
Beneath the surface.

Methodological issues
in research and
data collection
with assisted
trafficking victims

2010



IOM International Organization for Migration

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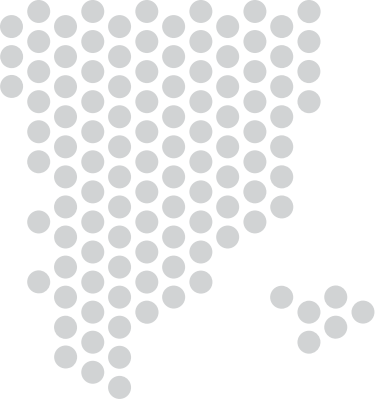
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Beneath the surface.

**Methodological issues
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Rebecca Surtees and Sarah Craggs

A research cooperation between
IOM and NEXUS Institute



IOM International Organization for Migration



**NEXUS
Institute**

Foreword by NEXUS Institute

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, during deliberations of the seminal United Nations Anti-Trafficking Protocol and the early drafting of national laws that followed, only a handful of reports addressing contemporary forms of slavery had been written. This has changed. Today hundreds of studies on human trafficking are available with more published each month.

The expansive growth in the body of literature on this subject within this relatively short timeframe is a positive development and is welcomed by all who have dedicated themselves to ending modern slavery. Government leaders, donors, service providers and other professionals, faced with the myriad of complexities and variations of human trafficking, continue to stress the importance of research to their work and their desire for more data collection and research. However, even though policymakers and practitioners want and need research they can use, many conclude, with some dismay, that only a small percentage of the numerous reports available provide sufficient empirical rigour and quality of analytical insights needed to help guide more informed decisions capable of producing more effective anti-trafficking results. It is clear that despite a substantial investment of time and resources to produce more and more studies around the world, few end up being useful to government officials and anti-trafficking professionals in their work.

Implementation of more effective practices to end modern slavery will require better underlying research, analysis and evaluation. Achieving this, however, will not be possible in the absence of a foundation of sound data systematically collected to serve specific practice-based research objectives.

This report focuses on approaches to collecting data about human trafficking that underlie a large segment of research produced since the UN Protocol and, in doing so, reveals some of the key reasons that research generally has not provided a clearer path to more effective action for policymakers and practitioners. It examines how current approaches to the collection and use of data about human trafficking, while helpful for certain purposes, fall short of what will be needed to achieve a new generation of higher quality research and analysis capable of helping to produce transformative results in addressing human trafficking.

The NEXUS Institute is a policy and research centre dedicated to helping anti-trafficking leaders develop and implement best practices to improve our collective ability to prevent human trafficking, assist and protect victims of trafficking as well as end the impunity of the traffickers. The issues spotlighted in this report by the authors, Rebecca Surtees and Sarah Craggs, serves as a valuable starting point for a wider discussion among governments, donors, academic institutions and others who support, conduct or use research concerning human trafficking. We encourage governments and others to consider in greater depth how best to operationalise the important findings of this report. Implementing new methods to systematically acquire data that can reveal a fuller picture of human trafficking and enable practice-based research will provide a firmer foundation of understanding to act upon to achieve an end to slavery in our time.

The NEXUS Institute appreciates our valued collaboration with our partner IOM on this project. NEXUS is especially grateful to the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons for supporting and making this project possible.

Stephen Warnath
Founder and Chairman
NEXUS Institute



Foreword by IOM

In 2000, as countries met to inaugurate the United Nations Anti-Trafficking Protocol, the IOM office in Pristina took the important initiative to launch an internal human trafficking case management tool. Its aim was to manage the assistance provided to trafficking victims as well as to improve the knowledge base through the collection of information about trafficked persons and the trafficking process. The tool, today known as the IOM Human Trafficking Database, was soon adopted within the South-Eastern Europe region and during the years that followed, was rolled-out globally within IOM and to our national counterparts.

At the same time, there was an increased interest in the research potential of the IOM database, given the detailed and unique degree of primary data being collected. This move towards assessing the research potential of the database and the associated data set on assisted victims allowed for new partnerships to be formed, including the partnership with NEXUS Institute.

As the anti-trafficking community reflects upon the ten years that have passed since the signing of the of the United Nations Anti-Trafficking (Palermo) Protocol, there is a need to assess the impact of our research and data collection efforts. While progress has been made, there remains a real need to further advance our understanding of human trafficking and thus our associated research and data collection efforts, by ensuring that a more precise and encompassing picture of trafficking is presented. This requires us to not only reflect upon the cases that have been assisted by IOM but to equally learn from those who have either declined IOM's assistance or failed to be identified. This further requires efforts to be undertaken in all corners of the world to ensure that all trafficked persons regardless of sex, age or type of exploitation are granted the protection they need.

This paper notes that there is a fundamental need for more accurate, quality, and in-depth data, information and research on all aspects of the trafficking phenomenon if we are to successfully and effectively combat human trafficking and end the exploitation of migrants. On this note, we encourage governments, policymakers, researchers, international organisations, and other actors to take note of the pertinent and timely findings herewith presented in this report; and

to bolster their efforts to support the production of improved research and data in order to better understand and combat human trafficking.

IOM has been working to end the exploitation of migrants and to combat human trafficking since 1994. During this time, the organization has assisted tens of thousands of trafficked persons around the world. We hope that by sharing our experiences and lessons learned we will collectively be able to protect more migrants in vulnerable situations, and to end their exploitation.

IOM equally appreciates our valued collaboration with our partner NEXUS on this project. IOM would further like to extend our continued appreciation and thanks to the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons for their generous support to the database over the years and to this project in particular.

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Acknowledgements

This research paper is the first in a joint IOM/NEXUS research series which will seek to augment and enhance the current knowledge base on human trafficking by conducting targeted research as well as to consider and test methods and approaches to trafficking research in different settings and in response to different situations. The paper (and the project more generally) are generously funded by the US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking (G/TIP). The idea for the joint project was conceived over a number of years of discussion and cooperation between the authors as well as IOM and NEXUS Institute and, as such, it is important to acknowledge the role of Richard Danziger, then Head of IOM's Counter Trafficking Division in Geneva (now Chief of Mission in Sri Lanka) and Stephen Warnath, Chairmen and founder of NEXUS Institute in Washington. G/TIP has also been very supportive of this research cooperation and partnership between IOM and NEXUS; their support must also be acknowledged here.

This paper benefits from the expertise of a wide range of respondents from the fields of research as well as service provision. Our sincere thanks to all those who participated in this research study. We would also like to sincerely thank the trafficked men and women who shared their experiences of being involved in research with us. Their ideas and suggestions are an important part of this paper and provide important insight into the issue from the victim perspective including what might be done differently (and better) in future.

The inputs and suggestions of our seven peer reviewers has enhanced and strengthened the paper. Our thanks to Anette Brunovskis (Senior researcher, Fafo in Norway), Elzbieta Gozdzia (Research Director, Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University), Frank Laczko (Head of IOM Research in Geneva), Anh Nguyen (Deputy Chief of Mission/Senior operations coordinator, IOM Kyiv), Ana Eva Radicetti (Head of unit, IOM Brussels, former Chief of Mission, IOM Skopje), Tal Raviv (Regional Project Development Officer, IOM Nairobi) and Lisa Rende-Taylor (Chief Technical Advisor, United Nations Interagency Project in Bangkok).

In addition, within IOM and NEXUS here are a number of people without whom this study would not have been possible. Our thanks to Anvar Serojitdinov, Project Officer (Migrant Assistance Division, IOM Geneva), who has been an important member of the project team and undertaken a wide range of roles and activities. Thanks also to former IOM interns, Elizabeth Murphy and Sharmaake Sabrie. Finally particular thanks to Richard Danziger and Stephen Warnath for their expert guidance and support as well as their inputs and direction in the development of this paper.

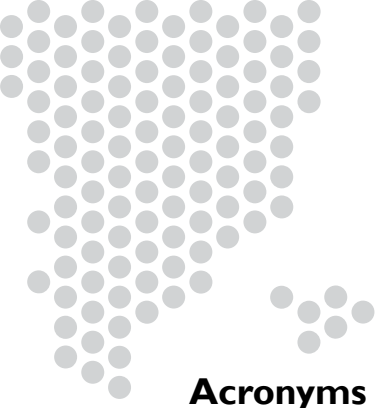
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Acronyms and abbreviations

AT	Anti-trafficking
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BNRM	Bureau of the Dutch Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings
CT	Counter-trafficking
CTM	Counter-Trafficking Module
EC	European Commission
ECPAT	Global network of organisations and individuals working together to eliminate child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of child for sexual purposes.
EU	European Union
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GAO	United States Government Accountability Office
GO	Governmental Organisation
G/TIP	U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
HQ	Headquarters
ILO	International Labour Organization
IO	International Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
Moi	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SEA	South-East Asia
SEE	South-Eastern Europe
SW	Support workers
THB	Trafficking in human beings
TIP	Trafficking in persons
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UN.GIFT	United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking
UNIAP	United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commission of Human Rights
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VoT	Victim of trafficking
WHO	World Health Organization



Executive summary

Recent years have seen increased attention to research and data collection on the issue of human trafficking. Many early trafficking studies sought to understand the nature and scope of human trafficking. More recently, trafficking studies have considered a wide range of topics including methodological and ethical issues when conducting research and data collection. There has also been a spate of data collection initiatives as a means of tracking and, by implication, better understanding trafficking in persons. Nevertheless, there is some debate about the current quality and integrity of research and data collection in the trafficking field.

This paper draws upon one particular research and data collection approach – the IOM human trafficking database – as a means by which to discuss current data collection and research efforts and, equally, as a lens to draw some lessons and suggestions for future research and data collection initiatives.

As the paper discusses, much of the current knowledge base on trafficking is drawn from assisted trafficking victims (that is, victims who have been or are currently being assisted). And research and data collection with assisted trafficking victims, like that undertaken by IOM and other service providers, has many strengths. It can shed light on a range of issues including risk and vulnerability factors, the needs of different groups of trafficking victims (e.g. men, women, children, victims of labour trafficking and sex trafficking); the gender dimensions of trafficking; details of the trafficking process and, albeit it to a lesser extent, the perpetrators involved, their modus operandi, the routes used and so on. This approach also allows counter-trafficking professionals to identify emerging trends and patterns in “real time”, which, on the one hand, means the data is current and, on the other hand, allows the data to inform policy and programmatic response.

Nonetheless, as with all research methods, the approach suffers from some challenges which must be understood for the research findings to be used effectively and appropriately. This paper outlines some of these issues, centring around the following four themes:

- A global approach? Data quality and comparability across different terrains
- Who is collecting data? The role of researchers and service providers

- Being representative? Challenges in obtaining representative samples of trafficking victims
- What questions are asked and why? Assumptions, biases and agendas in trafficking research and data collection

In exploring these topics, we outline some of the methodological issues which arise when collecting data about assisted trafficking victims (and their trafficking experiences) through service providers and in the context of anti-trafficking assistance programmes. While it is not the aim of this paper to present an analysis of actual data contained within the IOM database, key examples from the database are used to illustrate these themes and issues.

This paper equally seeks to draw some lessons for future research and data collection initiatives. In sum, while IOM and other actors have made important steps in drawing upon assisted victim data for research purposes – including for trend analysis and to identify emerging issues – there are opportunities to further advance the analysis by ensuring that a more rounded picture of trafficking is presented. This means being mindful of key issues like, issues of data quality and comparability, the context of data collection, the representative nature of the data and biases and assumptions in the research process. This equally involves moving beyond an analysis of data collected from only one source and one group of victims to include other data sources, employing multiple methodologies.

It is critical that service providers and researchers increasingly explore and present both the strengths and limitations of data and research in order that policymakers and practitioners can make informed decisions about which data they use and how in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their anti-trafficking responses. It is hoped that by making explicit some of the limitations of data collections with assisted victims, and more specifically what can be learned from the example of the IOM database, that research drawn from these data can be read and understood in context, including what this information does (and does not) tell us about trafficking.

This paper is the first in a series of research papers being prepared jointly by IOM and the NEXUS Institute and funded by U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP). The overall objective of the thematic research series is not only to seek to augment and enhance the current knowledge base on human trafficking but also to consider and test methods and approaches to trafficking research in different settings and in response to different situations.

Key words

Anti-trafficking data collection; assisted trafficking victims; bias; case management; comparability; data quality; ethics; IOM human trafficking database; methods; representativity; service providers; trafficking research.

I. Introduction

Recent years have seen increased attention to research and data collection on the issue of human trafficking. Many early trafficking studies sought to understand the nature and scope of human trafficking. More recently, trafficking studies have considered a wide range of topics including methodological and ethical issues when conducting research and data collection. In addition, there has been a spate of data collection initiatives, albeit different in scope, nature, and location, as a means of tracking and, by implication, better understanding trafficking in persons. These efforts are also intended, in many cases, to help account for focus and expenditures on anti-trafficking efforts.

Nevertheless, there is some debate about the current quality and integrity of research and data collection in the trafficking field. Within research and policy circles, there have been a number of recent initiatives and publications which have sought to assess the current state of trafficking research, including the use of different methodologies and approaches.¹ Moreover, many institutions, agencies and universities have been engaged in discussions of and projects on research and data collection, including the establishment of national rapporteurs on trafficking or equivalent mechanisms.² And so, a decade since the signing of the Palermo Protocol,³ researchers, practitioners and policy makers are increasingly taking stock of what is known about human trafficking and what still needs to be known to more effectively undertake trafficking research and, by implication, to design and implement more effective anti-trafficking programmes and policies. This necessarily involves a consideration of research methodology and practice as a means by which this greater understanding can be realised.

¹ See, for example, Aghazarm, et al 2008; Andreas & Greenhill 2010; Andrees & van der Linden 2005; Brennan 2005; Brunovskis & Surtees 2010; Clawson et al. 2006; Cwikel & Hoban 2005; David 2007; De Cock 2007; GAO 2006; Goodey 2008; Gozdziaik & Bump 2008; Gozdziaik & Collet 2005; Gragmena & Laczko 2003; IOM et al. 2009; Kelly 2005 & 2002; Laczko 2005; Laczko & Gozdziaik 2005; Rogers et al 2010; Savona & Stefanizzi 2007; Steinfatt 2003, Steinfatt et al. 2002; Surtees 2007c; Tyldum 2010 & 2009; Tyldum & Brunovskis 2005; Tyldum, Tveit & Brunovskis 2005; UNIAP 2008; Young 2009. In addition, there have been numerous national, regional and international seminars, conferences and meetings to discuss research methodology and data collection efforts.

² As a non-exhaustive list, this includes: David 2007; Dottridge 2010; Folden et al. 2007; ILO 2009; IOM et al. 2009; Machado et al. 2007; OSCE 2009; Surtees 2009, 2007a, 2005; UNODC 2009; Vermeulen & Paterson 2010; Vermeulen et al. 2006; Weiner & Hala 2008. Many national entities, such as national rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms, also produce annual reports on the state of trafficking in the respective country (e.g. BNRM 2010).

³ Officially the United Nation's *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children*, signed in 2000.

To this end, this paper aims to discuss some of what we have learned from our involvement in different anti-trafficking research and data collection initiatives, with a view to moving forward. In particular, we use our joint experience with one particular research and data collection approach – IOM’s Counter-Trafficking Module (CTM)⁴ – as the starting point for a discussion of current trafficking research and, equally, as a lens to draw some lessons and suggestions for future research and data collection initiatives. The CTM is IOM’s global database on victims of human trafficking. It collects data about individual trafficking victims assisted by IOM and/or its partner organisations, including information on trafficked persons’ background, recruitment, transportation, trafficking exploitation and assistance.⁵

The paper will consider how, to date, the IOM database has (and has not) been effective in terms of trafficking research and data collection and, equally, what methodological, practical and ethical issues arise from this particular approach. While it is not the aim of this paper to present an analysis of data contained within the IOM database, examples from the IOM data sets will, where relevant, be included. We will also consider what might be done to improve trafficking research and data collection, suggestions which are specific to the IOM database and also have broader relevance. It should be noted that many organisations employ approaches similar in scope and purpose to the IOM approach. It is, therefore, hoped that this paper – with its discussion of our experience of and, at times, our frustration with the IOM database and other related data collection initiatives – can contribute to the dialogue on anti-trafficking research and data collection. It is also intended that by making explicit the strengths and limitations of the IOM approach (and by implication, those of many other organisations and institutions), research drawn from it can be read and understood in the appropriate light.

Certainly research and data collection is vital in terms of better understanding human trafficking and, equally, in designing and implementing anti-trafficking responses. The authors, and the institutions we represent, have been involved in various studies, projects and initiatives with precisely these objectives.⁶ At the

⁴ The database is referred to as the “CTM” within IOM. In the context of this paper we refer to the IOM trafficking database.

⁵ The database is installed in 72 IOM missions globally. As of the end of December 2010, the system contained data on nearly 16,000 registered IOM beneficiaries in more than 85 source and more than 100 destination countries. See also section three for additional discussion of the IOM trafficking database.

