

JRF Programme Paper
Forced labour

**FORCED LABOUR AND HUMAN
TRAFFICKING: MEDIA COVERAGE
IN 2012**

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This paper:

- Analyses articles captured by an online database to give insight into how many victims of forced labour there are in the UK;
- Considers how the media gets its information and why some cases receive more coverage than others;
- Gives an insight into trends in human trafficking and forced labour;
- Suggests how under-reported crimes might be brought to due prominence.

**The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)
commissioned this paper as part of its
programme on forced labour, which aims to
contribute to reducing such labour in the UK.**

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Executive summary

- An analysis of 2,770 articles captured by LexisNexis in 2012 found 263 victims of forced labour and human trafficking were identified by the UK media in Britain last year.
- Of these, 85 were subjected to some form of labour exploitation (including domestic servitude) and 172 were victims of sex trafficking.
- Newspapers reported 182 women victims of human trafficking or forced labour in 2012, compared with 72 men.
- The press identified significantly fewer victims than the official figures. The United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) found 1,186 potential victims of forced labour and trafficking in 2012.
- Gaps in newspaper reporting often reflect gaps in law enforcement; the sources of articles are often court cases or tip-offs from the police or other officials.
- However, according to an ILO method of analysing national surveys, this research shows there could be more than 7,000 forced labour victims working in Britain today.
- Most victims reported in the press were British – 115 British-born victims of trafficking or forced labour were identified in the media last year. Yet official figures show Britain is the eighth most likely country for victims to come from.
- Newspapers identified more victims of agricultural forced labour (34) than any other kind of legal work. This possibly reflects the fact that agricultural workers are still the only workforce with their own dedicated exploitation watchdog, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA). Its investigative powers mean cases are more likely to be uncovered.
- Sex is the most commonly written about aspect of these crimes: 797 of the articles dealt with some kind of sexual abuse, compared with 446 on forced labour – and just 147 on domestic servitude.
- Just five adults and one child victim of domestic servitude were identified in the press in 2012.

- While official statistics showed domestic servitude made up a sixth of the 770 cases of adult exploitation where the type of exploitation was known, they made up fewer than 3 per cent of the victims identified in newspaper reports.
- The picture was similar for forced labour; 77 victims of forced labour were written about in 2012, compared with 271 victims identified in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) the same year.¹
- Cases where the most human detail was available generally received the most coverage. A common thread in these highly covered cases is usually shocking facts combined with access to a high level of available human detail about the case, such as in the Connors family's use of forced labour or the tale of Nigerian sex trafficker Osezua Osolase.
- The Rochdale sex ring was by far the most written about single case, prompting 80 articles – almost double the number of the next nearest contender.
- If NGOs and other groups publicised more of the human detail and shocking facts of domestic servitude cases and other under-reported forms of forced labour (for example by giving journalists access to victim interviews), this imbalance might be redressed.

Introduction

“We are the people you do not see.”

Okwe, *Dirty Pretty Things* (dir. Stephen Frears, 2002)

Forced labour is one of the most hidden crimes in Britain. Sometimes its victims are invisible in plain sight: cleaning our houses, harvesting our crops and looking after our children. The pre-Wilberforce reality of their employment remains unseen to all but them and the criminals they work for.

The nature of forced labour means it is difficult to assess the scope and scale of the crime and there is still very little record-keeping. There is no routine collation of data by government agencies. The official statistics which do exist deal with people who have also been trafficked and are identified via the UK Human Trafficking Centre's National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

From the evidence we have of the gangmasters who are caught, it is estimated that hundreds of people – perhaps thousands – are forced to toil unnoticed in the UK every year.²

People in forced labour are typically vulnerable, disenfranchised migrants who have no vote or interaction with people in power. It is one of the reasons experts believe the issue has never been a policing or Home Office priority in Britain, and it is also why accurate data on the crime is so notoriously difficult to obtain.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 20.9 million people are victims of forced labour globally, yet we have no accurate picture of how many of these might be living in Britain. Given this paucity of knowledge it is necessary to try and find new sources of data that are not reliant on official channels.

One such source is an analysis of news media. The ILO recently used newspaper reports as one of their sources of data for a report which gave a global estimate of the crime. It said that the media could be a useful tool in estimating the extent of forced labour in a particular state (ILO, 2012, p. 54).

To use the media as a data source requires a rigorous search to extrapolate figures and trends. This report is the first to use article capturing by the online database LexisNexis to provide the basis for such analysis.

