
Child trafficking or teenage migration? Bolivian migrants in Argentina

Tanja Bastia

School of Environment and Development

University of Manchester

Introduction

- Power of defining social process
 - Trafficking and international policies
 - As social scientists we can analyse why these processes take place and the consequences of using particular labels
- Child trafficking
 - Growing international concern
 - International legislation to protect victims of trafficking (children and women)
 - Concern with worst forms of child labour
 - Parallels with child labour discourses and critique
- Interrogating
 - Rightfulness of definitions used to describe these processes
 - Implications of these definitions

Trafficking in Latin America

- Limited but increasing information
- Fluidity of movements across borders, including for work
- Little information on gendered patterns of migration
- Southern Cone and USA
 - Poles of attraction create two 'migration systems'
- International migration in Southern Cone an extension of internal migration

Background – Bolivian migration to Argentina

- Long-standing migration
 - Characteristics: labour migration, links with origins, social networks
 - Trends
 - Changing destinations: from northern Argentina to Buenos Aires
 - Increasing illegality
 - Feminisation of migration
 - Crisis 2001
 - New migration to Spain
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Four case studies of teenage migrants/ victims of trafficking

- Maria
 - 16 when recruited to work in garment workshop
 - Debt – 3 months without pay
 - Escaped
 - Now in Bolivia studying
- Isabel
 - 16 when recruited
 - Signed a contract, escaped, returned to workshop and stayed 5 years
- Jose
 - From 13 years old, agricultural work
- Miriam
 - From 15 years old, agricultural and domestic work

Mechanisms

- Reasons for wanting to migrate
 - Same as for economic migrants
 - Poverty, income differentials, gender-based discrimination
- Recruitment
 - Some recruited, others migrated with parents
 - Deceit and lies; family pressures
- Working conditions
 - Exploitative working conditions, 8am-8pm, 30 min lunch
 - Accommodation and food
- Consequences
 - Longitudinal view based on life stories
 - Maria and Juan are studying, Isabel and Miriam worked have now set up their own families.

Discussion: child trafficking or teenage migration?

- Child trafficking defined as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article” (UN Protocol, 2000, Article 3, Subparagraph (c)).

Discussion: child trafficking or teenage migration?

- Teenagers' experience can be defined as child trafficking
 - Contravene national legislation
 - Exploitative working conditions
 - Deceit and force used in some cases
 - Portrayal of victims of trafficking
 - Extreme cases of exploitation
 - Focus on protection
 - Lack of distinction between younger and older 'children'
 - An issue of child labour?
 - UNICEF (2002) against framing of child trafficking as a labour issue
 - Children = victims, passive, without agency
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Child trafficking is a child labour issue

- Four cases analysed
 - Deemed old enough to migrate for work
 - Global labour markets
 - What would be local teenage workers become 'victims of trafficking' because of border crossing
- Root of the problem – teenagers exploited because:
 - Teenagers' need to work
 - Lack of 'decent' work opportunities (locally and internationally)
 - Migration policies that allow movement but grant migrants limited (if any) rights

International migration policy

- Focus on migration ‘management’ (control)
 - Teenage migrants are unlikely to have any rights under current migration policy rhetoric, but
 - Their migration for work can have positive effects on their long-term chances
 - Education
 - Work experience
 - New skills
 - Savings
 - Higher status within the household

Policy proposals

- Short and long-term policies needed
- Short term policies need to address the current needs of teenage migrant workers
 - Support
 - Advice
 - Emergency accommodation
 - Training in destination country
- Long-term policies need to address the root causes of migration

Contact details

- Tanja.Bastia at Manchester.ac.uk
- This presentation is based on the following paper:

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