⁶ We have each worked with the IOM trafficking database at various stages of its development and in different roles and capacities. The first author has approached the database from a largely “outside” perspective, conducting independent research using different IOM data sets at different stages and in different ways. In some cases, the data sets were exclusively IOM; in other cases, IOM data was part of a larger body of primary data. She has also conducted extensive field research with trafficked persons in Asia, Europe, the FSU and Africa. The second author has worked with the IOM database from the “inside” – cleaning and validating the data, providing training and guidance to field missions, data analysis for country and thematic reports and contributing to various articles and documents based on IOM’s approach to data collection. She has also conducted field research in Europe, the FSU and North America. In addition, both authors have been involved in various research discussions, meetings and seminars and have participated in different (national and regional) data collection initiatives, including those which have drawn on, learned from and also built upon the IOM trafficking database model.

same time, research and data collection must be undertaken with caution, care and adequate attention to attendant methodological and ethical issues. And, as a number of researchers and studies have observed, there are substantial problems with much research on human trafficking and data collection initiatives which have, in many cases, been ill conceived and/or poorly implemented. Nevertheless, there is much that can be learned from these past efforts and initiatives. Equally, there is a need to move beyond simply “taking stock” of and critiquing existing research and data collection and offer some suggestions and entry points in terms of how to go forward with this work.

This paper is not intended as a definitive exploration of methods in research and data collection with trafficking victims. Rather, it is a starting point for discussion, illustrated largely through the discussion of IOM’s very specific methodology and approach to research with assisted trafficking victims, including the attendant strengths and weaknesses. In doing so, it is also intended to encourage other organisations, institutions and individual researchers to openly discuss and explore some of the issues and constraints they face in their research and data collection efforts as a mean of advancing both the methodological approach in this field and to enhance the rigour of trafficking research and analysis. Finally, the paper is intended to provide some guidance to policymakers and practitioners in terms of the strengths and limitations of the current body of knowledge on trafficking, not least in terms of how it can and should be read, understood and used in the design and implementation of policies and programmes.

This paper is the first in a series of research papers being prepared jointly by IOM and the NEXUS Institute and funded by U.S. Department of State’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP). The overall objective of the thematic research series is not only to seek to augment and enhance the current knowledge base on human trafficking but also to draw upon IOM database and data sets to consider and test methods and approaches to trafficking research in different settings and in response to different situations. Each paper in the series will be a stand-alone study of a specific aspect of trafficking and/or trafficking research. Preliminary analysis of data contained within the IOM database has led to the selection of research topics which will include, but are not limited to, an analysis of research on traffickers and trafficking operations, research on trafficking into the construction industry, trafficking and exploitation of fishermen and seafarers and trafficking for forced marriage. At the same time, taken together, the studies will provide a strong foundation for considering not only the potential of the IOM database toward providing fresh insights on human trafficking but, equally, what is (and is not) working in the field of anti-trafficking data collection and research, including ideas and recommendations for ways forward, both in terms of what is known, what research is needed and how to go about undertaking such studies.

2. Methodology and data collection

This paper is based on a number of different data sources including interviews with key informants (researchers, service providers and trafficked persons), a survey of IOM missions working on anti-trafficking data collection, a literature review and analysis of the current IOM trafficking data sets from various countries and regions.

Interviews with key informants

This paper is based on interviews with 62 key informants – 41 anti-trafficking professionals and 21 trafficked persons.

Interviews were conducted with 41 professionals who work on trafficking research and data collection from different angles and in different capacities. Some were professional researchers; others were service providers. They were selected based on their past work and existing knowledge in this field; the selection criteria also sought to capture those working for different organisations/institution and from different countries and regions. Interviews centred on various aspects of trafficking research and data collection, including different research methodologies and experiences with and assessment of research with assisted trafficking victims and, more specifically, the IOM approach. Where respondents were not familiar with the IOM approach, the IOM research tools were shared in advance of the interview.

Of these 41 professionals, a total of 23 professional researchers were interviewed, working within universities, research institutions, international organisations, governments and NGOs. These researchers represented institutions in eleven countries in Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Africa, North America and the former Soviet Union (FSU) and were from a wide range of academic disciplines, including anthropology, criminology, economics, law public health, and sociology. Interviews with researchers focused on the research method used by IOM and many assistance organisations, including strengths and weaknesses of the IOM screening and assistance forms as research tools. Also discussed were different methods being used in the field of trafficking, including the strengths and limitations of these approaches, and means of addressing these constraints.

Interviews were also conducted with 18 service providers from IOM and NGOs who, in addition to their assistance and case management work, also collect data about the trafficking victims they assist. This included 12 IOM staff from seven countries in Europe, Asia, the FSU, Africa and Latin America who work or have previously worked on trafficking data collection and research. In addition, six NGO staff was interviewed from three countries in Europe, the FSU and Asia. Service provider interviews focused on their experiences of conducting research and data collection with their programme beneficiaries – some with the IOM forms, others according to their own tools and methods.

We also interviewed 21 trafficked persons who were currently being or had previously been assisted within an anti-trafficking assistance programme and, in that context, had been involved in data collection process as respondents. Five trafficked persons from Albania and one from Ukraine were interviewed in 2009; 15 trafficked persons from Ukraine were interviewed in 2010. This included both men and women and victims of both trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation. The intention was to learn from trafficked persons how they had understood and experienced the research and data collection process, including how they felt about this type of data collection, how they felt about the tools used and questions asked, any concerns they had about the data collection and what could be done differently (and better) in future.

Survey of IOM missions

IOM counter-trafficking focal points currently working with the IOM trafficking database and/or the accompanying screening and assistance interview forms were globally surveyed according to a standard research questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on current data collection processes and protocols within the mission and, where relevant, the nature and extent of any variation on or deviation from the standard approach outlined in IOM's trafficking database protocols. Responses were received from 23 missions in Europe, North America, Asia, the FSU, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. This accounted for about a third of the 72 missions which currently use or have used the CTM; there are approximately 250 IOM missions worldwide.⁷ We also drew on information and feedback shared previously by IOM missions in the context of an internal evaluation of the IOM database undertaken in 2006-2007 (Stigter 2006) as well as in past and ongoing discussions with IOM field missions.

Analysis and review of the IOM trafficking database

This included a review of the database, checking for full data and high levels of non-response, coding errors, outliers, inconsistencies, logic checks and an

⁷ Not all of these missions implement – or are currently implementing - anti-trafficking activities. Furthermore, while IOM is present in 460 field locations, this does not necessarily refer to an office as a physical premise but to the presence of IOM staff.

assessment of the open fields and narrative information. While some of this was done in the context of this paper, this exercise is also done regularly within IOM (at the global and local level) as part of data maintenance and quality assurance. In addition, queries were made in the database to answer specific questions in relation to non-response, local adaptations and changing patterns.

Literature review

A broad review was undertaken of trafficking research methodology as well as research methods and approaches which potentially overlap with the trafficking field – for example, methods used in studying migration, prostitution, hidden and elusive populations and stigmatised/marginalised populations. This included reviewing journal articles, books, organisational reports and presentations.

Peer review process

The paper was reviewed by seven peer reviewers, with extensive knowledge and experience in trafficking research including, in some cases, detailed knowledge of the IOM database and methodology. This included four internal peer reviewers (personnel who had previously or currently work for IOM) and three external reviewers from research institutes, research projects and universities.

In addition, the paper was reviewed internally within IOM and NEXUS Institute project teams – by Richard Danziger, then Head of the IOM Migrant Assistance Division and Stephen Warnath, Chair and founder of NEXUS Institute.

Research limitations

This paper draws on a wide range of experiences and expertise in considering, the current state of trafficking research and data collection, through the lens of the IOM approach. This includes not only a review of current research and existing IOM data sets but also interviewing a range of researchers and service providers working on the issue as well talking with trafficking victims themselves. Nevertheless, there are some limitations in terms of the data collected, which are discussed briefly below.

Geography. There was a geographical bias in that more respondents were from Europe, North America, the FSU and Asia than from Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. To some extent this is a consequence of our own working environments and contacts. However, it is also, at least partly, because a large amount of trafficking research is focused on or conducted by researchers in or from Europe, Asia and North America (Aghazarm et al. 2008; Laczko 2005). One survey of IOM trafficking publications found that, between 2000 and 2004, 44 per cent originated from within Europe and 35 per cent from within Asia-Pacific (Laczko & Gozdzik 2005).

Moreover, IOM missions in SEE and FSU have the longest experience with the IOM database and, as a result, the largest data sets. While there are pockets of experience in other regions, it is by no means comparable. As a consequence, the findings and issues identified may be more reflective of these settings than less represented regions. Future papers in the series will seek to pay attention to this geographical bias by considering less studied countries and regions, to the extent that this is possible.

Representativity amongst respondents. The intention was to use the IOM database as a lens to discuss methodological issues faced by those undertaking research and data collection with assisted trafficking victims. There are consequently a limited number of interviews with organisations which work directly on data collection in different settings and do not partner with IOM. While it was possible to conduct brief fieldwork in Ukraine and Albania, this was an “add on” to other fieldwork projects, which means that there is insufficient attention to (different and differing) “field perspectives” and organisations not associated with IOM and its partners. There is also a geographic bias in that the fieldwork took place in one country in Europe (Albania) and one country in the FSU (Ukraine).

Representativity amongst trafficked persons. The paper includes the experiences and opinions of trafficked persons, both men and women and victims of both labour and sex trafficking. However, because fieldwork took place only in two countries in the Europe and FSU region, this informs the extent to which victims’ experiences are representative and/or globally relevant.

Language barriers. Telephone interviews were primarily conducted in English, although Russian language interviews were possible due to language skills of the project research assistant. Interpretation was available in the context of fieldwork. Nevertheless, there is a bias toward researchers and service providers who are proficient in the English language. The literature review also reflects this bias toward English language sources which means that some valuable research has been missed. Lack of funds for translating research prevented the inclusion of these foreign language studies.

3. Considering the IOM approach

IOM's trafficking database collects single case data about assisted victims as a means of facilitating case management in the shorter term and facilitating data analysis for research purposes in the longer term. Data is collected with two distinct tools – a screening interview form and an assistance interview form.⁸ Screening interviews, undertaken upon first contact with the trafficked person, assess whether an individual was trafficked according to the definition provided in the Palermo Protocol⁹ and also their immediate protection needs. Assistance interviews, undertaken once the individual has accepted IOM assistance, document the victim's background, recruitment and transportation, trafficking experience and their assistance and/or re/integration needs, including what service are (and are not) provided. The IOM database encodes data about individual trafficking victims according to these standardised interview forms. This standardised data is further supplemented by qualitative data from interviews with trafficking victims, which allows for the documentation of details that fall outside of the standardised fields and adds depth to the information collected. Interviews are undertaken by service providers, either an IOM staff or an NGO or GO partner with whom IOM works in providing direct assistance.¹⁰

The IOM trafficking database aims to consolidate into one database trafficking cases assisted by IOM missions and their partners globally. By mobilising the links between field missions (in origin, transit and destination countries), the database aims to establish a standardised model for data collection and data sharing (allowing for local and cultural adaptation through the inclusion of open fields) while reducing the risk of double counting cases. The database also facilitates the cross-border transfer of data in a secure manner (Stigter 2006: 9).

IOM's first counter-trafficking data collection system was started in 2000 in Kosovo, UNSC resolution 1244-administered Kosovo¹¹ by IOM counter-trafficking staff who required a system to collect information about trafficking victims they were assisting as well as returning and referring for assistance in countries of

⁸ Please refer to the IOM Direct Assistance Handbook for a copy of the screening form and a detailed description of IOM's approach to screening and assistance. See IOM 2007.

⁹ See Chapter Two of the IOM Direct Assistance Handbook for more information on how IOM determines trafficking status. See IOM 2007.

¹⁰ The interview process and nature of data collection will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

¹¹ Hereinafter referred to as Kosovo/UNSC 1244.

origin. Thus, initially the primary objective was to track (an often high number of) referrals in a systematised manner and to facilitate inter-country case management by sharing information about trafficking victims who returned home and were assisted within the framework of IOM's direct assistance programme, either directly by IOM or its partner organisations. It then expanded from the IOM Pristina (Kosovo/UNSC 1244) mission, initially to surrounding "countries of origin" to facilitate the provision of return and reintegration assistance provided to trafficking victims¹², and then to other countries and regions globally. The database was used to track cases and service provision in real time and to facilitate the generation of basic, summary reports based on the standardised data collected about trafficking victims.

This expansion was also accompanied by an interest in the IOM trafficking database as a research tool, given the scope and nature of primary data being collected. This led to a shift from undertaking basic summary analysis towards more detailed and in-depth analysis. An early example was the Regional Clearing Point, hosted by IOM but under the Stability Pact Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings, which combined the IOM data set with data from other assistance providers to present national data on victim and victim assistance in the ten countries of SEE (see Hunzinger & Sumner Coffey 2003; Surtees 2005). This was followed by IOM engaging with independent research partners, such as NEXUS Institute, to undertake thematic analyses of the data as means by which to discuss less considered aspects of human trafficking and emerging issues. Key topics to date have included the trafficking of men (Surtees 2008c), re-trafficking (Jobe 2010), trafficking routes (Rahmani 2005), changing trafficking patterns and trends (Andreani & Raviv 2004; IOM 2005) and trafficking and development (Danailova-Trainor & Laczko 2010; Laczko & Danailova-Trainor 2009). Future reports in this series will equally draw upon the database (coupled with fieldwork) to shine a lens on trafficking for forced labour and for forced marriage. In addition, IOM shares depersonalised data to researchers working on specific issues.¹³

While a helpful tool in many respects, field missions also faced problems with the database which were content based or thematic – for example, the (in) applicability of the tool to trafficking cases outside of Kosovo/UNSC 1244 (and later on the European and FSU context) including the transferability or adaptability of certain question or answer responses to different settings and/or the lack of room for local adaptation.¹⁴ Some of these issues were linked to training needs,

¹² IOM takes a comprehensive approach to the provision of individualised direct assistance to trafficked persons. This includes the provision of shelter, health care, psycho-social assistance, legal aid, facilitating voluntary return process (after a risk assessment) and reintegration assistance. IOM works to counter trafficking and assist victims in countries of origin, transit and destination. While IOM direct assistance projects were first targeted at females trafficked for sexual exploitation, today the organisation provides assistance to men, women and children trafficked for all forms of exploitation around the world.

¹³ IOM only shares depersonalised data with third parties, consistent with IOM data protection principles (IOM 2008a).

¹⁴ Technical issues included slow operation of the software, the time needed to encode cases, problems with data transfer and problems using the reporting functions.

while others required amendments in the system.¹⁵ In 2004, revisions were made to the database and the old data set, which has been collected since 2000 (with a very small number of cases having been identified in 1999), was transferred and integrated into the new IOM trafficking data management system.

In January 2006, the then IOM Counter Trafficking Division¹⁶ hosted a meeting on how to improve data collection and how to make the database a more useful research tool. The meeting was attended by relevant HQ and field staff and representatives from external institutions like NEXUS Institute and ILO. This was in response to ongoing inputs, and often frustrations, from field missions about the ease of the tool's use and/or its suitability for their purposes. While some issues were technical¹⁷ or linked to resources, others were linked to the approach itself and included issues such as questions which were deemed inappropriate in some settings, unsuitability for all forms of trafficking and all types of victims, the large number of questions and inconsistent or incomplete data. This meeting was followed by an internal evaluation of the database, finalised in October 2006, to identify reasons for none or partial usage of the database (including challenges in different operational environments) and to consider the research potential of IOM trafficking data (Stigter, 2006). Another meeting, attended by staff from IOM (HQ and field missions) and external experts (NEXUS Institute and ILO) was held in Geneva in January 2007 to discuss the findings and to explore ways forward.¹⁸

Both the evaluation and subsequent meetings identified the need for further change within the IOM trafficking database, to make the tool more global, adaptable and user-friendly. This included resolving current technical constraints; ensuring sustainability of the tool within IOM; and accommodating regional and cultural specificities in data sets. As a result, the screening and assistance interview forms were revised, with attention to removing biases. For example, an earlier version of the database assumed - based on the situation in SEE at the time - that all victims were essentially deceived or coerced into trafficking. Yet this was out of synch with the situation in other regions where many trafficking victims were (and still are) willing labour migrants (often accessing formal migration channels) but ending up trafficked. Questions were also added to address gaps and sometimes a lack of precision in the existing data sets – for example, about victims' place/family of origin; education; past employment experience; trafficker/recruiter profiles and different types of exploitation.¹⁹

¹⁵ Please see section four for a more detailed discussion of the contextual challenges to global data collection.

¹⁶ Now the Migrant Assistance Division.

¹⁷ While some frustrations and problems continue to be of a technical nature and lessons can be learned from a discussion of the technical implementation of the data collection system, this paper's focuses on more substantive thematic and methodological considerations.

¹⁸ In late November/ early December 2010, IOM convened an additional meeting with counter-trafficking and assisted voluntary return and reintegration 'subject matter experts'. The aim of the meeting was to begin discussing the feasibility of moving IOM's operational databases, including the IOM trafficking database, to the internet. Staff also began discussing ways in which to further improve the tool. The process will be further expanded during 2011/ 2012.

¹⁹ See section four for a more detailed discussion of cultural and contextual challenges to global research and data collection approaches.

