking

There is a small amount of data available on human trafficking in Jamaica because most victims do not come forward, and human trafficking is a silent crime that usually happens behind closed doors. Most of the data available is from the yearly Trafficking in Persons Report put out by the U. S. Department of State. In the 2017 report it stated that the Jamaica government secured two human trafficking convictions within the year, and they prosecuted nine trafficking cases on thirteen individuals (Trafficking in Persons Report). This was increasingly better when compared to 2016 convictions. The most common form of trafficking in Jamaica is sex trafficking which typically happens in nightlife or at private locations. Research suggests that seventy-nine percent of victims are females between the age of eighteen and twenty-four (Irving, 2015). From 2007 to 2012 twenty-two victims were identified (Hill, 2016).

Offenders and Victims

Jamaica is a popular tourist destination for many. Families, newlyweds, college students, and traffickers travel to this destination to getaway or conduct business. The 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report classified Jamaica as a "source, transit and destination country for adults and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour in the global multibillion-dollar (US \$32 billion) trafficking in persons industry" (Hill, 2016; Trafficking in Persons Report, 2014). Offenders and victims are both local and international because it is a vacation hotspot and transit hub for traffickers. Jamaican citizens have been trafficked in their own country and they have also been taken to other countries, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other countries within the Caribbean (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2015). Women and children are the most at risk for sex and labor trafficking within Jamaica. Traffickers target young females from poor communities because they can trick them into thinking they will be paid for their work. Recently, more and more advertising for trafficking has been taking place on the Internet and Dark Web. A research study conducted on Jamaica from 2007 to 2012 showed an alarming link between missing persons and human trafficking within the country. Over the six year time frame 8,600 people went missing. Twenty percent of those individuals were never found, and an overwhelming amount was young females (Hill, 2016).

Country's Response to Trafficking Problem

Jamaica has taken many steps to comply with the U. S. Department of States standards, but they have yet to fully comply. Jamaica does have regulation and laws on human trafficking and punishment set out. As of 2017, a person could be sentenced up to twenty years for human trafficking or conspiracy and up to thirty years when the crime is aggravated (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2017). The country is continually looking into trafficking allegations and charging alleged traffickers, though they have only received a few convictions for trafficking over the last couple years. The country has also enacted new legislation and laws. They have

instated the Evidence Act of 2015, the DNA Evidence Act of 2015, and Jury Act of 2016 (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2017).

Also, law enforcement agencies have begun implementing training for officers to keep them up to date on the most recent laws and procedures. The government has also created a victim protection protocol with specific procedures for agencies and departments. The government has put more focus into prevention and awareness of human trafficking. The country now participates in school programs, distributes information through the newspapers, and has partnered with the media to educate individuals. A taskforce has been created in regards to informing and educating tourist, tourism agencies, and resorts. The government had yet to charge anyone with trafficking since the significant changes when the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report came out.

CONCLUSION

Human trafficking has impacting the lives of millions of individuals across the world. The U. S. Department of State took the initiative to label each country as to where they stand in relation to the work they have been doing to prevent human trafficking. Countries have been working hard to combat human trafficking. Over the years Jamaica has made improvements. In 2005, Jamaica was a tier level three country and as of today they are a tier level two country. Jamaica has increased prevention efforts, created new laws surrounding the issue, and has focused investigation and prosecutor efforts. Educating residents and tourist can be the difference between freedom and modern day slavery.