LexisNexis produced a raw spreadsheet capturing all available articles in the British press that covered human trafficking and slavery in the UK in 2012. This paper is an analysis of the 2,770 articles in that database. It uses these to see what the media

can tell us about the scale of forced labour in the UK, as well as what the articles surveyed tell us about media reporting of this issue. Since the press in Britain only captures a fairly small percentage of the cases uncovered, there are limitations to the database's use as a resource for estimating the scale of the crime. This issue is covered at greater length later in this paper.

JRF hopes that by bringing this evidence together in one place for the first time, it will not only highlight the problem but provide a useful tool for policy-makers, practitioners and campaigners.

Previous JRF research in the forced labour series has looked at the experience of forced labour, its underlying causes, business models for forced labour and the scope of forced labour in the UK.

This study uses the ILO definition of forced labour: 'all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily'.³

Using press articles to give a portrait of forced labour in Britain today

Articles captured on the LexisNexis database identified 263 different victims of trafficking or forced labour during 2012. Of these, 85 were subjected to some form of labour exploitation (including domestic servitude) and 172 were victims of sex trafficking.

This figure was significantly lower than the 1,186 potential victims of forced labour and trafficking identified in the UK Human Trafficking Centre's (UKHTC) official figures for the same year. Their figures are made up of a list of possible trafficking and forced labour victims recorded in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in 2012. Data in this paper is broken down into the same exploitation categories to make comparisons simpler.

Though it is useful to make comparisons of scale with the NRM, it is important to note that the official statistics represent only those victims (or those working on their cases) who opt to go through the NRM process. This means that some victims reported in the press, such as those identified in court cases, have not necessarily been registered in the NRM. Other cases will be deliberately kept from the media. However, the size of the disparity in the number of victims singled out in the press and the official statistics does suggest that media outlets are under-reporting these crimes. The press identified less than a quarter of the number of victims listed in the NRM. Tables 1 and 2 enable a direct scale comparison in media reported victims and official data.

Table 1: Analysis of victims identified in media articles 2012

Exploitation type	Female	Male	Gender unknown	Total
Adult – domestic servitude	4	1	/	5
Adult – labour exploitation	5	68	4	77
Adult – sexual exploitation	83	0	5	88
Adult – unknown exploitation	1	0	/	1
Minor – domestic servitude	1	0	/	1
Minor – labour exploitation	1	1	/	2
Minor – organ harvesting	1	0	/	1
Minor – sexual exploitation (non-UK national)	7	2	/	9
Minor – sexual exploitation (UK national)	75	0	/	75
Minor – unknown exploitation type	3	0	/	3
Minor – for adoption	1	0	/	1
Unknown age and unknown exploitation type	/	/	/	
Total	182	72	9	263

Source: LexisNexis

Table 2: NRM provisional statistics for 2012

Exploitation type	Female	Male	Total
Adult – domestic servitude	112	8	120
Adult – labour exploitation	54	217	271
Adult – sexual exploitation	373	6	379
Adult – unknown exploitation	35	8	43
Minor – domestic servitude	34	10	44
Minor – labour exploitation	24	75	99
Minor – organ harvesting	1	0	1
Minor – sexual exploitation (non-UK national)	74	5	79
Minor – sexual exploitation (UK national)	21	1	22
Minor – unknown exploitation type	57	70	127
Unknown age and unknown exploitation type	1	0	1
Total	786	400	1186

Source: UKHTC

Since we know these figures dramatically understate the scale of the crime in Britain it has been necessary to find other ways of using this data to get a clearer picture. The ILO recently proposed a method for estimating the scale of forced labour in any country. It said that for every reported case, about 27 cases go unreported (ILO, 2012, p. 39). Although this calculation referred to national surveys, it is still a useful tool for getting closer to a ballpark victims figure.

Using this calculation, and including those trafficked into the sex trade, it is possible to estimate from Britain's press reporting that there were at least 7,101 victims of forced labour (including all forms of human trafficking) in 2012.

Some of the articles gathered by LexisNexis have no statistics and could not be included, but still give exceptional insight into the potential scale of the problem. For example, in a two-week investigation, Belfast's *Sunday Life* uncovered 11 'sex dens', and highlighted many with potential trafficking victims. But with no definitive figures or individuals identified, their discovery could not be included in the overall victim statistics. Similarly, a story in *The Express* about Romanian criminals who were caught in a benefit fraud scam included a quote from a judge who said in his summing up that there was a serious possibility that the children used in the scam were 'the subject of child trafficking'. Without more evidence, however, they could not be included in the statistics.