The revised forms were piloted at IOM Headquarters in Geneva, using a number of cross-cultural trafficking scenarios to test for global applicability and regional and cultural specificities. They were then translated into French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Kurdish, Japanese, Portuguese and Russian. At the same time, changes were reflected in the technical system, which was piloted at IOM Headquarters and two field missions. This resulted in some minor changes and bug fixes and the revised database was then launched globally.

The database is today installed in 72 IOM missions globally, albeit with differing levels of data collected from mission to mission. As of the end of December 2010, the system contained data on approximately 16,000 registered IOM assisted victims in more than 85 source and more than 100 destination countries.²⁰

While the IOM trafficking database represents in some ways a unique tool (both methodologically and technically), IOM is by no means the only organisation which uses this approach. Indeed it is similar in many ways to the approach of many NGO and GO assistance organisations around the world which collect data about the trafficked persons whom they identify and assist. In some cases, data collection mechanisms have been based on the IOM model, drawing on IOM's past successes and challenges in this field (IOM et al. 2009; Surtees 2009 & 2007; Weiner & Hala 2008).²¹ Most service providers, whether from NGOs, IOs or GOs, maintain comprehensive case information about the trafficked persons they assist – both about their trafficking exploitation and their assistance needs. Many also use this information for research as well as case management. There may be a wide variation between service providers in terms of what data is collected and how. Yet this methodological approach – that is, accessing victim-centred data from service providers as a means of understanding trafficking – is common in most countries and constitutes the primary source of data about trafficking in the current knowledge base. Moreover, a large number of trafficking research projects are based on victim-centred data, often accessing respondents through assistance programmes and, thus, overlapping in terms of informants with the information collected by assistance programmes (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010).

²⁰ A number of missions also collect standardised data sets based upon the global data collection approach but outside of the database. This is due to technical reasons (where the mission is unable to connect to the hosting server); or the existence of a previously developed data collection tool (prior to the roll-out of the global database). This situation is currently being resolved and, in 2011-2012, all relevant IOM assistance data will be captured within the one database. In the interim, IOM requests that all missions operating outside of the database share a minimum core data set with Headquarters bi-annually. This data is then validated and compiled.

²¹ IOM has also partnered with various governments globally to support their data collection mechanisms, sharing IOM's method and approach and providing technical assistance. For example, this has included cooperation and/or technical assistance and training on data collection in Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Kosovo/ UNSC 1244, Nepal, Portugal, Romania, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Zambia. IOM has further provided technical assistance at the regional level to the European Union (IOM et al. 2009). Local initiatives are similarly often in place at the IOM mission level.

Data from assisted victims – methodological strengths and limitations

Data collected directly from trafficked persons is an important source of information and has proven central in efforts to understand and combat human trafficking. As one CT professional remarked, there is a need to bridge the gap between research and data collection and operational work:

Research and data are paramount for our work and I really do not understand why people and managers that are out in the country and in the field do not understand this because it is really mandatory. Without data especially on counter trafficking (...) there's nothing you can do.²²

Research and data collection conducted within the assistance framework, such as the IOM approach, can shed light on a range of issues including risks and vulnerability factors, the needs of different groups of trafficking victims (e.g. men, women, children, victim of labour and sex trafficking); the gender dimensions of trafficking; details of the trafficking process and, albeit it to a lesser extent, the perpetrators involved, their modus operandi, the routes used and so on.²³

Moreover, as will be discussed in more detail in section 5 (*Who is collecting data? The role of researchers and service providers*), this approach (which involves data collection by service providers) potentially mitigates some of the ethical concerns associated with research with trafficked persons, like extensive interviewing (and re-interviewing), insensitivity in the interview process, the risk of outing respondents through research and so on. The relationship between service providers and respondents may also translate into more comprehensive, detailed information; data can also potentially be collected over time allowing for a fuller picture of the individual's experience and needs than a one off interview may allow.

The sheer volume of data which can be collected in this way potentially allows for a broader picture of trafficking than smaller studies may permit. Research and data collection with assisted trafficking victims also allows counter-trafficking professionals to identify emerging trends and patterns in “real time” – like new forms of trafficking, new routes, emerging means of control, different destinations, new profiles of victims. This means that data is current and is able to inform policy and programmatic response.

However, as with all methods, research and data collection with assisted victims is not without its problems. And, in going forward, it is important to take into account and accommodate methodological issues, not least because these

²² Interviews with respondents were recorded, with the consent of the respondent, and then transcribed. The quotes included in this paper are verbatim and have not been edited.

²³ For a discussion of the methodological limitations of collecting data about perpetrators from assisted victims, see for example, Antonopoulos & Winterdyk 2005; Cwikel & Hoban 2005; Goodey 2008; IOM et al. 2009; Kelley 2002; Lazos 2007; Levenkron 2007; Surtees forthcoming 2011, 2009 & 2008b; Troshynski & Blank 2008.

impact an understanding of trafficking and, by implication, the ability to prevent and combat it. This paper lays bare some of the strengths and also the constraints in working with this approach (both within the IOM trafficking database and through other assistance frameworks). The discussion centres around four main themes including:

- A global approach? Data quality and comparability across different terrains
- Who is collecting data? The role of researchers and service providers
- Being representative? Challenges in obtaining representative samples of trafficking victims
- What questions are asked and why? Assumptions, biases and agendas in trafficking research and data collection

While the focus of this paper is explicitly about the IOM trafficking database, it is of relevance and importance for all service providers who undertake research and data collection in a similar way. In addition, many of the methodological and ethical issues raised will resonate with researchers more broadly who, while perhaps not using this specific approach, may also access trafficked persons within the assistance framework, and, regardless, must consider and address issues such as data quality and comparability, boundaries between service provision and research, representativity and assumptions, biases and agendas in research questions. Finally, and as importantly, the issues raised and discussed here are critical for those who rely on data and research to support programme and policy decisions to combating human trafficking. Providing guidance about what trafficking data does (and does not) reveal can go a long way toward a better understanding of the issue and the policies and programmes which can serve to prevent and address it. It is these issues that are discussed in the next sections.

4. A global approach? Data quality and comparability across different terrains

This section focuses on issues of data quality and comparability within global research and data collection initiatives. Data quality refers to the appropriateness, integrity and degree of excellence demonstrated by the data in relation to the phenomena that is being studied – in this case, human trafficking. A central aspect is that the data be sufficiently standardised to allow for fruitful comparison within the data set. Indeed, standardised data, when of a sufficient scope and quality, can potentially make it possible to do a wide range of things – cross-sectional, multi-variate comparisons and longitudinal analysis, the identification of patterns and trends, the evaluation of anti-trafficking policies and programmes – which, in turn, provides an anchor for building knowledge, debating policy and developing and assessing interventions (Laczko & Gozdzia 2005; Omelaniuk 2005; Weiner & Hala 2008: 16). The IOM database, as a standardised, cross-border data collection tool about assisted trafficking victims, contributes, in important ways, to the quality and comparability of data about trafficked persons being assisted by the organisation and its partners.

That being said, this methodology and approach (and more generally data collection on assisted victims) involves some specific issues in terms of standardisation and, by implication, the comparability of findings. Factors contributing to data standardisation include the manner in which the data is administered (i.e. collected, stored, analysed/used); persons involved in data collection (i.e. for whom and by whom); and the completeness and accuracy of the data set. As one researcher stressed, understanding the context and processes of data is essential in terms of assessing the quality of the data:

...the circumstance of data collection really is so crucial in terms of what this data actually represents. And whether this is something that you know. At what stage was the information collected? Are these questions actually asked directly? Is the information collected from other sources and, if so, are these sources reliable? There is so much information that you need to know and really understand before you can start to analyse what the data means.

Thus, this section will discuss various considerations toward data quality and comparability – namely the tool that is used, the questions that are asked, comparability between different contexts, language barriers, the professionals involved, how data is managed and the impact of missing data.

The tools used

One strength of the IOM database (and similar data collection efforts) stems from its standardisation. All data is collected according to the same two interview forms – the screening interview form and assistance interview form.²⁴ IOM missions are required to work with these generic tools, which contain a number of fixed question and response options to cover various elements of the trafficking process and victims' assistance needs. Standardising tools and approaches can increase data quality in a number of ways, enhancing the reliability, generalisability and validity of data collected. Providing interviewers with a data collection template and interview form not only allows for the collection of comparable data but, equally, serves to limit the number of null or invalid responses, enabling enhanced data analysis. For example, in terms of victims' sex the IOM database has valid information for this variable in 99.98 per cent of the almost 16,000 cases in the database (in other words, there is only missing data for this variable in five cases). In comparison, a report assessing the anti-trafficking efforts in the European Union Member States found that many countries are unable to provide any form of sex disaggregated statistics on trafficking (EC 2008: 4; see also Dottridge 2010). Pre-scripted or standardised question and response options may further prevent the interviewer or respondent from deviating from the interview topic, again increasing the comparability of the data collected (see also Weiner & Hala 2008: 22).

Standardising tools can also facilitate data entry – data entry errors may be minimised when the data encoder is able to select from a number of predefined fields as compared to inputting open, narrative data. The latter point is particularly relevant in that content analysis of open fields in the IOM database exposes some of the limitations of a more flexible approach to data collection, particularly in terms of data analysis. Open fields may be more difficult to standardise and, therefore, code. At other times, open fields may have been used incorrectly, again resulting in coding difficulties. For example, in the IOM data set, responses about victims' relationship to their recruiter have, in some cases, been coded as "other". However, review of the openly coded terms in this "other" section are, in many cases, consistent with how one might define "acquaintance" which is one of the predefined codes – for example, "former classmate", "friend of a friend", "from the same village" and "family friend". Without knowing the local context, it is difficult to gauge why an open field

²⁴ For more information see IOM 2007. In addition, IOM has developed a step-by-step training manual for system usage and data entry; detailed release notes for each system upgrade to document technical and/or thematic changes made to the database; a guidance note on data quality and validation; and a template data analysis framework for report drafting.

has been used over a predefined, coded field and, further, if this is an issue of training or local adaptation – that is, who is perceived to be an acquaintance in different settings. Language may also be an issue with open fields, where terms are listed in the local language or loosely translated rather than according to set terminology. This is particularly the case in multinational or multilingual data collection attempts, which are often required in the case of human trafficking due to the transnational nature of the phenomenon.²⁵

The above strengths notwithstanding, there are issues with the feasibility (and desirability) of a standardised approach. Some issues relate to the data collection process, while others are a function of the rigidity of the model.

While the IOM approach collects standardised data, the data collection process is not done in an entirely standardised way. In practice, many interviewers use an open ended, unstructured interview technique (often done by service providers in the context of case management) and then fill in the interview form based on memory or the notes they have taken (if the interviewee consented to note taking). Other interviewers use a more structured format, working directly with the IOM interview forms, asking each question on the form in sequence, using the standardised terminology. Just as different methods may yield different response rates (Dillman et al. 2009; Reddy et al. 2006; Schwartz 2000; Yu & Cooper 1983; Weiner & Hala 2008), differences in implementation of one method may yield different response rates.²⁶

Moreover, when data is collected by a partnering organisation (whether NGO, GO agency or other), IOM has even less control over and information about the extent to which data collection is standardised with data collected by IOM missions or, for that matter, from case to case within the partner organisation. Given that in many countries IOM works with more than one partner organisation (and with varying staff within these organisations), it is reasonable to conclude that there are threats to standardisation which result from data collected by different partners even in one setting. Such a consideration will equally need to be taken into account by other actors attempting to collate, compare and analysis data collected from a variety of sources.

²⁵ The issue of language is discussed in more detail towards the end of this section.

²⁶ Research on sensitive issues has increasingly considered what methods are likely to yield the most reliable results. Some recent studies have found that data gathering procedures which avoid social contact (e.g. self administered questionnaire, whether written or computer based) may be preferred by some respondents and result in greater disclosure (O'Leary 2006; Reddy et al. 2006; Weiner & Hala 2008: 24). However, the nature of this type of data collection – linked as it is with case management – does not necessarily lend itself to this approach. Rather, service providers' work and talk on a day to day basis with beneficiaries and, thus, the interview process is essentially part of this regular way of working and interacting. It is also how case relevant information is collected and counseling provided. Moreover, research has found that the interview method may allow for greater comprehension of questions and builds rapport between interviewer and respondent in ways that lead to greater disclosure (Schwartz 2000: 815; Weiner & Hala 2008: 24).

Equally relevant is that while standardisation may be enhanced by the use of generic, standardised data entry templates, they often lack flexibility – for instance, to accommodate new patterns and unanticipated trends and behaviours. The often nuanced and complex nature of trafficking is difficult to capture through predefined fields, which means that data collectors may find themselves trying to choose the best (predefined) answer from a menu of often less than adequate responses, as different respondents both within and outside of IOM observed:

[Generic tools] may not be designed to capture the subtle nuances unique to the cases. Recordings of these “nuances” give us a more accurate picture of evolving and changing indicators and local trends.

You can’t take that kind of very complex set of circumstances [as seen in trafficking] and convert it into a more specific and simpler set of questions that you then ask and repeat and carefully make sure that you’re asking in very much the same way of everybody, rather than a kind of opened ended conversation.

A lot of data comes from drop down boxes so the variables are predefined and the predefined variables don’t always cover the actual scenario... the predefined naming is one of the problems.... [in] a lot of [places] where the variables are defined, it might be better just to leave [the field] open because then you might get a better picture in terms of research.

Moreover, working with predefined categories may still leave room for different interpretations where insufficient direction and training is provided to those working with the research tools (Stigter 2006). One simple example relates to the use of the answer option “partner” when asked about the victims’ relationship to people in the recruitment process. There has been confusion as to whether the word “partner” denotes a purely professional relationship (i.e. business partner) or a purely personal relationship (i.e. intimate other). As this answer option is used in relation to questions about different people involved in recruitment, it is important to have clear definitions otherwise the validity of the coded answer response may be called into question.

The questions asked, the variables used

What questions are asked and how are vital in terms of the validity and reliability of the responses received. Poorly designed questions – for example, those which are poorly worded or use jargon, have ambiguous meaning, are insensitive or uncomfortable for respondents – can lead to unreliable or invalid findings in that respondents may misinterpret or misunderstand the questions or be unwilling to answer in a truthful manner (Di Lillo et al 2006: 419-423; Hamby et al 2006: 515-516; Mitchels 2004: 37-38; Golafshani 2003: 604). As one researcher

interviewed in the context of this paper stressed, there needs to be a process and criteria “to ensure that the question will be understood in all places where it is used, that people will have the same probability of answering truthfully to these questions”.

One example is the use of the term “trafficking”, a term which may be unfamiliar to respondents, understood differently by different respondents or one which trafficked persons do not associate with their experience. The use of the trafficking term, then, will (differentially) impact how questions are understood and answered. A respondent who answers “no” to a questions about whether they have been trafficked may still have been trafficked but may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the term, may see him or herself as failed a migrant rather than trafficking victims, etc. If the same respondent was instead asked a series of questions relating to deceitful recruitment practices and exploitation, which cumulatively constitute a trafficking experience, the overall assessment may be “yes”. Clarity of meaning for all terms and concepts discussed with respondents is, therefore, essential.

Moreover, it has been noted that “labelling” – for example, using problematic or sensitive labels such as rape or prostitution or trafficking or illegal migration – may undermine disclosure of victimisation. Labelling may be particularly an issue amongst some sub-populations – for example, certain culture groups, sexes, age groups, nationalities, ethnicities, etc. (Weiner & Hala 2008: 21). For instance, one of the authors has, in past research, explored how the term “victim” and/or “trafficking victim” can be unpalatable to some victims, leading some to decline being identified and assisted (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007; Surtees 2008a&b). This highlights the importance of how questions are framed and issues queried and how even standard questions may yield different response rates given the individual or social dynamics which inevitably come into play in such research. It also signals the need for reliance on behaviourally specific questions to minimise labelling and capture issues of and associated with victimisation (Weiner & Hala 2008: 21).

Lack of consensus around key questions and issues have the potential to seriously compromise data standardisation, thus negatively impacting comparability and validity. Even subtle or seemingly insignificant changes to wording and/or response categories can affect the level of self reporting and, thus, data quality. A 2006 internal evaluation of the IOM trafficking database found that data validity could be augmented by improving some of the questions and by adding additional questions to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the trafficking process (Stigter 2006: 13, 25).

Consider again questions about the roles of persons involved in trafficking. Earlier versions of the database were based on the assumption that the trafficker was synonymous with the recruiter. When the victim relayed information in relation to the “trafficker”, it was encoded into the system as being related to the

“recruiter” only. This led to information on transporters, harbourers, exploiters and other actors being collapsed into one category – that of “recruiter”. This potentially caused an information gap about these specific categories and, at the same time, distorted an understanding of who are (and are not) “traffickers” and, equally, how they do (and do not) operate. Later versions of the database have included additional questions which differentiate between the often differing roles played by different actors throughout the trafficking process. Where there is relevant data, this allows for cross-variable analysis such as the cross-tabulating the gender of the victim against the gender of the actor involved and the associated role (s/he, they) played.

Certainly some information is more easily understood in a range of different settings – for example, more objective categories like age and marital status. However, even what might appear to be quite universal and objective categories – like education levels – require careful consideration and definition when working with victims, interviewers or case managers who originate from different countries (and thus different education systems) and who may have a different understanding of what constitutes primary, secondary and tertiary education. As one researcher observed, many seemingly direct categories are, in fact, quite complicated and diverse when considering all of the various global constellations and options which might arise and, thus, need to be captured in a global database:

Things like the structure of the family, you need to allow for some quite strange structures if you are dealing with cultures all over the world.

Similarly, sometimes responses will mean different things for different people and in different contexts. For example, one question in the database asks how victims were referred for assistance, one response for which is “self-referred”. In some situations, this self-referral was quite straightforward – i.e. the victim escaped trafficking and sought the assistance of IOM. However, for others, self referral is a more complex chain of events, sometimes involving a range of triggers like seeing an advertisement, being told about it by a friend, seeking out assistance only following one’s return home, self-referring only in a situation of crisis, etc. For example, amongst Ukrainian men trafficked for labour we found a specific pattern of “self-referral”, whereby they mainly self-referred after receiving a recommendation from a friend who trusted the NGO or IOM and had visited and received assistance. And usually this self-referral took place only after some time, when they had exhausted all other options for support.

Other data are even more problematic in terms of ensuring standardisation. Often times an assessment of the victim’s economic situation is based on their individual assessment (e.g. very poor, poor, average and well off) rather than an objective measurement (for example, actual income, income relative to minimum wage, etc.). This is equally the case with issues such as past experience of abuse and violence. Perceptions of violence and abuse are very individual

and context specific. Consider the example from one of the authors' previous research where one assisted victim initially reported no violence in her home yet then went on to mention instances in which she had been hit by her father. When this seeming contradiction was queried she explained that these were not instances of abuse; rather it was how he disciplined her and she had deserved it in those instances. Where corporal punishment is considered a legitimate form of discipline (and/or is socially normative), what constitutes abuse may differ quite substantially. Moreover, what social workers/interviewers assess as abuse may be perceived differently than by trafficked persons. As one interviewer cautioned, interviewers may also (consciously or unconsciously) become detached from the interview process because of the subject matter which also influences the processing of the information:

Very often the credibility of the information doesn't always lie with the victim [... staff] become so acclimatised to working in trafficking that they subconsciously write the stories out [...] You know, I'll tell that purely from experience, when it comes to which pieces, when it comes to sexual exploitation or anything exploitive, very often the staff had numbed themselves to the point where they didn't want to hear this.

Indeed many of the types of questions or categories which are often sought from trafficked persons are subjective and highly individual, as one researcher stressed:

... [A]nd to think that you can standardise something so assigned with so many meanings. Even just talking about something across countries, like discussing sexuality and violence. And these questions are so incredibly intimate.

Thus, while seemingly direct, comparability is far from a simple issue and certainly not one which is assured or even easily realised.

The language used

Language barriers equally have a significant impact on the extent to which data is sufficiently standardised, as has been noted in the context of migration research:

For a study to meet the scientific requirements, each respondent should be asked the same question in the same way, in all languages. One of the major problems with cross-linguistic research is to ensure that the questions are comparable across cross-linguistic groups and that the interpretations are not affected by cultural bias (Dahinden & Efonayi-Mader 2009: 107,112).

Certainly language is something that needs to be considered given that in any one interview there may be two to three (and perhaps more) languages used by various individuals involved.

In this vein, IOM has recently worked with field missions to standardise interview forms across language. The latest versions were launched in 2008 and have since been professionally translated from English into French and Spanish. A number of IOM field missions have similarly translated and adapted the forms into a variety of other languages (such as Arabic, Japanese, Kurdish, Portuguese and Russian) and also dialects to meet their local and cultural needs; while other IOM missions work mainly with the English versions of the forms, hiring interpreters for the interview process, when necessary.

However, having forms in a local language only partly addresses language barriers. Because of the transnational nature of both trafficking and anti-trafficking efforts, data collection is often done through translation or interpretation at least once – and perhaps at multiple stages (e.g. at origin, transit or destination) – or in different ways (e.g. a translator is involved in the interview process, translation of the interview information for entry into the database). A typical scenario might be a situation in which a Russian language speaker from the former Soviet Union (FSU) is trafficked into prostitution in South-East Asia (SEA). At identification the interview will be conducted by a local NGO or IOM mission staff, which most often means interviewing in the local language of the destination country through interpretation. Data will initially be recorded in the case file in the local language but then translated into English when the information is entered into the database, which is an English language tool.²⁷ Should the victim then be returned home, later information gathering will be conducted in their own language but then translated back into English for the purpose of data entry. The English language skills of the data entry staff – at origin and destination – may vary quite considerably. The data will then be processed and analysed by someone who, at minimum, can work with English language data sets but for whom it may not be a first language and who may not have knowledge of the language (or culture) of the respondents. Beyond navigating the different languages is that staff is likely to have differing levels of fluency and literacy in the various languages (as well as in English, their common language), which can impact the quality of the information collected.

Not only is the process of working through many languages cumbersome but there is further the question of what gets lost in translation. One researcher stressed how generations of translation compromise data sets, drawing on her own recent experience with a multilingual process:

The interviews were conducted in the language of the individual. It was something that I really did insist on. But, of course, then it was translated into [the national language]. I don't speak [the national language].... The

²⁷ The official languages of IOM are English, French, and Spanish. Up until 2008, the database was available in all three of these languages. As the tool was updated, funding constraints only allowed for re-development of the English version of the tool. While the accompanying screening and assistance interview forms are still available in French and Spanish (along with other language), the actual database interface is in English only. IOM intends to address this issue in 2011-2012.

qualitative interviews were translated into [the national language] and then into [my language]. That's one of the reasons why the interviews were so poor. Because obviously they have been through generations of translations. You obviously miss so much.

Moreover, there is likely to be a need to adapt the terminology used or the way questions are phrased to ensure that they are understood in ways that make the information comparable across settings. But the questions may not translate easily from one language to another.²⁸ As one IOM case manager cautioned, language may impact upon the reliability of the intended meaning:

It's always a bit lost because if people say some words in their local language it means [something] different to what it is in the English language. And, at times, it can lead to different responses.

Another IOM staff noted that the use of different languages can make for a very messy situation, particularly at the stage of data analysis²⁹:

So you don't know which language it's come from, or who has been speaking what language, or who is the person who has recorded the information.

To some extent, language may be less of an issue for larger organisations like IOM than for some smaller and less resourced organisations. NGOs and GO partners are not likely to have the same resources for their data collection and research efforts. However, even within IOM access to staff with relevant language skills is not assured, particularly as new nationalities of victims are identified in countries (and thus new languages and culture groups). Consider, for example, the case of a Congolese woman trafficked through one of the countries of the former Yugoslavia where victims have traditionally been from the FSU region and staff have typically been hired in part because of their Russian language skills. This invariably created difficulties with language and alternative means to interview the victim – for example, through interpretation – had to be found.

When an IOM office itself does not have language capacity, it is common practice to enlist the services of an approved interpreter. But working with an interpreter involves another set of issues when it comes to standardisation. An interpreter who is not familiar with the issue may be less familiar with the appropriate terminology to be used (including sensitive and appropriate phrasings for interviewing trafficked persons) and so information collected in this way may not compare with that collected directly. There are also ethical issues in that interpreters need to be sufficiently screened to ensure that they

²⁸ In cases where language is shared, spoken word may still cause a barrier; we may not all have a shared understanding of the meaning of words or use the same terms (Brett Davies 2007: 82).

²⁹ The latest version of the database now records the interview language or dialect along with the languages spoken by the victim.

are acting in an objective, honest manner, vetted to ensure that they are not linked to the trafficking operation or traffickers, trained and sensitised on the issue and trained in appropriate interviewing so as not to stress or re-traumatise victims (see IOM 2007; UNIAP 2008; Zimmerman & Watts 2003). There is also the additional question of the extent to which language (and the dynamics of translation) create a barrier to disclosure of certain types of information, potentially impacting on data quality.

The professionals involved

Standardisation needs also to be considered in how data is collected and by whom. To a large extent this is a question of capacity – providing service providers/interviewers with the skills and experience to provide sufficiently rigorous data based on their interviews, as research respondents stressed:

There are so many issues like how you train people who interview, both in how they interview and how they register the information they collect.

So how do you train people in the field to collect data that are not necessarily researchers? And how are these questions asked? Because depending on the question, that's the answer you are going to get.

Within IOM, training in data collection and research has generally been insufficient. Few trainings have taken place and resource limitations prevent an ongoing sequence of training for keeping up to date and/or to target new staff working with the database. This is an evermore complicated issue as IOM is a project-based organisation resulting in a relatively high turnover of staff and projects. This obviously has a negative impact in terms of data standardisation. Where data is collected by NGO partners, training is even less likely to have taken place beyond informal guidance by the IOM field mission. In an attempt to overcome some of these issues, in 2007 and 2008, IOM developed written guidelines and training materials to accompany the latest version of the database. These include a step-by-step training manual for system usage and data entry; detailed release notes for each system upgrade to document technical and/or thematic changes made to the database; a guidance note on data quality and validation; and a template data analysis framework for report drafting. Data protection principles were also prioritised including guidance on data access, requiring all database users to sign a compulsory confidentiality and nondisclosure form, above and beyond the generic confidential clauses included in all IOM staff contracts (IOM 2008a). Written tools are also supplemented by a 24 hour technical support system and ad hoc training by the database coordinator, where possible.³⁰ IOM has also been able to undertake interactive training through conference calls and over the Internet.

³⁰ A comprehensive internal training programme is planned by IOM on all aspects of data collection, including trafficking, in 2011-2012 to complement expected technical updates to all IOM migrant activity-related databases.

However, a major limitation remains the fact that such training materials and guidance notes are only available in English as are many training events and the technical support system. Further, not all missions have had equal access to these training opportunities nor are they systematically implemented. Thus, it is likely that some IOM offices in certain regions may be less informed and skilled when using the research tools and entering data into the database itself. The lack of training opportunities also reduces the number of occasions to receive interactive and detailed user feedback and, thus, to enhance and improve the research tools and database itself. Also important is that these improvements are not able to address issues in the data sets which preceded greater attention to training, which is something to be acknowledged in data analysis.

Other factors beyond an interviewer's skills and experience can play a role in the research dynamic. Characteristics including, but not limited to gender, age, class, social status, economic background, education and ethnicity may play a role in the interview process including what questions are answered and consequently how data is collected. Sex, for example, may affect disclosure of victimisation (Schwartz 2000: 825-26), often making women prefer female interviewers particularly when they have been victimised by men (WHO 2003: 14). It may also be a function of cultural and social mores. This was illustrated in the responses of two former trafficking victims (women in their 20s from Albania) when asked whether they would feel comfortable in being interviewed by a male researcher or by a researcher with a male translator. Both were victims of sex trafficking and stated a clear preference for women to be involved:

If there is a female, I would speak really freely because I would think I am speaking to my mom or my sister. But if there was a man I wouldn't have come at all.

It's a bit uncomfortable if there is a man, because if there is a woman I feel more free.

By contrast, trafficked men interviewed in Ukraine were also asked if they had any concerns about the sex of the interviewer and more specifically about being interviewed by women. Their responses were more ambivalent, as the quotes from two trafficked men below illustrate:

Q. Would it have been different with males, having a male or female interpreter?

A. [...] really doesn't matter speaking with men or women... it doesn't matter much.

It doesn't matter much to me but, of course, it is more pleasant to speak with women. A male translator is probably better because he understands men [...] a man can understand what I mean for certain things.

A range of social and cultural signifiers – for example, age and social status – may influence who are (and are not) appropriate interviewers in different settings and relative to different respondent groups. Consider the response of teenage boys from SEE who, when asked about their preference in terms of the sex of the interviewer, were far more concerned with other signifiers, like age. For them, older persons were more reliable (and arguably more respected) than younger people:

Why would it be worse [to not have a woman present]? It would make no difference... I prefer it with older people because they know more [than younger people] (Surtees 2007b: 71).

Thus, who interviews and collects data is not an uncomplicated feature of this process and one which merits attention in terms of how it is undertaken and, equally, the impact this may have on data sets and data quality.

How data is managed

The IOM database involves a technical mechanism which contributes to standardisation and data quality. There are various mechanisms built into the database which provide an important check in this regard. This includes the reduction of errors by automating manual operations; the prevention of duplicate cases or double counting through the tracking of single case data; the reduction of invalid numeric responses through the inclusion of range limits; the prevention of invalid response options through logic flow checks; and the prevention of insufficient data through the incorporation of mandatory fields. In turn, these checks help to enhance data quality. Moreover, in the management of the database, staff undertakes various procedures which are aimed at standardisation and could compromise standardisation and validity – for example, checking for high levels of missing data, outliers or unusual trends.

There are, however, some key data management issues that impact upon standardisation for all organisations involved in data collection and trafficking research, including IOM. One is in terms of how the interview data is encoded and transferred into the database, which includes transferring information from interview notes to the standardised screening and assistance forms and the transfer of information from these forms into the IOM database. It may also include the transfer of information from one data source (e.g. an NGO or GO partner) to another (e.g. an IOM mission). Each mission has implemented protocols for ensuring consistency from case to case – for example, agreement on how certain issues and answers are to be encoded, what answers fall into certain categories, etc. However, this needs to be regularly checked as new staff is hired and new types of cases (and responses) identified. Moreover, this consistency is only assured within a mission and yet case files are often transferred and used between missions – for example, when trafficked persons return to their country of origin from the country of exploitation, with data collected and entered at

both locations. In such instances will the data be sufficiently consistent and standardised with the other cases in the origin country? This process also often involves negotiating different languages and also different personnel, which may further impact data standardisation.

Furthermore, in managing information collected by partner organisations (meaning situations where IOM enters case information collected by NGO or GO partners), IOM has less knowledge of or control over how the tool is being implemented and information collected. In an attempt to ensure data accuracy and a full understanding of the case history, an open field remarks section was included in the database and IOM missions often provide additional narrative information to better contextualise the data. However, cross-checking the data against the narrative information is labour intensive and still poses challenges for standardisation as each case does not contain the same type or extent of qualitative information.

Missing data, missed meaning?

Incomplete or inconsistent data can additionally compromise comparability. Missing data (that is, high levels of non-responses) may be caused by any number of factors.

One factor may be insufficient access to trafficked persons or limited time spent with the trafficking victim and, thus, an inability to collect extensive information.³¹ This may be because victims stay only a short time in a programme – for example, being returned after a few days stay in a destination or transit country. It may also be because victims decline to be assisted or drop out of the programme before full case information is collected. It may also be a choice (or in some cases a coping strategy) on the part of the victim to not disclose certain elements of their experience – whether of their family background, their trafficking experience or their future plans. As many caseworkers explained, there are some questions – like those about family and their personal backgrounds – which many victims find particularly intrusive.

While data collection is a priority within IOM and many assistance organisations, many also take the position that where disclosure is too stressful, it should not be pursued. For example, IOM's *Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking* recommends interviewers adapt the interview to each respondent's individual situation (IOM 2007: 34). While important from a case management perspective, there are obvious implications for research in terms of data standardisation and comparability.

³¹ Overly long interviews may also run the risk unnecessarily stressing trafficked persons. In the IOM context, case workers are often able to collect the necessary case management information over a period of time; it is rare that information is collected during just one interview with the victim.

Some missing data may be more a function of institutional arrangements. There may be reluctance – or an inability – from partnering organisations to share certain types of information – for example, because of concerns with confidentiality, legal issues associated with data protection, lack of safe data sharing channels, issues of “ownership” of the data or because of a more limited role played by IOM in providing assistance. In many settings, IOM no longer directly implements assistance programmes and, thus, much current data collection relies on agreements and cooperation between partner organisations and IOM.

In some instances, it may be time and resource constraints which limit the amount of data collected. Service providers often don’t have time to collect and/or enter a lot of detail about each beneficiary. Where data collection is too ambitious (e.g. too many data fields or questions), there is likely to be a high degree of missing data, as one NGO worker noted of the IOM interview forms:

The whole process of collecting this level of detail has problems. It takes a long time to ask the questions and then fill in the information. And it is stressful in many cases to be asked such specific questions, especially about the trafficking experience.

Missing data might also be a consequence of the methodological approach taken. Consider, for example, interviews conducted with males in the FSU. A desk-top analysis of relevant (and de-personalized) IOM database data in advance of in-country fieldwork revealed that many males were noted as having self-referred to IOM or partnering NGOs. However, after employing a mixed method approach which involved interviewing males, we learnt that many men had in fact only self-referred after receiving a recommendation from a friend or colleague who ‘trusted’ the NGO or IOM. In this example, the data received in a field research setting added to and enhanced the findings from the IOM database.³²

Thus, while there is a need to ensure sufficiently complete data for standardisation and comparability, data collection initiatives also need to balance what needs to be known against the degree of information that can be realistically (and ethically) collected.

Comparability across contexts

An additional question is to what extent trafficking data is comparable across different national and cultural boundaries. Questions and concepts (and, by implication, interview responses) may not be understood in the same way between countries, cultures, different staff, interviewers and interpreters and/or at different points in time (e.g. Van Liempt & Bilger 2009:3; Surtees 2007c; Brett-Davies 2007: 82; Mitchels 2004:37-38).

³² The ability to draw upon the IOM assistance data in advance of the fieldwork did however help to provide a stronger baseline understanding and entry point for analysis, helping to refine the research focus.