Where victims come from

According to the cases identified in the articles captured by LexisNexis, the majority of labour exploitation victims in Britain come from within the UK. There were 115 victims of trafficking or forced labour from Britain identified in the media last year, though most of these came from just two child grooming cases in Rochdale and Oxford where multiple victims were identified. Elsewhere, Europe was the next most likely source of victims with 83, followed by Asia with 36. The USA was the least likely continent for victims to come from, with just one child from there identified as a possible subject of trafficking.

The official figures give a very different picture, showing the UK as the eighth most likely country of origin for a victim of trafficking or labour exploitation. Britain came behind Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Nigeria, Romania, Hungary and Lithuania for victims' country of origin, according to the NRM (see Table 3).

Table 3: Analysis of source continent of victims identified in newspaper articles 2012

Source continent	Europe (not including UK)	Africa	Asia	USA	Within UK	Unknown
Adult – domestic servitude	1	2	2	0	0	/
Adult – labour exploitation	38	0	14	0	25	1
Adult – sexual exploitation	43	5	15	0	15	10
Minor – domestic servitude	1	0	0	0	0	/
Minor – labour exploitation	0	1	1	0	0	/
Minor – organ harvesting	/	/	/	/	/	1
Minor – sexual exploitation (non-UK national)	0	4	3	1	0	1
Minor – sexual exploitation (UK national)	0		0	0	75	/
Minor – unknown exploitation type	0	2	1	0	0	/
Minor – for adoption	0	1	0	0	0	/
Total	83	15	36	1	115	13

Source: LexisNexis

Where labour exploitation takes place

It is clear from this data that forced labour is prevalent throughout the UK. According to the articles surveyed, the north-east, which is one of Britain's most deprived areas, is the only place where no victims of trafficking or forced labour were reported, while Britain's affluent south-east had the most, with 60 (see Table 4).

Table 4: JRF analysis of UK location of victims identified in newspaper articles 2012

UK location	London	South East	South West	East Anglia	West Midlands	East Midlands	North West	Yorkshire and Humberside	North East	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Adult – domestic servitude	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Adult – labour exploitation	0	30	0	24	1	6	1	1	0	1	13	0
Adult – sexual exploitation	25	1	2	5	2	8	1	2	0	2	22	18
Minor – domestic servitude	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Minor – labour exploitation	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Minor – sexual exploitation (non-UK national)	2	3	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Minor – sexual exploitation (UK national)	0	24	0	0	4	0	47	0	0	0	0	0
Minor – unknown exploitation type	1	2	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Minor – for adoption	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	34	60	2	30	8	15	51	3	0	4	35	19

Source: LexisNexis*

* Two victims in the data had no known UK location.

While London's total of 34 victims is made up of tens of cases where one to three victims were identified, the south-east's total of 60 victims mostly consists of two shocking cases (30 men identified in forced labour on a chicken farm and 24 victims of the Oxford sexual abuse case). Similarly, 47 of the north-west's high toll of 51 cases come from a single case in Rochdale. Here, there are so few cases identified that it is possibly a mistake to attach too much regional significance to them.

The data is also potentially misleading as the cases reported in the press are chosen for their news value. This will be discussed at greater length in Section 2, but needs to be addressed here in the context of data accuracy. A tale of migrant abuse in the Home Counties is more unusual – and therefore more newsworthy – than a similar tale in London. It is perhaps also for this reason that the data shows more victims identified by newspapers in the south-east than in the capital itself.

Collecting longer term figures on media reporting on the crime over, say, five years, might provide more substantial data and make it easier to extrapolate meaningful trends.

Types of labour exploitation

Analysis of media articles found that 172 distinct victims of sex trafficking were identified in 2012 – significantly more than the 85 victims of forced labour. Because coverage of forced labour victims is so patchy (see Section 2 on media coverage), the statistics involved in this study are small, which means single cases can skew them drastically. For example, Table 5 breaks down the victims identified according to the type of work they were forced to do. According to this, one might assume that the country is faced with a disproportionate epidemic of exploitative labour in agriculture, with 34 victims identified. However, 30 of these victims were Lithuanian workers for a single gangmaster in Kent, who were discovered toiling in debt bondage for up to 17 hours a day on farms. A single case has distorted the national picture.