As noted previously, the IOM database was developed in one region (i.e. SEE) and predominantly from the perspective of a country of destination (i.e. Kosovo/UNSC 1244) in a specific period (i.e. 2000, during the crisis). This resulted in a number of biases – for example, a focus on sexual over other forms of exploitation, attention to (young) female victims as compared to males, the assumption that entry was forced rather than part of voluntary labour migration, etc. Had the tool been developed in South-East Asia – where much trafficking is for labour, victims are of both sexes and all ages, most trafficked persons start out as willing labour migrants – the questions would likely have been quite different. Subsequent changes to the tool have sought to address these biases (see also *Section 3: Considering the IOM approach*). Yet when analysing the data across contexts, and particularly across time, these biases must be taken into account. It would be incorrect to say that more victims are today trafficked after having migrated for work compared with ten years ago if we are not comparing the same questions, and by implication, the same data sets.

In practice, several IOM missions have also adapted the interview forms, removing or rewording questions to meet their needs. While this allows for local and cultural contextualisation, there is a risk that standardisation (and thus comparability) from one mission’s data set to another (or across the whole data set) will be called into question. For example, missions that have removed questions must still input a response of “not available” into the database but no further clarification is required. Thus, when analysing the data it is not clear what “not available” means. Did the interviewer take the decision not to ask the question? Is the question never asked by the mission? Was the respective information not shared with IOM by its partners? This makes it difficult to use the “not available” response rate as a means to spot trends or challenge the reasons for missing data amongst certain groups of questions across the data set and in different contexts. Added to this, and perhaps further complicating the issue, missions are also able to select a “not known” answer option. Again, it is not always clear what “not known” refers to. Was the answer not known to the victim? Or was it not disclosed by the victim and, thus, unknown to the interviewer? Or was the field not completed and, thus, is unknown to the data entry staff?³³

There is also the issue of time and the extent to which data collected and collated in the past versions of the database are still comparable with the data collected today, given the changes in the database over the past decade. Again, when working with data compiled over a number of years it is equally important to assess the data in its broader context. This may consequently result in some data having to be excluded from analysis.

³³ IOM internal guidance to field mission on this issue notes that: “If a question is asked, but if the interviewee remains silent, please use the code NA of “not available” or “no answer”. If a question is asked, but if the interviewee responds that s/he does not know, please use the code NK – “no knowledge”.

Standardised but not comparable?

Data collection processes, like the IOM database, need to be developed in a careful and precise way, to ensure comparability. This has not always been feasible within the IOM system and is equally an issue for many organisations which collect data in similar ways. One researcher, reflecting on her own experience in conducting multi-country surveys, explained the precision and process required for this type of multi-situational data collection:

I think that when it comes down to the collection of survey data... there are so many issues that need to be observed... that presupposes that you have a questionnaire that works in all of the settings. So that is the first thing that you do, you go through, identify the topics, identify the questions. Then you go back and forth with the local experts to find out: "is this question applicable in this context?" "Will it be understood in the three countries so that we can compare the data?" And then you try to find objective indicators. Also something very important is whether it can be measured in a meaningful way. And then you need to identify your team, a team of interviewers and then you need to train them and ensure they all have the same training and are professional in the way that they collect the data and register the data, that they don't ask leading questions, that they don't fill in information that the respondent hasn't given and so on. So it's really this incredibly nerdy observance of detail that is necessary for high quality data collection.

The development of the IOM database has not, in some ways, been sufficiently rigorous in ensuring standardisation that would allow for detailed comparisons – for example, between countries, across regions, about different forms of trafficking and across time. The nature of the database – as a mix of case management and research – has played a role in this; as has its global nature. As a result, there is limited opportunity for standardised and comparable data at a global level.

The data are, however, sufficiently standardised to be used at a local (national, programmatic, thematic) level to afford valuable information and insight and to allow for fruitful comparison and analysis of specific topics, themes and issues and for assessing emerging issues and less considered aspects of human trafficking. However, this does make it essential that IOM (and organisations working with a similar model), in using and analysing its data, be clear about when this data can and should be compared against other data and, as importantly, when it should not. Further, this is a critical lesson to be taken on board by the many global and regional data collection projects which rely on and present data from assisted victims. It is equally a lesson for donors and policymakers who often rely on such data in designing and evaluating their anti-trafficking responses.

5. Who is collecting data? The role of researchers and service providers

The IOM trafficking database was developed initially as a case management tool by and for IOM staff to manage and track referrals, the needs of and assistance provided to trafficked persons, and to monitor trafficking trends and patterns, as one IOM staff explained:

The thought around the tool back when we were in Kosovo [Kosovo/ UNSC 1244] derived from the need to have easy access to the caseload that we were managing and to have an immediate response on the profile that we were managing. So that was really the need. So we had X victims in a few months so we had to know how many were coming from this site, the age, etc. because that would have helped in the report. So it was purely a case management tool and at that point it was incredibly useful and incredibly successful and you know that [a donor] put money in it and we evolved what we have evolved.

This “evolution” has meant not only the replication of this case management tool into a global system but also interest and investment in the database as a research tool. This dual and generally mutually beneficial function – for case management and research/monitoring – is consistent with how data collection is undertaken by many service providers, within IOs, NGOs and GOs.

On the one hand, data collection through service providers has some important benefits and strengths. It potentially mitigates some of the ethical concerns commonly associated with research with trafficked persons, like extensive interviewing (and re-interviewing), insensitivity in the interview process and so on. It draws on the existing relationship with service providers, which, when positive and healthy, is commonly characterised by trust, comfort and feelings of safety. This, then, may translate into comprehensive, detailed and high quality data for service providers and a safe and comfortable interview for victims. One assistance organisation in Europe stressed this feature of data collection efforts when undertaken by service providers:

The form was designed to be filled in by Support Workers (SWs) over time as women feel safe enough to discuss their experiences. Many of these experiences will not have been raised by women in any

other setting because these are not the experiences that are useful to statutory services in terms of prosecution; because of shame/stigma around sexual violence; and because for women who have been tricked, deceived and abused, it is often difficult to trust anyone. We believe that the women we support tell their support workers of these experiences precisely because they are in a place of safety where they are believed... (POPPY Project 2004: 1).

There is also an element of protection and confidentiality when data is collected within the assistance framework because some forms of respondent recruitment – for example, community sampling – may serve to identify trafficked persons to their families and communities. While outing trafficking victims to the community may differ in significance and fallout – for example, relative to the form of trafficking or cultural context – in many cases, it has a very real and serious implications, including social ostracism, rejection by one’s family, discrimination, reduced economic options, limited access to social services, threats and retribution from trafficking and even physical and sexual violence by family or community (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010). This approach also potentially provides a layer of protection in that, should any assistance needs surface during or following the interview, service providers are aware of and able to respond accordingly (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010, 2007; Surtees 2007b).

Data collected by service providers is also practical in that it potentially provides a great deal of information about a large number of trafficking cases in an “economical” fashion, tapping into an organisation’s existing data collection process. And it is dynamic. When victims are assisted over a period of time, data can be updated, expanded and even corrected as a fuller picture of the individual’s experience and needs emerge, as is often the case with IOM data. When contact with victims is ongoing, even beyond the formal assistance and reintegration process, this may provide access also to longitudinal data, rather than a snap shot approach (for example, single interviews or surveys at a set point in time), which is common in trafficking research.³⁴ And because victim assistance organisations are on the frontline of the issue, this can mean being able to identify trends in real time – like new forms of trafficking, new routes, different experiences – all of which can contribute to an enhanced understanding of the issue as well as tools and interventions to address it.

The above benefits notwithstanding, because case management and research are two distinct activities (in spite of some key synergies), this overlap is not

³⁴ Nevertheless, there are myriad limitations to collecting longitudinal data which also impacts the IOM data set and assistance providers generally. Not all trafficked persons accept to stay in contact with service providers over time. Breaking contact with service providers (and their trafficking past or victim identity) is often a vital part of recovery and reintegration. Moreover, some service providers take the position that maintaining contact can impede reintegration, foster dependence and/or may constitute a breach of ethical principles like confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. There are also more practical obstacles – for example, that trafficked persons are not easily reachable as they move addresses, change phone numbers, re-migrate, etc. (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010 & 2007; Surtees 2009b, 2008d: 33-36; Surtees 2007b: 191-95).

without its complications. The approach, while addressing many critical problems in trafficking research, also involves other issues and considerations. These include the potential for blurred roles and boundaries between research and assistance, concerns with rigour, objectivity and independence of the resulting research, constraints of resources and time, and potential differences in goals and purposes. Better understanding these complicating features is the focus of this chapter.

Blurred roles, blurred boundaries?

An important consideration is the ways in which the blurring of roles and boundaries between research and service provision may impact the scope and nature of the data collected from assisted victims. On the one hand, the goal of both researchers and service providers is essentially the same – that is, to better understand trafficking as a phenomenon and to use this information toward preventing and protecting trafficking persons, through policy or programme development. On the other hand, service provision and research, while often complimentary and conducted in cooperation, are nonetheless distinct fields and areas of expertise. That the boundaries between the two are blurred in this type of approach was of some concern to more than one researcher interviewed for this paper:

Maybe I'm being overly cautious, but I am thinking about having social workers or medical professional collecting research information. Is it really research information? Is it for your case file? I don't know.

... [W]hat is the database for? Is it for case management or for research? I think the relationship and role needs to be very clear to the victims. I know that in some cases IOM doesn't really do anything with the victims, apart from helping them. But then why collect all of this information? All of these aspects of this very private information? Maybe then they don't do it? Maybe then they should only collect the information about reintegration, about risk assessments.

Trafficked persons may, in some situations and in response to different needs, emphasise certain aspects of their identity relative to the persons with whom they are interacting. Service providers, such as social workers and psychologists, do play a specific (assistance) role in the lives of trafficked persons which, in turn, may inform what information they share and what experiences they present. As one researcher observed, such dynamics need to be considered in terms of the data one collects and the meaning that is assigned to it:

At the same time [the service providers] are providing the assistance, so how does that influence the answers you get back? Are you eager to please? Or have you been socialised into a particular understanding of your own actions?

As with applied research generally, research with assisted victims aims at knowing the “problem” in order to enhance response capacities both at programmatic and policy level. That an assistance organisation is focused on the individual’s exploitation and needs may mean that these issues are particularly prominent in the questions asked and the experiences that victims share, which may not necessarily always be the case when interviewed by independent researchers. Trafficked persons may, in other interactions, choose to focus on different aspects of their lives and experience than that of victimisation. While victimisation and vulnerability is the lens for much research and data collection on trafficking, many victims struggle with and, in different ways, resist the category of “victim” (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007; Surtees 2008a, 2007b). Victimisation is not always or inevitably the lens that victims themselves use or the main aspect that they wish to discuss, as is illustrated in the case presented in one research study on trafficked persons who declined assistance, in some cases, because of complicated feelings around victimisation:

One woman we interviewed displayed, unsurprisingly, clear discomfort when describing the traumatic experiences she had been through abroad. However, we also found it striking that her body language and demeanour was very similar when she described receiving assistance, indicating that she was perhaps as uncomfortable discussing the assistance she received as she was discussing her bad experience abroad. This particular woman was in her 50s, had an alcoholic husband and was effectively taking care of her children and her ageing mother-in-law on her own. She took great pride in having been able to earn enough money to help her sons study. When she talked about accepting assistance, she underlined that she only accepted it when she realised that her daughter could also receive some medical assistance and she would have time to first harvest her vegetables to ensure that her family’s winter food supply was secured. For someone whose main purpose has been to take care of others, it may be problematic to acknowledge that they themselves may need to be taken care of. Assuming a victim identity may, thus, be experienced as relinquishing agency or a positive self image as a provider or caretaker (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 143).

When interviewed by service providers (on whom they rely for assistance), respondents may answer in ways which are consistent with the approach of the assistance organisation – for example, by presenting a certain type of victim image or focusing on certain issues and features of their experience – or in ways that will garner needed services and support – for example, calibrating narratives to emphasise victimisation and need over agency and coping skills.

When service providers have a particular (ideological or theoretical) framework and approach, the questions asked will likely reflect this, consciously or unconsciously, which in turn will inform how victims answer questions and what information they provide, as one researcher postulated:

... [M]aybe it is in the NGOs interests that people come up with a certain type of information. And it may not even be conscious. Let's say that, at a specific level if I think of the assistance provided in [this country] it is by women's crisis centres, so it comes from a very specific brand of feminism. So they have very specific views on prostitution and it's this sort of pathology, everyone has been abused in the past and it is because they haven't learned to respect their own bodies and so on. And if they are going to collect information, no matter how many people have told them that you need to do it this way and that way, there is always the risk that it shines through what their attitudes are.

Whether researchers get different data than service providers is a natural follow on point and has significance in understanding the value and limitations of different methods and research positions. There is no simple answer to these questions but it is one that merits ongoing thought and consideration. There are myriad dynamics which inform what information is shared by respondents, with whom, when and why. As one researcher noted, it is likely that information is quite different depending on whom a victim talks to and so this must be part of how results and findings are understood:

I am sure that we [researchers] do get different information just by being different people and not knowing them [like service providers]. And I think that it could turn out in many different ways. That is, I think sometimes we would get less. I think sometimes we would get more. Or we get different interpretations of the same chain of events.

More broadly, another researcher noted that all research is, in essence, a negotiation, impacted by the research process itself, the researcher, the research tools and the environment:

I think ultimately any sort of interview or encounter with a person whose story or information, opinion, whatever you are seeking, is also to a certain degree a negotiation. And I think we shouldn't fool ourselves that it is just sort of an absolutely unadorned encounter with the truth. It's not. There is what we call social desirability. I am a teenager, you're asking me about sex. If you're from the school, I'm going to say one thing. If you're my parent, I am going to say something else. If it's a computer screen, I may be much more likely to say "yep, do it all the time". If it is a human being that may represent a certain kind of authority, even if it's a stranger, I might say, "No, no, I never do that" or "I always use a condom" or "I always ask for consent" or something. And those things can be studied. You can study that kind of thing and then figure out what's the best way to get the most kind of honest straightforward answer that you can.

All of which is to say that in spite of similar goals and many complementarities, service providers and researchers have distinct roles, positions and expertise which must be accommodated in terms of how research is done in the assistance framework and how the research findings are presented.

Rigour, objectivity and independence

One important consideration is the extent to which the data being collected in the context of case management are sufficiently rigorous from a research perspective. While assisting organisations have access to victims (and thus victim-centred data), they do not necessarily have the skills to assess, analyse and present this data in the research field if they do not also have sufficient training in research and data analysis. As different researchers argued, this may have implications in terms of the academic rigour, objectivity of the research findings:

Why is it that NGOs produce all of these research based reports and most of the articles in peer review journals are not research based? This is a very interesting question. And the question of access to the victims. And the question also of scrutiny over the research design and the instruments used and all of that. And again the beauty for NGOs is that they can do whatever they wish and do not have to go through that scrutiny. But how valid and reliable is that data? And then perhaps the researchers- that's all they do for a living. They are much more scrutinised and perhaps this results in more reliable and valid data. But they do not have the access to the programmes and to the victims to the extent that whoever the person that provides it does. So it is a sort of dilemma. And how would you marry the two? Because I think that is also a gap in the discussion.

Research is a professional job. NGOs could be trained to do research but in general they're not and that's not what they're good at doing and it's a secondary activity and it then becomes advocacy which means there is no number too exaggerated, that somebody won't use it.

Linked with the issue of whether data collected in a service provision context is sufficiently rigorous to support sound research are issues of objectivity and independence. Where research results or data collection somehow contradict the work or objective of an organisation, are such organisations willing and able to share this information? How much would a service provider reveal of their findings if the data challenges their programmatic approach?

Another feature is the extent to which the data is (and is perceived to be) objective and transparent because it was collected by assisting organisations, as one researcher postulated:

Well you have one set of populations that are relatively easy to study and also your own clients or any clients, any people that have been “rescued” and are part of some sort of a programme and that kind of stuff. Of course the issue.... is who can get access to these people and again [IOM] is in a good and in a bad situation depending on how you look at it. You’re obviously in an excellent situation because those are your own services and your own clients so you de facto can ask them whatever you wish and you can instruct your people in the field to explore things that would be both beneficial for the service provision and the treatment modalities that they want to implement as well as for a research piece of it. Where you are in an unfavourable position, not envious position, is that people are going to be saying, “Well, they are collecting data on their own programmes how objective can that be?” Right? Well how objective can that be?

In short, rigour, objectivity and independence, which are fundamental to any research, must also be considered in terms of how service providers collect data from trafficked persons if this data is to be used also for research, analysis and evaluation purposes. All data sources face challenges and biases; this is not unique to this particular method or data set. One potential benefit of service providers and researchers working together in this way is the opportunity it presents to address such issues.

Resources and time

It is not only a question of the extent to which case management data are appropriate for research but, equally, how a focus on research may impact how case management is done and how case workers are able to do their primary task of service provision. That is, mixing the two roles raises considerations of (often very limited) time and resources.

One consideration, where not accounted for, is the extra work that data collection puts on often already overburdened service providers, as both service providers and researchers noted:

It’s difficult because these agencies are very busy dealing with the operational side of the problem and the very real response in terms of protecting victims, providing support, getting prosecutions through the court process. So they see the value in research but it’s just sort of an afterthought for them.