If an equivalent thorough investigation had taken place in another area of work, it is probable that a similarly sized cohort of workers would be discovered. Agriculture is the only area of work with its own dedicated exploitation watchdog – The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA). With no equivalent body in any other sector, it is not surprising that this case is the only example in the media in 2012 of a large-scale investigation which uncovered abuse in a legal trade.

Table 5: Analysis of forced labour victims identified in articles on LexisNexis database

Type of forced labour	Men	Women	Gender unknown	Boys <16	Girls <16	Total
Domestic servitude	1	4	/	0	1	6
Hotel trade	/	/	4	0	0	4
Cannabis farming	9	1	/	1	0	11
Agriculture	31	3	/	0	0	34
Business cleaner	0	1	/	0	0	1
Manual labour	27	1	/	0	0	28

What the data tells us about the media

As well as the victim counts examined in Section 1, the database of human trafficking articles can also show us the volume of stories written on areas within this subject. This tells us not only which individual cases get traction in the press, but also which types of crimes are most commonly reported.

One trend which is immediately apparent is that sex is the most commonly written about aspect of these crimes. For example, 797 of the articles collated dealt with some kind of sexual abuse, compared with 446 on forced labour – and just 147 on domestic servitude.

Table 6 breaks down of all types of articles entered into the database, arranged according to how many were published. Aside from the 366 'undefined' articles, it is clear that the human trafficking stories with a sexual element are by far the most commonly written about.

Table 6: LexisNexis analysis of human trafficking articles

Categories	Number of articles
Undefined	366
Sexual	296
Child sexual	274
Labour	261
Adult sexual	227
Adult labour	122
Domestic servitude	110
Child labour	63
Child undefined	50
Adult domestic servitude	23
Adult undefined	16
Child domestic servitude	14
Organ harvest	13
Adult organ harvest	6

Despite there being only one case of organ harvesting found last year, it generated 19 articles – some of which classified the victim as a minor, and some as an adult. The reason it generated so much attention is because it was the first case of organ trafficking identified in modern Britain.

Using NRM figures for the same year as the LexisNexis database, we can compare media reporting of victims to the scale of the crime uncovered by officials. The comparison reveals some interesting gaps in reporting.

Perhaps the most dramatic gap is in the under-reporting of domestic servitude. Newspaper articles reported on just five adults and one child as victims of domestic servitude⁴, compared with 120 victims found by the NRM. While NRM statistics showed domestic servitude made up a sixth of the 770 cases of adult exploitation where the type of exploitation was known, they made up fewer than 3 per cent of the victims identified in newspaper reports.

There could be several reasons for this. The first is that the domestic setting of the abuse means that the majority of domestic servitude cases will be one-offs, involving one person who has been enslaved by one family. From a media perspective this means that the scale of the crime may be seen as less newsworthy, since it is less shocking than, say, 47 young girls being forced into sexual slavery in Rochdale by one gang. It also means that as a crime with a single victim, rather than multiple victims, it is less likely to be prioritised by police. And if it is less likely to be a police priority, the case is less likely to come to court or come to the attention of journalists. The involvement of big businesses in exploitation – particularly those that have a wholesome family reputation, or are attached to a major event, such as Happy Eggs, or the Olympics – is also a factor in how newsworthy a story is. Domestic servitude cases, by definition, tend to involve single or family employers, rather than companies, which means there isn't an added element of damaging the reputation of a household consumer name.

Another crucial factor in the under-reporting of cases is that many victims of domestic servitude who do escape are too afraid to prosecute their former bosses, and will simply return to their country of origin having spoken to very few other people about their experience.

Although very few specific victims were identified, the issue of domestic servitude was mentioned in 110 articles. It should be noted, however, that this includes comment pieces and reviews of fiction or films related to the subject.

As with domestic servitude cases, labour exploitation was similarly under-reported, with newspapers identifying 77 victims of the crime in 2012, compared with 271 victims identified in the NRM the same year. Flaws in the NRM have been well-documented, with a 'lack of comprehensive data...widely identified as one of the major shortcomings in current anti-trafficking work in the UK' (Anti-Slavery International, 2012). But the difference in the numbers of victims identified suggests that the NRM's ability to uncover and recognise cases is significantly more thorough than that of the press, which many believe should have a role in investigating serious crimes such as these. It also suggests many media organisations' lack of interest in covering the issue.

Though the resources do not yet exist, it would be interesting to compare how many articles are written on human trafficking and forced labour compared with other crimes. For a number of reasons it would not be surprising if they were less reported. These reasons include: the difficulty in interviewing victims directly; the large number of victims who still go undetected; compassion fatigue; the complication of the immigration debate and victims being seen as ‘other’ and stories being seen as too similar.

It is no coincidence that the most reported cases in the LexisNexis database are the ones which had the most human detail. Table 7 shows the top 10 most written about cases in 2012.

Table 7: Top 10 of the most visible cases

Cases names	Number of articles
Rochdale sex ring	80
Deaf and mute woman	41
Nigerian man smuggled children into Britain to turn them into prostitutes after witchcraft blood rituals	29
Domestic slaves for Connors family	21
Operation Quest	19
Poundland	17
Craig and Beukan pair case	16
Rong Chen's prostitution ring	15
Charles Taylor's conviction	13
Indonesian sweatshops for the Olympics	12

This gives us some insight into the news stories that capture the imagination of readers and editors. The Rochdale sex ring, where it was revealed that young white girls had been groomed for sex and trafficked around the UK by gangs of Asian men, was by far the most written about case. It prompted 80 articles – almost double the number of the next nearest contender.

Sometimes what makes a story is that additional element which transforms a sadly everyday moment in a court case to something extraordinary. For example, what would have otherwise been a fairly uneventful day in the Rochdale grooming trial in Liverpool Crown Court attracted three separate articles because of a bizarre court outburst where the accused took off his shirt, pulled out clumps of his chest hair and threw them on the floor. It is quite possible that without that extra element of drama the day’s proceedings would not have received any publicity.

The second most written about case – and the most told account of domestic servitude – was the shocking story of a deaf and mute young woman who claimed she was brought over from Pakistan, locked in a cellar, raped and treated as a

domestic slave for almost a decade. The story came out in a Manchester court case and the horrific details revealed in court – as well as the extreme vulnerability created by her disabilities – meant the case generated 41 articles.

In general, the pattern that emerges from these much covered cases is that shocking facts combine with access to a high level of available human detail about the case. This is a common thread in all the stories which get most reported.

The sixth most written about of all individual cases was the story of graduate Cait Reilly who went to the High Court after she was forced to lose benefits or take unpaid work experience at Poundland as part of the government's back-to-work scheme. It is a tale of a young, white, British graduate who experienced no physical suffering and was required to do unpaid work experience. Some would argue it illustrates a media bias towards prioritising the suffering – however small – of white, middle class British victims over foreign ones. However, it is also one of many examples where a story is widely covered because it is unusual and therefore newsworthy. The court case was a direct challenge to the new government policy and the first of its kind.

Ms Reilly was not included in the final victim statistics discussed in Section 1, however. While there is a debate to be had on the exploitative nature of unpaid work experience, the extreme suffering of those working in forced labour who often fear for their lives should not be trivialised. Also, despite winning her case against the government, the court made it clear that being made to undertake the work placement was not forced labour.

In reporting the cases where the most human detail is available, the popular press generally tends to ignore the broader pieces stemming from charity or government reports.

The Daily Mail has mastered the art of news as entertainment and will write hundreds of words if there is a detailed human story with 'villains' and easily identifiable victims. It is the lack of these human stories that often means very important and worthy research on issues such as human trafficking go entirely unreported – particularly in tabloid and middle market papers.

According to the LexisNexis database there were 97 articles relating to human trafficking or forced labour in *The Guardian*, *Guardian Online* and *The Observer*, compared with 163 in *The Daily Mail*, *Mail Online* and *Mail on Sunday*. In fact, contrary to widely held assumptions that *The Daily Mail* and the *Mail Online* are uninterested in 'worthy' cases such as these, they were often the only non-local publications to pick up on individual cases of human trafficking and forced labour. For example, the case of the Ali brothers who raped and attempted to prostitute four teenagers in Telford was covered in detail by the *Mail Online*, with only local

newspapers taking the same level of interest. For this reason it is important not to dismiss more rightwing or populist papers as neglecting to report news on trafficking. In fact, one could argue that they cover the crimes more thoroughly than the left-leaning broadsheets that are often assumed to be the greater champion of victims. However, while many of their reports are sympathetic to victims, some stories featuring these crimes are used to further an anti-immigration agenda.