It is really [taking time] because the social workers should deal with the case in counselling or doing the case management and or the work. Besides that, they put information for working better with the cases, for doing better assessments. They still need this information for the work. But sitting and typing all the things! I remember myself, when I first started working at [the organisation] and I was a case manager and the thing that I did not like was entering data. I liked very much to work with the cases and counselling and everything but to sit and input all of the information, it sometimes felt like we were losing time. It is not for us [social workers], it is for others.

In some aspects I like more detailed information, especially on the assistance side. But, for some issues and topics, I don't know why so much is needed.

Given limited resources, what is reasonable in terms of time (and, by implication, money) spent on data collection? While this is an issue for IOM which is largely a project based organisation, it is perhaps even more pressing for smaller organisations and government agencies which typically have even fewer resources. An important question is whether data (beyond that which is needed for service provision) is going to be analysed and used for research purposes. That is, are there resources (time, funding, trained staff) available for maintenance, analysis and presentation of the data? Where this is not the case, spending a good deal of time and resources to collect information is, arguably, wasteful and inefficient. It also places undue burden on service providers and, as importantly, the additional probing and interviewing can cause stress and discomfort for trafficking victims/respondents.

Different role, different goals?

Distinctions between the roles, responsibilities and objectives of service providers and researchers may also produce tension in terms of what information is collected. The type of information needed for case management may not necessarily match what is compelling from a research perspective (and vice versa). And because the objectives of the two roles differ, the content of the information and the nature of inquiry needed will also necessarily diverge.

One service provider, in considering questions asked in IOM's screening and assistance forms, explained how in many instances the information, while "interesting" from a research perspective, was not of direct relevance or high importance from an assistance perspective and, moreover, was not easy to collect, particularly in the assistance framework. As such, it seemed to unnecessarily complicate information gathering for the purpose of organising the individual's assistance, which was, as she stressed, her work and expertise:

...It is good this [topic of the] means of transportation and the detailed questions... but then I was asking: “Who was the first person who recruited?”, “At what point?”, “With what kind of means?” And sometimes they have done so many types of movement, with so many different persons that it is even difficult to put this detail. There are some cases where this information is possible. But, in some cases, it is really much too complicated and there are too many detailed questions.

Similarly, asking very personal or intrusive questions, which may be important from a research perspective but not for the purposes of case management, may compromise the relationship between service provider and beneficiary which, in turn, may threaten the effectiveness of care as well as impact what information is collected, in what quantity and so on. As one social worker explained, it may be preferable to allow beneficiaries to volunteer sensitive details rather than to inquire directly; it may also be that some questions don't get asked and answered as a consequence:

I have seen many times that kind of question, like “how many clients” or “how much you are paid for the services”. I never asked this type of question of beneficiaries. If they said it, I would put it on the form. But if they did not say it, I would never ask this. It was really a negative question for us... But what we have discussed between the social workers is this, that first, we are supporting them. When we do the interview we must emphasise to them that this is for helping them. But we avoid questions that make them think that we are curious or why are you asking this question.

There is the additional issue associated with the limits of a trafficking victim's meaningful consent when the information that s/he provides is used for multiple purposes. Some information given to the service provider for case management purposes may not be something to which the researcher should be privy (and vice versa). That is, Brunovskis & Surtees (2010) point to some of the ethical and methodological considerations of this overlap:

We are concerned that the blurred boundaries between service provision and researcher complicate the extent to which consent in the research is fully informed and consensual. We maintain that respondents should be able to decide what they do (and do not) tell us about their lives. This is both an ethical and practical consideration – ethical because it is about individuals owning their personal narratives and practical because the information offered to service providers (on whom they may rely for assistance) may in fact differ from that told to independent researchers.

This raises the need for both service providers and researchers to determine clear boundaries as to what information is included in a research data set as compared to case files, together with more precise approaches for acquiring respondents' informed consent consistent with the different uses of data collected (see IOM 2008a). Consent for the use of personal information collected for one purpose cannot be presumed to be consent for every purpose. Consent is something that also must be regularly raised and negotiated.

Regarding the management of case data, service providers (including IOM) have a legal and ethical responsibility to uphold confidentiality and to ensure that each victim case file is handled with utmost care, sensitivity, security and confidentiality.³⁵ To ensure that information from trafficking victims is obtained in a manner consistent with standards reflecting this responsibility, IOM's data collection approach is governed by the IOM data collection principles adopted in 2008 (IOM 2008a). These principles establish obligations in terms of appropriate data collection, storage and usage. Examples of template consent forms and confidential agreements are also provided. In addition, guidance on interviewing trafficking victims is outlined in both the internal and external versions of the *IOM Direct Assistance Handbook* (IOM 2004, 2007).

Further, as data is collected by IOM first and foremost for case management reasons, staff is obliged to inform victims that his or her depersonalised and aggregated data could be used for research purposes. The beneficiary has the right to either accept or decline in this regard and, in such instances, their decision is noted on their case file and within the IOM database so that the necessary action can be taken to include or omit the case where data analysis is undertaken (IOM 2008a). Further, all questions within the screening and assistance forms are answered on a voluntary basis, with informed consent, and victims are informed of their right to decline to answer questions that they do not want to answer.

Mixed roles?

That being said, this does not mean that the mixing of two roles is not possible. Researchers, when asked about the problems and possibilities of mixing research with case management, presented different perspectives and thoughts on the viability and advisability of this approach. Overall, researchers stressed the issue of informed consent as perhaps the most definitive issue in how such an approach should (or should not) be pursued and, equally, transparency in terms of how data was collected and, therefore, what it may (and may not) reveal:

My view is that it all depends. I think first of all you have to be very open about what you are doing... I think if you're the service provider to a

³⁵ The IOM database employs a multi-layered coding system and access to the system is reserved for chiefs of mission or designated counter-trafficking staff, each of whom is obliged under the terms of their employment contract to adhere to the IOM data principles and sign a confidentiality agreement.

group of people who are highly vulnerable you have to be very careful about how you ensure that you are not subtly coercing information. Not wanting to but whether or not you have a group of people who may be vulnerable – you’re their only connection to services that they need or staying in the country or whatever... so when you have that kind of relationship and you’re trying to gather data from that, I don’t think it’s an impossible situation but I think it has to be carefully considered.

I think you can come out and say: “Yes, this is a problem [to mix case management and research], but this is not a problem that we want to totally avoid”. In other words, to distil our roles, and say: “Now we have completely objective core of researchers, investigators who all put it before than anything else” would also be problematic. In other words, the same researchers who cannot take action to refer someone or to do something useful. I think in this area, this would also be ethically problematic. I guess I am very much in favour of pointing to all the glitches, the flaws of bearing data because of the biases of the organisation. Pointing to the need for much more objective research but also point out that research that cannot provide assistance or pay useful attention to the individuals, who are the subject of the research is also worrying...

... [A]nd what actors are appropriate for collecting different kind of information? It is not a one size fits all, either social workers can collect data or they cannot collect data. So more differentiation maybe [is needed].

Thus, at least one part of the solution is to be very clear about the roles and objectives (including capacities and limitations) of the various actors involved in data collection and research and being transparent about the limitations this poses in the data. As one researcher noted:

There’s a certain integrity that research has to demand just as there is programme integrity and just as there is an integrity of person and just as there are participants and respondents who have a right to speak too.

This feeds into the broader discussion of how to engage local partners, often NGOs and GOs but also IOs, in research to ensure the integrity of research projects and access to critical data from trafficked persons. It is also about how to be ethical while also ensuring high quality research is undertaken by NGOs, GOs and IOs, like IOM, which often (even primarily) draw on data from victims assisted by the organisation.

6. Being representative? Challenges in obtaining representative samples of trafficking victims

Because most trafficking studies and data collection approaches (such as the IOM approach) centre around assisted trafficking victims, an important question is the extent to which this group is representative of trafficked persons generally and what lessons and conclusions can be drawn from the sample presented. As one researcher explained, bias and selection effects make a representative sample difficult to obtain in the assistance context:

... [Y]ou're looking for something that says "Okay this is not random, but it may represent some larger phenomena". And you look at who you are talking to and how you found them or how they found you... Obviously you're bringing your own biases or whether its service provider connections that is providing these connections, or something else out there, so that's a problem, plain and simple...

Are assisted trafficking victims representative?

Many trafficking victims that are identified are never assisted – for example, those who decline to be labelled as “trafficked”, persons who are unsatisfied with available assistance, people who do not wish to be returned home and/or returned home through an assistance programme (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010 & 2007). Moreover, many trafficking victims are never identified – for example, because of poor identification processes, limited capacity of anti-trafficking professionals, individuals not understanding that they have been trafficked or because of a conscious decision to avoid identification (Brunovskis & Surtees forthcoming 2011, 2010, 2007; Surtees 2007b). These two groups – identified but unassisted victims and unidentified trafficking victims – are of unknown size, boundaries and nature and it is not known to what extent they are represented by the experiences and characteristics of assisted victims, including how this might fluctuate from place to place and over time.³⁶

Rather, assisted victims (those who were willing and able to access assistance) may represent a particular sub-group of trafficking victims who may be

³⁶ See, for example, Brunovskis & Surtees 2010 & 2007; Brunovskis & Tyldum 2005: 22; Laczko 2005: 8; Surtees 2007c & 2005b, Tyldum et al. 2005.

systematically different from other trafficking victims. A range of factors inform who is a part of the group of “assisted victims”. These include not only individual characteristics but also social or cultural norms, policy or legislative frameworks, how programmes are designed and funded, political commitment to anti-trafficking and so on.

At an individual level, a victims’ education, age, geographical location, personal experiences and social networks may play a role in their knowledge of and ability or willingness to access assistance (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010 & 2007; Tyldum & Brunovskis 2005: 25; Tyldum et al. 2005: 29). Similarly, trafficking victims with good family relationships may be more likely to return home and, thus, be underrepresented amongst assisted victims; victims who come from more problematic family environments may be unable or less eager to return home and thus be overrepresented (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 150-1). Moreover, there are differences in the images of trafficking for sexual exploitation that one comes away with depending upon whether one interviews persons in an assistance programme or not. For example, interviews with persons trafficked into street prostitution in Serbia included representations of agency and choice as well as violence and exploitation. By contrast, victims in assistance programmes in the same country at the same time more commonly focused on their victimisation and vulnerability in describing their past experiences and current situation (Brunovskis & Surtees 2008: 62-64, 108-10, 2010: 14. See also Skilbrei & Polykova 2006: 29).

More generally, social and cultural norms may impact what forms of trafficking and types of victims are offered assistance and whether individuals are willing to accept assistance. Many men we have interviewed in Europe and the FSU were reluctant to be labelled “trafficking victims”, not least because this categorisation is seemingly at odds with culturally prescribed notions of masculinity (e.g. strength, stoicism, self-sufficiency, being the breadwinner and/or the household head), thus underlining their (perceived) failures as a man. A number of trafficked men from the FSU and SEE region expressed this view, in spite of differing education levels, backgrounds, ages and trafficking experiences:

Many men are ashamed of appealing for help, because our society does not really accept or approve of men who appeal for assistance. They must manage on their own.

Men think that they are stronger and they have to find a way out of a difficult situation by themselves without asking for help.

Many men don’t tell about what happened to them. They are ashamed of the fact that they were tricked and lied to. They would never request assistance from organisations because they will be mocked and laughed at by their relatives. A man must manage his problems by himself.³⁷

³⁷ See Surtees 2007b: 211-215, 2008a: 26 & 2008c: 91-95

These social and cultural norms also impact when (and if) trafficking victims are identified and assisted, as anti-trafficking professionals manifest similar biases and assumptions. One adult male from SEE described how he was arrested as an irregular migrant rather than identified as trafficked in spite of explaining his situation and asking for help:

Some of the policemen were laughing at us, saying that we were idiots, that only fools could end up in a situation of exploitation like that... Some policemen didn't understand that we were forced to work, that we were threatened with death... they didn't believe that our passports were taken by the exploiters... Many of the cops thought that we were robbers, that we were attempting to flee the country and that's why we were concealing our true identities... (Surtees 2008c: 81-84).³⁸

That being said, cultural and social norms vary quite substantially between countries and regions (and even within countries with different social and cultural constellations). The critical point is that these social and cultural norms and expectations do impact which men (and women) come into assistance and when (if at all). For example, in the instances outlined above, men may only accept or seek out assistance in situations of crisis, when confidentiality has been assured, for a specific type of service or when referred by other trafficked men.

The legislative and policy framework may also influence who is (and is not) assisted. Where national policy and legislation (and, equally, funding opportunities) focus on one aspect of trafficking, one profile of victims, one angle of the trafficking phenomenon, data collected within that country (and the organisations working there) cannot help but reflect this. Where legislation criminalises only trafficking for sexual exploitation, victims of other forms of trafficking will not likely be documented and may not be eligible to access assistance (thus failing to be included in these data sets). For example, the IOM database up until July 2004 contains only females assisted, 75 per cent of whom had been trafficked for sexual exploitation and 18 per cent for whom the form of exploitation is unknown (IOM 2005: 417- 421). By the end of December 2005 the number of identified and assisted males had risen to only seven per cent, with the remaining 93 per cent of assisted victims being female. This is generally consistent with the legal and policy frameworks of many countries which focused on sex trafficking of young women and children in the first half of the 2000s. Similarly, the increased recognition of other age groups of victims beyond young women (aged 18 to 24) and children being trafficked in many countries has coincided with an upward trend in the number of registered – and therefore assisted – adult trafficking cases in the IOM database. Consider, for example, that 14 per cent of assisted

³⁸ Given that men appear to be “less identifiable” for many anti-trafficking actors in many countries, statistics about trafficked men are likely to be underestimates and perhaps are even more underestimated than women as trafficking victims (Brunovskis & Surtees forthcoming 2011; Surtees 2008a: 19-20, 2008c: 18).

trafficking cases documented in the database in December 2005 related to adults aged over 30 as compared to 19 per cent in December 2010.

Where laws and policies have very specific or high requirements for assistance – for example, the obligation to cooperate with law enforcement – data will reflect this orientation. This may mean that assisted victims in these countries manifest a greater level of exploitation or abuse than victims assisted in other countries like where the burden of proof for trafficking status (and thus options for assistance including temporary residence permits) is lower or different (see also Craggs & Martens 2010).

Political will is another variable. The degree to which a country (and organisations within) considers trafficking a priority issue will impact the volume of cases identified (and often therefore assisted); the nature of a government's interest may also impact the types of victims who are assisted – women over men, children over adults, sexual exploitation over other forms of trafficking, foreign over national victims. At the same time, cases identified by some NGOs may not be included in official trafficking statistics when the NGO is not considered a competent national authority and, therefore, does not have the authority to grant victim status (Craggs & Martens 2010).

Donors (generally foreign governments) have also often influenced who is assisted by dictating what forms of trafficking were considered and therefore funded (generally sexual exploitation over other forms and international over internal trafficking), the profile of victims (women and children but rarely adult men), countries or regions of priority and so on. This cannot be overlooked when considering selection effects in terms of representativity of assisted trafficking victims.

There is also the issue of the anti-trafficking response, namely the identification and referral process. In some countries, many assisted trafficking victims are self-identified and self-referred to assistance programmes, generally some time after their trafficking experience and when back in their country of origin.. They may have specific characteristics that lead them into the assistance framework – for example, they may have access to information about services through the media or social contacts, live in areas where assistance programmes are available or where programme outreach to victims, have greater trust in the assistance framework and so on (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010 & 2007; Tyldum et al. 2005: 29).

Moreover, they may also have common experiences of non-identification in the destination country; some countries are far less active and committed in identifying and referring trafficking victims and it is often only when they return home that they find their way into assistance (Brunovskis & Surtees forthcoming 2011; see also Olivie 2008). In other countries, assisted victims are typically identified and referred by law enforcement authorities. Cases identified by

law enforcement may differ in that this sector may perceive certain types of trafficking cases or certain types of trafficking victims to be a higher priority (e.g. sex trafficking, victims of a particular nationality) or more in line with how they perceive trafficking or they may also focus on cases which they perceive to be more serious or who agree to cooperate with law enforcement (Albanese 2007: 60; Brunovskis & Tyldum 2005: 24-25; Brunovskis & Surtees forthcoming 2011, 2007: 33, 46; Craggs & Martens 2010; Surtees 2007b: 77-83; Surtees 2007c; Tyldum et al. 2005: 28).

An additional consideration is that because information, policies, laws and programmes change over time, information about assisted victims (and the extent to which they are representative) must be understood in this temporal context.

Thus, there are many selection effects to be considered in terms of who comes into assistance. And there is a range of experiences not captured in the assisted cases which must also be part of an understanding of the issue, as one researcher explained:

One of the issues everywhere is that, through organisations that provide assistance, you can get data about people who have decided to seek assistance... [but] what about all the others? And I keep on thinking that's where there is a lack of information. And yet, 10-20 years ago before this trafficking concept came up the anthropologists would be saying: "Clearly you have to go to look very broadly at the experience of the population group that has migrated in order to identify a whole set of not just experiences but strategies".

Caution is, therefore, needed in terms of how data about assisted victims are used and what they purport to represent.

Is an organisation's caseload representative?