Race and immigration politics can play a role in the coverage of these issues, which means that while *The Daily Mail* and its sister paper *The Mail On Sunday* cover many individual tales of abuse, their slant on them might not always be condoned by victim support groups or campaigning charities. Included in the statistics is a *Mail on Sunday* story, which ran at some length, about a 15-year-old asylum seeker from Palestine who turned out to be 18 and stabbed his foster mother. The report came up in the database because it included a reference to a court case where traffickers had encouraged asylum seekers to lie about their age in order to get better help as 'children' in the UK

Another example where the issue is covered, but not perhaps in the way anti-trafficking campaigners would hope for, is the tale of a woman who was smuggled into the UK on a false passport from Uganda to work as a care worker for an Iraqi family and was paid as little as £20 a week while her uncle received the bulk of her wages. She was given an afternoon off a month. *The Daily Mail* presented this story with outrage labelling her as a 'failed asylum-seeker' who was awarded compensation from the government by the European Court of Human rights (because there was no UK law in place at the time against slavery).

The 'right' kind of victim

There is a fairly widely acknowledged bias in society where women and children are more easily perceived as victims than men. Man's traditional role may mean that some people in authority – and some journalists – are still less inclined to see them as vulnerable.

Newspapers reported 182 women victims of human trafficking or forced labour in 2012, compared with 72 men. To an extent this appears to be a reflection of the reality – or at least a reflection of the fact that the authorities identify more women victims. But even so, the proportion of women victims identified is higher in the press than it is in the official statistics. The NRM found 786 female victims, compared with 400 male ones. This means the press found 2.5 times as many female victims as men, while the ratio for the official statistics was 1.9 times as many women as men. While the media's focus on women victims – particularly women forced to work in the sex industry – is partly a reflection of the proportion of crimes recorded, there also appears to be a bias towards stories involving exploited women rather than men.

Newspapers' focus on women forced to work in the sex industry may also come down to a news judgement that these women's experiences of exploitation and continued forced rape will seem more shocking to readers than those forced to do other kinds of work for little or no pay – and are, therefore, more newsworthy. Some also believe that accounts of sex – even when it is sexual abuse or trafficking for sex – sell papers.

But there are a growing number of victims in different circumstances being identified, a trend that the media reporting *and* the official statistics do not entirely reflect. A recent Council of Europe analysis of British victims concluded: 'According to the British authorities, most adult victims are women trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation or domestic servitude, but there is a growing number of men who are trafficked for labour exploitation' (GRETA, 2012, p.12).

Since men are four times as likely to be involved in forced labour cases than women (see the NRM data in Section1) – it is interesting that forced labour cases are less well reported than those of, say, sex trafficking, which largely affect women. Perhaps this is because news editors – and the public – struggle to feel the same level of compassion for a man forced into work than a woman. It could be that there is still a lingering thought at the back of people's minds that, as the 'stronger sex', the man 'could just have run away'.

It is not possible to tell easily from the data exactly how many of the articles were run at length or in prominent parts of the paper. But experience tells us that only the most shocking cases of sexual exploitation make it onto the front pages – and it is very rare for forced labour to be on page one at all. As a subject that is often considered a bit too depressing or 'worthy' by news editors, stories of forced labour and human trafficking are typically covered in briefer articles towards the back of newspapers, rather than prominent features splashed on the front. This is partly to do with readership and a widespread editorial belief that people generally want to read stories about issues they feel affect them directly.

Reporting of foreign cases in UK publications was also included in the database. Individual cases which took place abroad were left out of the victim counts, however, as the tally is only designed to show the number exploited in the UK.

One of the most striking things about the inclusion of all foreign reporting on the subject is how little there is of it. If forced labour and human trafficking is seen as a marginal issue on the home news agenda, it is even more invisible on the foreign pages. The few stories that do make it through are often where there is a link back to Britain. The story of sweatshop workers in Indonesia making the official merchandise for the London 2012 Olympics, for example, or the 120 Bangladesh sweatshop workers who could well have been making products for the British high street, killed in a fire.

Former Liberian president Charles Taylor's trial at a UN-backed court brought up 13 articles which referred to charges of sexual slavery against him. The prominence of these articles is largely irrelevant to the mention of forced labour however, because the bigger news was that a world-famous leader was on trial for war crimes.