Representativity applies also in terms of what victims are assisted by which organisations or institutions. NGOs, GOs and IOs providing assistance are different; NGOs themselves differ from in terms of a wide range of factors (e.g. type of programme, approach, philosophies, target group, scope of work and so on) as do different government institutions and international organisations. This, then, raises questions about the extent to which victims assisted by one organisation (or institution) are representative of assisted victims generally? This equally applies to IOM and, in terms of the IOM database, requires consideration of what it reveals and, as importantly, the limitations?

As one researcher stressed, assistance data can be valuable and meaningful but it needs to be appropriately contextualised and framed for the full complexity and nuance to emerge:

... [T]his point about data being project [or organisation] based, it's so important. Because if it was presented and understood as that then it could be interesting. And then you could start to discuss the groups that are in the umbrella and who are we reaching and who are we not reaching, for instance. But this whole misrepresentation of what data is. And it doesn't really help to have a caveat in the introduction of a report. Well, the caveats in [many reports] aren't helpful in any way. But it doesn't really help because it's still perceived and still kind of presented as global representative data that you can compare across countries.

So what are the possible selection effects in terms of which victims are assisted by which organisations?

Certainly what services are available and which models of care are used is relevant in terms of who is offered and/or chooses these services. Programme criteria – and all institutions and organisations have requirements and criteria – informs who will accept or seek out assistance.

Many of the victims we have met have, in different ways and at different stages, decided what services and what assistance organisations best suit their situation and needs. Some victims have declined assistance when the requirements and restrictions have been too high (Brunovskis & Surtees 2008 & 2007). A programme which requires residence in a shelter will exclude certain types of victims – for example, persons who are anxious to return home, those with children (when children cannot or do not want to also be accommodated in the shelter), those who must find work immediately to support their family, etc. When returning home is a requirement of being assisted by an organisation, some victims opt to stay outside of the assistance framework altogether. At the same time, when this form of assistance is accepted (as with many cases assisted by IOM), this might equally bias the data in that it represents a specific profile of trafficked person. In other cases, victims have chosen from different models of care (e.g. residential vs. non-residential programmes); different services (e.g. accepting medical care or job training but not counselling); different types of organisations (e.g. NGOs, GOs and IOs) and different philosophies and approaches (e.g. women's groups, non-trafficking specific assistance, community based support, faith-based services, etc.). All of this informs the nature and representativity of an organisation's assisted caseload and makes clear that there are likely quite noteworthy differences between caseloads.

How agencies and institutions conceptualise and define trafficking is also relevant in this selection process, as one assistance programme notes of the beneficiaries it is referred:

...there is an unresolved question here too about whether a woman who knows she is coming to work in prostitution, but not the degree of exploitation she will face, is as likely to be referred to [the project]. Such women may not identify themselves, or be identified by agencies they come into contact with, as “victims”, even though they may have been exploited and experienced human rights abuses (Poppy Project 2004: 4).

Long (2004: 21-22), in her study of assistance to trafficked persons in BiH, argues that organisations typically reflect their own biases and assumptions in how they define trafficking, their organisational perspective, which victims they are able and willing to assist and what kinds of assistance they provide. That is, IOM assisted victims who were willing to return home but didn't work against labour conditions which allowed for trafficking; UNHCR defined trafficking pre-eminently as an asylum or refugee issue; ILO focused on labour over sexual exploitation and irregular migration; UNOHCHR and the police forces focused on human rights and increasing prosecutions. This also links with the issue of ideology within an organisation (or even a national assistance framework). The orientation of assistance programmes introduces selection effects in terms of who are the trafficking victims it assists.

In terms of IOM, it is perhaps worth considering what factors and features inform who comes into the IOM caseload? And does this differ from country to country and even year to year? IOM is a project based organisation and, thus, the IOM data is informed by what programmes are running at the time, the duration of these programmes, the type of assisted victims, availability and scope of programme funds and so on. A rather striking example comes from Ghana where the majority of data is of children trafficked into the fishing industry. Read in isolation, this data suggests that other forms of trafficking are largely absent in Ghana when in fact other research indicates that trafficking takes place for both labour and sexual exploitation and involves adults and children, of both sexes (ECPAT 2008; ILO 2004). Rather, this orientation toward children trafficked for fishing reflects IOM's specific programme focus in the country, making clear that the context of the data needs to be adequately understood and presented in any analysis of this data set.

In addition, the IOM database which is comprised of data about trafficked persons who have been assisted within the IOM direct assistance programme. However, the context of their experience is quite different – being assisted in a country of origin, transit and/or destination – being assisted directly by IOM missions, NGO partner(s) and/or government counterparts. Thus, when considering selection effects, it is important to understand how precisely assistance is arranged in each context and, equally, how it is perceived by potential beneficiaries.

Another factor is more practical in nature – that of staffing arrangements. Adequate resources are needed for staff to collect, input, maintain and analyse data about victims. Thus, where programme funds are reduced or where there is insufficient staff time for such tasks, data will be impacted. Data collection will not be a priority for most organisations – whether large or small – where their primary work is service provision. IOM, in spite of being a large international organisation is nonetheless a project based organisation, which means that when no funds are available for data collection, staff cannot prioritise it. Thus, fluctuations in data may, in some cases, reflect an issue of resources as much as trafficking patterns. Given that most organisations have even fewer resources than IOM (IOM does have HQ staff which supports field missions data collection efforts), it can be a challenge for NGO and GO service providers to collect and maintain high quality data records.

Moreover, to what extent does IOM’s position as an international organisation, which works closely with government partners (including in many countries, Ministries of the Interior), influence victims’ decision about accessing IOM services? Does the (often requisite) component of return to the country of origin in many IOM programmes translate into some victims avoiding (or embracing) this assistance model? Do victims feel more (or less) trust in an international organisation than government services or even state NGOs?

Representativity in trafficking research and data collection

For all of these reasons, the current body of victim-centred data cannot be viewed as representing all victims of trafficking (in all forms of trafficking). Those who fall within the assisted caseload in one context (and at one time) may have specific characteristics which make them systematically different from assisted victims in other contexts as well as, potentially, victims assisted by other organisations within the same context. In sum, then, not only is it important to represent the differences between assisted and all other trafficked persons but there is a need to also attend to the selection effects within any one organisation’s data set.

As important is how this information – with all of its attendant limitations – is presented and shared. Information about assisted victims tells a great deal about their specific experiences and needs and when collected over time, also sheds lights on patterns and trends. Both policymakers and practitioners can draw on this valuable data in their work. However, the picture it offers is partial and it is essential that it be presented, read and understood within these very specific parameters. Too often, data from assisted victims has been presented and understood as “the” face of trafficking, rather than a sample from within a wider body of experience. The key, then, is to make explicit how the methods used in any study or presentation of data inform the extent to which the sample is (or is not) representative and to make clear the limits of considering this valuable but admittedly sub-sample of trafficking victims.

Equally important is to access alternative sources of data which can round out the current picture of trafficking which is based largely on research with and data about assisted trafficking victims.³⁹ Understanding that assisted victims is not the full picture of trafficking is essential in terms of knowing whose experiences are documented and needs are being met and, equally, who is not being researched and, by implication, assisted and protected. Identifying which victims are going unidentified and unassisted and why is urgent in terms of the protection and assistance of trafficked persons.

³⁹ Subsequent papers in this series will supplement (and seek to test and validate) data from the IOM database through field based, multi-method studies.

7. What questions are asked and why? Assumptions, biases and agendas in trafficking research and data collection

Research and data collection with former trafficked persons can reveal a great deal about the issue of trafficking to researchers (and, by extension, practitioners and policy makers). It can provide insight and detail on a vast array of subjects, including the individual trafficked person's personal situation, contributors to and motivations for migration, the recruitment and transportation process, their experience of exploitation, their exit from trafficking and their assistance needs.

But we can only learn about the things we ask about. So an important issue is what gets asked in this data collection process and why? What informs the questions that are asked? And to what extent are questions asked reflections of assumptions, biases and even agendas about trafficked persons and the trafficking field more generally. As one researcher observed, the role of the researcher in determining lines of inquiry is not a neutral one:

Those are great questions on that [IOM] form you sent, but also categories. I am an anthropologist by training, so those are not emic categories,⁴⁰ those are not categories cooked up by the victims, they are categories cooked up by the likes of you and me.

How much data collection reflects researchers' and data collectors' perspectives and preconceptions is important in evaluating how well responses reflect views and experiences of the interviewees. These issues – of assumptions, biases and agendas – are discussed in this section.

What assumptions? What biases?

The questions asked within the initial and subsequent versions of the IOM database provide a helpful illustration of how assumptions can come into play. Because the IOM database started in SEE in 2000, with large numbers of young women trafficked for sexual exploitation, the questions and lines of inquiry

⁴⁰ An "emic" view is a description of behaviour or belief in terms meaningful to the respondent, a perspective from within a culture); an "etic" account is a description of a behaviour or belief in terms that can be applied to other cultures.

reflected this orientation. This lens (and its inadequacies) was clear when the database expanded beyond the SEE region where other victim groups and forms of trafficking exploitation were identified. As one IOM case manager working in the Greater Mekong Sub-region noted of these challenges:

While the [original] form itself was fine, it suggested a common understanding and interpretation of what trafficking is. As I recall, the form was particularly well-suited to a police perspective of a crime, where there were clear and obvious signs of abuse – particularly trafficking for sexual exploitation. I think my concern was that, while the form seemed to fit very well to the context of most trafficking cases arising in Eastern Europe, it didn't fit well to what was being labelled trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region [...] I somehow was impressed that the form certainly fit into a prevailing/conventional understanding of the "typical" trafficking scenario but might ultimately confine perspectives of other potential trafficking cases. I guess what I am saying is that it didn't strike me as being nuanced enough. That was a long time ago, though, and there has certainly been a lot of progress made on victim identification.

Tied intimately with this attention to sex trafficking is the focus on females over males (particularly adults) and, as a result, some of the questions are very gender specific, including assumptions of female vulnerability and victimisation. This dynamic came into focus when analysing the data for male trafficking victims from Ukraine and Belarus (see Surtees 2008c) where select questions – for example, whether the victim had suffered abuse prior to trafficking – were seemingly not as relevant when dealing with trafficked men. This raised questions about the relevance of this question generally, particularly when many trafficked women migrated and made decisions along the same lines as those of their male counterparts. Another example was the assumption of coercion and even kidnapping in earlier versions of the database which was inconsistent with many of the interviews conducted in different countries in SEE and FSU where so many trafficked persons started out as labour migrants. Indeed, of the approximately 16,000 cases registered in the IOM database (as of end December 2010), less than one per cent of victims had been kidnapped while over 50 per cent were recruited through a personal contact.

Some questions in particular reveal assumptions about who trafficked people are and why they (and not others) were exploited. This includes commonly held assumptions about poverty/economic need, low (or no) education, poor social relations, violence in the family prior to trafficking and so on. These are reflected in the IOM database as well as many data collection tools developed by IOs, NGOs and GOs. And yet the relevance of these categories has not always (or perhaps even often) been sufficiently tested (and tested in different settings). For example, where factors such as domestic violence are noted, this may be attributed to who enters assistance programmes (i.e. those with violent or

problematic family environments). This does not mean that all trafficking victims (and all trafficking victims everywhere) have been trafficked trying to escape from domestic violence; many have never been victims of domestic violence. But because it is identified as relevant with one group of respondents, it is included in ongoing research.

Questions about entry into trafficking may also be underpinned by assumptions. The IOM database, for example, assumes a definite and specific entry points which may not always be the case. As one researcher explained, not only was this an issue generally but it was particularly a problem when researching certain sub-groups of trafficking victims, like children:

...I am thinking about the children who moved and they are really not aware, nor is it very easy to establish if the person who is moving them, the intermediary, is aware of anything to do with the specific circumstances in which they are going to be employed or exploited afterwards. You'd then get this continuum of experiences from very abusive to much less abusive. I suppose what struck me there is that it was trying to identify some of the straightforward cases, kidnapping, selling in advance. And kidnapping is one thing, but selling seems to me something which has been misused a lot. In other words, the ideological assumptions of the interviewer have often made a particular transaction of a child being sold.

None of which is to say that pursuing these (and many other) lines of inquiry are not relevant. There are many instances where these variables and factors have been considerations (sometimes central, sometimes more peripheral) in decisions to migrate, considerations in return or as inhibitors (or facilitators) in reintegration success. But many of the questions will not be equally relevant for all trafficked persons, particularly those of different trafficking experiences and individual characteristics (e.g. different nationalities, countries of residence, sexes, ages and so on). Indeed, the trafficking situation varies so substantially around the world that careful attention is needed to how questions do (and do not) fit with varying local settings and, equally, according to other variables such as whether in a country of origin, transit or destination country, form of exploitation and so on.

Moreover, any questions or categories need to be considered (and regularly reconsidered over time) in terms of their relevance and the extent to which they contribute to a better and more meaningful understanding of the issue. As trafficking patterns and trends develop and shift, data collection tools must also adjust. For example, IOM is increasingly confronted with “mixed migration” scenarios, where trafficked persons may also have other protection needs such as the right to asylum. As a result, in 2008, IOM included an additional field to collect information on the individual’s other issues and vulnerabilities, where the individual consents. Collecting valid and detailed information on the additional

protection needs of trafficked persons is not only essential for their safety, security and eventual referral to other agencies, but helps to inform programme and policy development.

Agenda and ideology

Research, and the data upon which it is based, may also be influenced by agenda and ideology. The extent to which agendas are implicit in what questions are asked and what issues are researched is an important determinant of the quality of information derived. Researchers interviewed stressed this as an issue with research generally, but also highlighted that trafficking research in particular can be profoundly ideological and political:

Well there's always going to be [an agenda] because there will be a person behind collecting that data. So there's always this question of whether it is an arbitrary decision of a particular individual, is it a decision based on what agenda?

Data to begin can be tainted; tainted by a moral agenda. And I think every researcher ... should recognise that.

When it comes to trafficking research, these agendas and ideologies relate to a wide range of issues including positions on prostitution, migration, crime, border control, labour and occupational rights, public health issues, human rights and feminism (e.g. Cwikel & Hoban 2005: 306-16; Gozdiak & Bump 2008: 9; Laczko & Gramenga 2003; Laczko & Gozdiak 2005; Long 2004: 19-23; O'Connell Davidson 2008; Tyldum, Tveit & Brunovskis 2005).

Perhaps the most prominent agenda is that surrounding the prostitution debate, which translates into the heavy focus on trafficking for sexual exploitation within programmatic and research circles, in spite of the Palermo Protocol including all forms of trafficking. It is striking that a recent review of literature on human trafficking found that the majority of research studies focus on (female) sexual exploitation – for example, from 218 journal articles analysed, 186 articles dealt with sex trafficking and 173 with women, whereas labour trafficking was mentioned in only 46 articles and men in only 14 (Gozdiak & Bump 2008: 6-11, 33). This focus on trafficking for sexual exploitation has, in practice, led to a tendency to neglect other types of victims (e.g. males) and other forms of trafficking (e.g. labour) which, in turn, has led to a sometimes distorted presentation of the phenomenon. At the same time, the heavy focus on international trafficking has, at worse, led to some cases of internal trafficking going unassisted and, at best, caused confusion as to the role of cross-border movements in trafficking.

When researchers (and service providers) have a vested interest in a particular image of victims or type of data production, this will likely be replicated (consciously or unconsciously) in their data set – e.g. through the choice of

questions asked, experiences noted, data presented and so on.⁴¹ One researcher raised this point with regard to the IOM assistance questionnaire in terms of questions asked and framed:

Only such a thing as, where they start: “Were you sold?” and “What did you cost?” This sets the tone for what kind of information you expect them to come up with. It could be extremely traumatic but also could influence the subsequent answers if that is the first question you get. You are not going to say: “No, I actually decided to work in prostitution because I wanted to earn some money”. You won’t say that then.

Agendas may also manifest in the information that is analysed and presented. Service providers may present cases and examples which are consistent with their perspective on trafficking or philosophy of care. They may also, in their analysis, focus on certain aspects of victims’ experiences which illustrate and/or serve to reinforce their perspective but which victims themselves may not always consider primary. For example, the IOM approach seeks to collect a significant amount of data on the status of the individual prior to trafficking (educational experience, family structure and role in family and so on) yet this information is not always perceived as being as central in the victim’s own experience.

Further, assistance criteria may (consciously or not) lead to certain (sub) groups of victims being assisted by certain organisations. This then leads to research which is most reflective of this (sub)group of trafficked persons; this information may then be mobilised in ways that support the agenda or perspective of the organisation.

These institutional lens and perspectives (as well as, in some cases, ideological orientations) are of particular relevance given that so much of the research available on trafficking comes from NGOs and international organisations and that the data sources for many of these organisations are the trafficked persons they assist, not necessarily the full diversity of trafficking victims and trafficked experiences.

The implications?

Biases, assumptions and agendas can potentially distort the body of research in the field of human -trafficking. They can (and, in some cases, have) reinforced stereotypes and uni-dimensional images of trafficked persons whose identities are, in reality, myriad and experiences diverse. Focusing on past experiences of domestic violence, for example, may be objectively true but only one aspect of the individual’s experience which may (or may not) have played into trafficking risk and may (or may not) be something they consider pivotal. Similarly, not

⁴¹ For further discussion, see for example, Brunovskis & Surtees 2010; Cwikel & Hoban 2005; Vanwesenbeeck 2001; Weitzer 2005.

asking questions about aspirations, motivations and individual perspectives may collapse the complex and multilayered decision making processes surrounding migration (often involving individuals, family and even community) into a list of one dimensional explanations that do little to advance an understanding of the issue.