Some of the pieces picked up by the data search are articles reflecting on cases from the past. These were not included in the final case data analysis, but they are useful as they show which cases have stayed in the public and media memory. For example, the horrendous case of the 23 cocklepickers drowned in Morecambe Bay is picked up several times. The enormous coverage that this case got was a direct result of its grim death toll. Not only was this a shocking case of workers being exploited, but the fact that they did not even survive it was unprecedented in modern Britain.

One group of stories which it is difficult to get overall figures for are speculations that authorities, or others, 'fear that' x or y is going to happen. This seems to be particularly common in the coverage of forced labour and human trafficking and is often entirely unsubstantiated. There was a raft of 'fear that a boom in sex trafficking is about to take place' stories in the run-up to the Olympics that have still not been backed up by any evidence. The 'cry wolf' element to these stories is very dangerous, particularly as they are sometimes encouraged – or sourced – from campaign groups working with victims.

A survey of more than 100 London sex workers by the Open Doors sexual health service found 93 per cent did not seek Olympic trade in London and 58 per cent reported having fewer customers during the Games.

Wrongly suggesting there is about to be a massive influx of trafficking victims risks fanning the flames of those groups who say sex trafficking is largely a crime that's imagined and unsubstantiated by liberal do-gooders.

Methodology and limitations of the resource

This is the first time a LexisNexis database has been used in this way to analyse human trafficking and forced labour. It is useful because unlike the official figures, newspapers and other media outlets gather different sources of data: from the courts, police, charities and their own investigations all in one place.

LexisNexis analysts initially collated the articles into a database according to broad themes, such as article type, case, source, NGO mentioned and category of exploitation. As well as identifying 2,770 articles flagged up in their tagging system, the analysts looked at each of these stories to pull out data on, for example, the type of exploitation described.

Due to licensing restrictions we were not able to include News International articles in the analysis by LexisNexis. This means articles from *The Sun* and *The Times* (and their Sunday sister editions) are not included, leaving a gap in what it was possible to collate. Significantly, in the Rochdale sex abuse case alone, a story which was pioneered by *The Times'* Andrew Norfolk, *The Times* published 83 articles in 2012, according to NLA Clipshare.

Thanks to a partial publishing agreement with the *Financial Times*, its articles are also excluded from the data, though the paper tends to give less coverage to these kinds of social affairs stories.

At times the database can be quite a crude tool, since it captures articles using keywords and some stories turn out not to be relevant. Other stories appear several times when they were covered in multiple papers – or even multiple editions of the same paper. For this reason, when it came to using the LexisNexis database as a source of detail about the scale of forced labour in the UK, it was first necessary to separate out mentions of individual cases and remove duplications.

Because a database created using keyword searches in newspaper articles inevitably picks up some anomalies, the victim count was done separately for this report, by reading each individual article in the database that referred to a specific case. This avoided duplication and bypassed potential glitches where the database captured articles referring to historical or fictional cases.

Obtaining the overall victim count of 263 was achieved by making a manual tally of victims mentioned, with a rigorous set of criteria for inclusion. Only specific cases mentioned were added to this list of victims, to avoid duplication of cases in the overall numbers. Articles which summarised the number of victims found by charities working in this area, for example, were excluded, since the figures were not broken down by case and risked being duplicates.

Cases where the exploitation occurred before 2012 were included, but only if the victim's story came to light for the first time that year. This was to avoid historical cases, such as the 23 Chinese cocklepickers killed at Morecambe Bay in 2004, being included in the statistics simply because they continue to be mentioned in the press.

Several statistics have been excluded from the analysis of victims reported because they were too vague to include in the data. For example, several articles referred to 'up to 60' possible victims of sex trafficking from Hungary to London being mentioned in a court case and others described a similarly vague 'up to 70 women' having been brought from Hungary to Northern Ireland. It was not clear from the reporting of these cases whether these figures were speculation – or indeed whether they referred to the same trafficking ring.

Some stories where victims were not included in the count were about people paying to be smuggled into the country illegally and the gangsters who moved them. While one can describe those moving them around as ‘people traffickers,’ the people themselves are not necessarily victims in the same way. If they are not forced into debt bondage by the journey then once they arrive in the country and have paid their fee, many are able to go off and live their lives.

The overall data which gives us trends on the types of stories covered has a margin of error because the database also picks up a few irrelevant articles that contain the key words. Some have been weeded out by LexisNexis, but some remain. These include the tale of a Banksy mural of a child dropping a *Jim'll Fix It* badge down the drain and a film review of *The Fear*, which deals with human trafficking.

Though one might hope that a database of media articles could offer a better snapshot of the scale of human trafficking and forced labour than official channels, cuts to newspaper budgets and the pressures of 24-hour reporting online mean longer term investigations that dig beyond the information coming from official channels and pressure groups are increasingly rare. This means that newspaper data is unlikely to bring up ‘new’ cases that are not reported by the police, courts or UKHTC.

Gaps in newspaper reporting often reflect gaps in law enforcement, because the sources of articles are often court cases, or tip-offs from the police or other officials. The ILO and UKHTC acknowledge that more victims are likely to exist but nobody yet knows about them. Gaps in reporting also reflect a lack of watchdogs on labour exploitation. The Gangmasters Licensing Authority investigates forced labour in agriculture but has not – despite MPs and NGOs asking for it – been given a wider remit to include other high risk industries, such as construction, hospitality and care.

Conclusion

This study found 263 victims of forced labour and human trafficking identified in the British press last year. Of the victims identified, 85 were subjected to some form of labour exploitation (including domestic servitude) and 172 were victims of sex trafficking. Using the ILO's methods of making an educated guess at the scale of the crime, it is possible to estimate from these figures that there are at least 7,000 forced labour victims working in Britain today.

It is clear from this research that forced labour and trafficking is a crime which can affect people of all genders and ages in almost all corners of Britain, yet only a select few cases are reported in the press. Sex trafficking, particularly of young British girls, is disproportionately reported compared with other crimes, for example. And if you read the British press you might think (wrongly) that domestic servitude was no longer a seriously problem in this country, with just five adults and one child victim reported in the press last year.

While much has been made of the inadequacy of the NRM as a tool for gauging the scale of forced labour and trafficking in the UK, the fact that it identifies almost five times as many victims as the British press suggests that it is at least succeeding in gathering more of the hidden cases than might be assumed. While the ILO suggests that collecting newspaper articles may be a useful tool for countries to estimate the scale of forced labour, this study indicates that in Britain the official figures are more thorough for giving an idea of scale. The gap between the scale of the crimes recorded in the official figures and the numbers of victims reported in the media suggests that the ability and success of the NRM in locating and identifying victims makes media figures more useful for an analysis of trends rather than reflecting the crime's scale.

This study gives us an insight into trends in human trafficking and forced labour and offers an interesting snapshot of, for example, the prevalence of these crimes in different regions (more in the south-east and the north-east) or different source continents (more from Europe than any other). But it also quantifies media biases in reporting. For example, the greater interest in British victims is reflected in the fact that a reading of the press might suggest that the majority of labour exploitation victims come from within the UK. Newspapers identified 115 British-born victims of trafficking or forced labour in the country last year, and only 83 born in the whole of the rest of Europe. Yet official figures show Britain is the eighth most likely country for victims to come from.

Newspapers also found more victims of agricultural forced labour (34) than any other kind of legal work. This possibly reflects the fact that agricultural workers are still the only workforce with their own dedicated exploitation watchdog.

As well as indicating which stories capture the imagination of the press, such as the Rochdale case or the Connors' exploitation of labour, the database also shows which crimes are still woefully lacking in media coverage. The analysis in this study suggests that to redress this balance in reporting it might be useful for NGOs and other groups to put more of the human detail and shocking facts of domestic servitude cases and other under-reported forms of forced labour into the public domain.

Obviously these stories involve the experiences of incredibly vulnerable people and steps would need to be taken to protect them, but If interviews with victims – or detailed case summaries – were made more easily available to reporters, then the imbalance in reporting might be redressed.

Notes

- 1 The NRM has been developed as part of the UK's implementation of the Council of Europe Convention Against Trafficking in Human Beings. Referrals of potential victims of human trafficking must be made by one of 17 organisations which have designated 'first responder' status in the NRM. Referred cases are then considered by staff of the two designated 'competent authorities', the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC).
- 2 In *A Baseline Assessment on the Nature and Scale of Human Trafficking in 2011* (UKHTC, 2012) p. 11 it says: '461 potential victims of trafficking for forced labour' were found in 2011 – a figure UKHTC said was the 'tip of the iceberg'.
- 3 Art. 2, para.1 of the ILO Convention on Forced Labour number 29, adopted in 1930.
- 4 Articles on LexisNexis also identified a further two victims who were exploited for both sex and domestic work, but these were counted as sex trafficking victims.

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