There is also the fact that because trafficked persons are vulnerable persons, ethical responsibilities are more pronounced. The risk is that collecting certain categories will serve to reinforce stereotypes and/or foster stigma against certain groups or categories of persons, as one researcher explained:

...it also concerns, any which way you flip it around, often a very vulnerable and a very visible group in the destination country but also in the country of origin. I think this just adds to the layer of this being problematic...

Take, for example, information on ethnicity. There is growing interest in understanding the role that one's ethnicity may play in trafficking vulnerability. Yet information on ethnicity should only be recorded when self-disclosed by the individual. Even then, there will be a need to handle this information very carefully, particularly in the analysis and presentation of findings.⁴²

As one researcher noted, where bias and assumptions translate into bad data, there are ethical issues to be considered and accommodated:

The issue is whether it is ethical to present data which are so bad that they can also create this very specific image of different groups that will, in turn, have consequences at the policy level. So that is the other side of bad data and bad data collection. That it can have some serious consequences beyond just being bad and meaning that we don't fully understand the phenomenon.

An important question, then, is how to identify and avoid these assumptions and biases in how questions are framed and, moreover, how to identify the most relevant and important questions for such data collection programmes. Gozdzik (2009: 161) has stressed the value of ethnographic investigations for formulating hypotheses for further studies, including preparation of survey questionnaires:

So often in social sciences, questionnaires are developed without the benefit of exploratory ethnographic studies and do not include the range of experiences of the cohort/s under investigation, but rather reflect the scholars' research goals and objectives.

⁴² National and international legislation prohibits the collection of certain sensitive information; there is some personal information which may not be legal to obtain and maintain at a national level. For Example, generally it is not permissible to keep information on one's sexual practices/orientation or on one's race/ethnicity or religion. See Article 8.1 of the EC Directive on Data Protection, Directive 95/46/EC, of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995.

Consider, for example, the findings of one ethnographic study in northern Thailand which found that risk of trafficking and hazardous child labour was linked to birth order, parental marital instability and high educational attainment (contrary to assumptions about vulnerability being linked to poverty and lack of education) (Rende-Taylor 2005: 12). Such findings signal crucial lines of inquiry for research and data collection and yet are not commonly part of the process in designing data collection initiatives.

Moreover, any data collection system – whether by an NGO, IO or GO – must be in a constant state of reflection, evaluating the extent to which the questions asked and issues explored adequately and sufficiently reflect the trafficking situation (and changes to the trafficking situation over time). Data collection projects need to be flexible, to respond to changes in the trafficking process or trends raised by trafficking victims themselves. The revisions to the IOM database have, over time, been substantial and aimed at addressing biases and assumptions. For example, the original database assumed that trafficking always involved coercive recruitment. Additional questions were added to reflect different types of entry into the trafficking process, including voluntary economic migration which led to trafficking. A range of similar changes have been made to all sections of the database over the past decade.

Victim's perspective

Tied intimately with issues of bias and assumption is the extent to which efforts have been made to bring trafficking victim's views into research. That is, what categories and issues do trafficked persons consider to be central in their decisions to migrate? What do they identify as risk and resiliency factors in their lives? How do these differ by form of trafficking, national setting, profile of victim and so on? And to what extent do the questions asked by data collectors capture the issues and factors that trafficked persons find most relevant and critical?

Even the terminology of “victim” (whether “trafficking victim” or “victim” generally) is often at odds with how trafficked persons view themselves and their experiences, particularly given that they commonly migrated to support their family, which is far more about agency than victimisation. At the same time, some victims embraced the victim identity (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 135-146; Surtees 2008a: 24-29, 2008c: 91-95). The distinction between these two features can lead to divergent pictures of an individual's background and experience and are not easily captured in a globally standardised database, developed by service providers (and sometimes researchers). Another researcher highlighted a similar challenge of labelling in research conducted with child migrants:

... [H]ow they conceptualise what happens to them is very different from these types of labels that we can come up with particularly if those labels have to fit our funders' ideas. I've looked at a [particular sample] and...maybe with two exceptions nobody felt like a victim. Even the

term did not figure in their vocabulary and they were not small children, they were 14 to 17 year olds because they've got into this situation with the help...of their mothers, grandmothers, of their uncles. They did not think of those people as of traffickers. And see again in the database well, okay, so you are listening, listening but you say: "Yes, this is a child, this is wrong, that person was wrong, they were abused". And as outsiders we will put them in these categories that you have there but that's not how they feel. And there is no room in that kind of a database done from the point of view of the funder or the policy maker, the service provider, for the ethic perspective. And that's I think is the missing link actually in data collection that happens as part of service provision and one could have a wonderful data from that.

Another aspect of victims' perspectives is the information that they are willing to share. Some issues and subjects may not be comfortable for victims to discuss, raising questions about the ethics of pursuing certain lines of inquiry. While IOM has, at different stages, sought to include certain questions and categories which could enhance an understanding of trafficking, this was not always well received or positively experienced by trafficked persons. For example, in attempting to more accurately document child trafficking in Africa questions were added about the family situation – living situations, birth order and so on. However, such questions have, in practice, yielded low response rates from victims in other countries and regions. The questions were seen by many victims as unnecessary, intrusive or out of synch with their personal situation and, thus, irrelevant; others were concerned that their family would learn about their trafficking and so did not answer these questions. As one case manager in the FSU noted, this exposes some of the tensions and possible contradictions between the victim perspective and the programmatic or research perspective (as well as the global vs. the local perspective):

[Regarding] questions about relatives. It's hard. And when you conduct an interview, people are looking at you like "huh, why do you need this information?"⁴³

Equally, we have found in our interviews with trafficked persons, there were some issues and queries which they did not feel were relevant (or at least not central) in their personal narrative. For example, during recent fieldwork in Ukraine, many victims of labour trafficking we interviewed focused on their exploitation and did not dwell on the recruitment and transportation process. For them, this aspect was simply labour migration (which many had done previously) and so did not really feature as particularly relevant in relating their experience. Similarly, in past research, questions about family and community were perceived by some

⁴³ This is not to say that victims' perception is the only one of relevance in the research process. Consider the issue of trafficking vulnerability where victims' preconceived notions of their risk factors may not be their actual risk factors. Thus, some questions will, by necessity, not seem relevant to respondents.

respondents as curious (even confusing) since, for them, the issue at hand was the recruitment process and the time they were exploited.

Interviews with trafficked persons often lead to a discussion of issues and topics not anticipated in structured questionnaires. As such, trafficked persons views on priority issues and topics related to trafficking, were they included in the development of a database or questionnaire, would likely yield different foci and orientations, and also differences from victim to victim and setting to setting. What precisely these issues would be remains an open and important question. They will likely diverge quite substantially from experience to experience and context to context, which makes it particularly challenging to implement data collection systems like IOM's and those of other agencies and institutional being undertaken at national or regional levels. That being said, it remains key that trafficking persons be included in the identification of key issues and themes for current research and data collection. And, equally, that their (voluntary) engagement and participation is sought on an ongoing basis in an effort to keep abreast of the trafficking trends and more accurately reflect the situation of trafficked persons and their experiences.

8. Where do we go from here? Some thoughts, some recommendations

This paper outlines some of the methodological issues which arise when collecting data about assisted trafficking victims (and their trafficking experience) through service providers and in the context of anti-trafficking assistance programmes. The focus of our discussion has been the IOM database. However, many other assistance organisations and institutions – from NGOs, IOs and GOs – employ a similar approach in their own work, many sometimes even following the IOM model. NGOs commonly collect similar types of case management data and not uncommonly analyse and present the findings. National rapporteurs typically draw on and compile data about victims assisted by NGOs and government departments in their countries, as at least one source of data in their monitoring of trafficking in persons. Some organisations and institutions are working to establish data collection mechanisms. And some researchers and organisations draw on assistance organisations' (anonymous) case files and data in their research. Thus, this discussion not only has relevance for IOM but also for all these organisations which employ similar models of data collection.

At the same time, there are also lessons for the broader research field given that this methodology and approach, in many ways, dominates how trafficking research is done and, by implication, what is known about trafficking and trafficking victims. Many of these issues will resonate with independent researchers who, while perhaps not using this specific approach, may also access trafficked persons within the assistance framework, and, regardless, must consider and address issues such as data quality and comparability, boundaries between service provision and research, representativity and assumptions, biases and agendas in research questions.

While certainly not the only issues faced in this type of trafficking research, the four themes highlighted in this paper are of central importance when working with data from victims being assisted in trafficking assistance programmes. These issues must be borne in mind not only when undertaking research but also in how we read and understand the research and data which is based on this methodology and approach. This has direct implications for the design and implementation of anti-trafficking programmes and policies. To that end, the four themes are summarised below.

Data quality and comparability

The IOM database provides a helpful example of global, standardised, primary data collection about assisted trafficking victims. At the same time, the specific methodology and approach of the IOM database (and more generally of data collection about beneficiaries by service providers) involves some specific issues in terms of standardisation and, by implication, the comparability and quality of findings. These relate to various factors including the tools that are used, the questions that are asked, comparability between different contexts, language barriers in the data collection and management process, the professionals involved in data collection, data management and the impact of missing data.

While each of these, in different ways, impacts standardisation and comparability of the IOM data set at a global level, the IOM database is sufficiently standardised to be used at a local (national or programme) level to afford valuable information and insight. This also raises the important question of the extent to which the IOM database is currently a global database or might better be presented and understood as a research tool being implemented globally. Equally, this is an issue to be considered by various organisations in their efforts to collect national, regional and global trafficking data.

Regardless, the IOM database has proven to be a valuable tool for the assessment of emerging issues and less considered aspects of human trafficking, including trafficking in men, re-trafficking, trafficking and development, and changing trends and patterns. However, it is essential that IOM and other similar organisations, in using and analysing their data, be clear about the quality of the data, including what data can (and cannot) be compared with other data sets. There is also a need to continually invest in such data collection processes, to enhance and improve the quality of information contained therein.

Relationships and boundaries between service provision and research

Research and data collection through service providers have some very specific benefits which can contribute to data quality as well as address some of the ethical challenges of trafficking research. Nonetheless, there is a range of methodological, practical and ethical considerations which must be recognised and factored into the analysis process.

Blurred boundaries between the role of service providers and researchers may impact what information victims do (and do not) share, including emphasising (or underplaying) aspects of their experience and/or situation (past or present). There are also questions about rigor, objectivity and independence of service providers in their research role. That is, to what extent the data being collected and presented is sufficiently rigorous from a research perspective and whether the information collected by service providers is (or will be perceived to be)

objective and independent. Equally, there are potential biases relating to which types of victims agree to participate in research and data collection initiatives and why.

It is not only a question of case management data being appropriate for research but, equally, how a focus on research can impact how case management is done and how case workers are (or are not) able to do their primary tasks of service provision. Mixing the two roles raises considerations of time and resources for service providers in terms of their primary role in service provision. This also raises the question of how organisations, like IOM and many NGOs, can invest in data collection for research purposes.

There may also be a tension in terms of what information is collected. The type of information needed for case management may not necessarily match what is compelling from a research perspective and the questions which researchers may look into may be difficult for service providers to ask in ways which will not impact their role of supporting victims. There is the additional issue of what information being shared is for case management and what information is for research. This raises the need for clear boundaries as to the purpose of the data collection exercise, what information gets included in a research data set as compared to case files and how respondents' informed consent is continually raised and taken into account.

Representativity in trafficking research and data collection

Many trafficking victims are never identified and referred for assistance; others may be identified but are not assisted, either because they are not offered assistance or they chose not to accept it. As such, assisted victims (those who were willing and able to access assistance) may represent a particular sub-group of trafficking victims who may be systematically different from other trafficking victims. A range of factors inform who is a part of the group of "assisted victims". These include not only individual characteristics but also social or cultural norms, policy or legislative frameworks, how programmes are designed and funded, political commitment to anti-trafficking and so on.

Representativity applies not only to assisted victims generally but also in terms of what victims are assisted by which organisations. Victims assisted by one organisation may not be representative of assisted victims generally. Equally, they may not be representative of victims assisted by another organisation in the same country or of victims assisted by the same organisation in different countries. It is, therefore, important to consider the possible selection effects in terms of which victims are assisted by which organisations, including the role of trafficked persons and service providers (as well as donors and policymakers) in this sifting process.

All of this highlights the need to regularly consider and discuss who is included in any data set of trafficked persons and, as importantly, who this data set has missed. This is a critical issue in terms of trafficking research but it is also important in terms of identifying which victims are going unidentified and unassisted and why, as this has urgency in the protection and assistance of trafficked persons. It is, therefore, equally important to seek alternative sources of information and data which can serve to round out the current picture of trafficking and to move beyond the research on only assisted trafficking victims.

Assumptions, biases and agendas in research questions

Trafficking research has, to a large extent, been informed by various assumptions, biases and agendas. Biases and assumptions have been linked to the overemphasis on sex trafficking (over other forms like labour) and of female victims (over males and other profiles of victims such as the elderly). It has also been linked to (sometimes untested) assumptions about vulnerability and push factors and victims' decision making processes. Equally, the field of trafficking has been underpinned by various agendas and ideologies – for example, positions on prostitution, migration, crime, border control, labour and occupational rights, public health issues, human rights and feminism – which have also informed how research is conducted, and what questions and issues are looked at.

For these reasons, it is important for researchers and persons involved in data collection to regularly consider what questions are asked and why and to make adjustments to questions as needed. This requires identifying individual and institutional biases and assumptions in the questions and categories we look at. As pressing is to consider to what extent the research and analysis being undertaken has ideological underpinnings. While this is obviously the responsibility of any service provider or researcher in presenting their research and data, it is also important for those reading trafficking research toward programme and policy development.

It is also important to learn from trafficked persons about the key issues they identify as risk and resiliency factors in their migration, decision making and their lives generally. Equally, their (voluntary) engagement and participation should be sought on an ongoing basis in an effort to keep abreast of the trafficking trends and more accurately reflect the situation of trafficked persons and their experiences.

Going forward?

This paper has highlighted the importance of increasingly exploring and presenting both the strengths and limitations of data and research on trafficking. This is essential in order that policy makers and practitioners can, based on a solid empirical basis, make informed decisions in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of their anti-trafficking responses.

It is hoped that by making explicit some of the limitations of data collections with assisted victims, and more specifically what can be learned from the example of the IOM database, that research drawn from these data can be read and understood in this context, including what this information does (and does not) tell us about trafficking (and trafficking victims). This lines up with discussions which are increasingly taking place in the anti-trafficking community about the need for greater attention to and exploration of the methodological and ethical issues in the context of the research done and findings presented.

While IOM and other actors have made important steps forward in drawing upon assisted victim data for research purposes – including for trend analysis and to identify emerging issues on human trafficking – there are opportunities to further advance the analysis by ensuring that a more rounded picture of trafficking is presented. This means being mindful of key issues like data quality and comparability, the context of data collection, the representative nature of the data, biases and assumptions in the research process. This equally involves moving beyond an analysis of data collected from only one source and one group of victims to include other data sources, employing multiple methodologies.

This is not to underemphasise the value of data collected from assisted victims (including the IOM data set). While data collected through this approach involves a number of practical and methodological issues, there are also a number of ethical, methodological and practical strengths, as discussed in the paper. This data set is a valuable source of information for understanding and addressing human trafficking. There is much that the collective body of data reveals about trafficked persons and their experiences at different stages of the trafficking process and many programmatic and policy responses which can benefit from this knowledge.

The key is that these methodological constraints continue to be laid bare and openly discussed in order that the information can be read and understood in ways that contribute to a better understanding of the trafficking issue. This means ensuring that policy makers and practitioners are aware of the strengths and limitations of all data presented so that policies and programmes can be designed accordingly. Equally critical is that this methodological reflection increasingly forms a part of how anti-trafficking organisations engage in research and how they frame and contextualise the information they share and the image of trafficking that they present. This may equally require researchers and service providers alike to employ mixed method techniques to better understand trafficking. Because information collected in the context of service provision, like IOM's approach, has its limits, there is value in pursuing and working with other methodological approaches.

It is hoped that this paper, and the IOM/NEXUS trafficking research series in general, presents an important step in this direction. The aim is that, when read together, the papers in this series will not only contribute to the body

of knowledge on trafficking but also form part of a more open and rounded dialogue about what methods do (and, in some cases, do not) work in trafficking research. Ultimately, the intention is to derive a clearer and more nuanced sense of what trafficking is (and is not) in different settings and contexts and for a wide range of trafficked persons. If there is one central conclusion to be drawn from assessing assisted victims data, it is that already rich data can be further enhanced by looking to other sources and approaches.

Better understanding the limitations of trafficking research and data helps in a better understanding of the issue which, in turn, supports informed decision-making, policies and programming. This, in turn, is critical in ensuring that anti-trafficking interventions meet the needs of trafficked persons. It is their well-being and recovery, after all, that trafficking research, regardless of methods or approach, is intended to support.

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