



The Use of Vulnerability Research to Inform Human Trafficking Interventions

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Purpose of This Report

According to United States Agency for International Development (USAID) human trafficking is “a crime that uses force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploiting an individual for profit through forced labor or sexual exploitation” (USAID, 2021). Despite the recognition of human trafficking as a devastating social injustice and an international crime as well as the vast numbers of counter trafficking interventions being implemented all over the world, the practice continues across and within borders globally.

Although there are regular, real success stories in the fight against human trafficking at the micro level, as a whole, the current interventions seem to be failing to make real, lasting headway into reducing and preventing the practice of human trafficking. This becomes evident from the annually increasing number of trafficking convictions as reported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) and the US Department of State (US Department of State, 2021). Notably, these official statistics only provide a glimpse of the actual size of the crime.

International instruments - such as the Palermo Protocol, the European Union Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU, or the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 – point out that an understanding of vulnerability is critical in combatting human trafficking. Many human trafficking prevention programs are thus built on identifying those most vulnerable to trafficking to implement targeted prevention measures. This has become particularly crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, which according to the UNODC (2020) has exacerbated the situation as “victims are targeted when they are vulnerable, and the COVID-19 economic recession will result in more people at risk of trafficking”.

Given the importance that vulnerability is assigned to informing effective human trafficking interventions, Winrock International, ELEVATE and Be Slavery Free partnered for a research project that aimed to evaluate if the current body of research provides a solid enough foundation upon which to determine human trafficking vulnerability and to inform interventions to protect at risk individuals and groups in society.

The research questions underlying the project were:

- What are the ways in which vulnerability to human trafficking is being researched and measured (e.g., what are the types of measurements and factors to describe and analyze what constitutes vulnerability to human trafficking)?
- Are these approaches useful in determining vulnerability to human trafficking of individuals and groups in society and in informing interventions to protect them?

The research was conducted in two phases:

- Phase 1: A systematic literature review conducted by ELEVATE. The aim of the systematic literature review was to understand how human trafficking vulnerability is being researched, measured, determined, and analyzed.
- Phase 2: Qualitative research by means of semi-structured interviews with human trafficking practitioners and program staff with insights into programs in Thailand and Cambodia. There were two rounds of interviews conducted by Be Slavery Free and supported by ELEVATE. The aim of the interviews was to test validity of literature review findings and gain additional insights from practitioners involved in human trafficking interventions.

Further information on each project phase and interview round are provided in Table 1.

This report presents results of the second round of interviews.

Table 1: Overview of project approach

	Systematic literature review	Qualitative research
Objective	<p>A systematic literature review was conducted to review current approaches to measuring vulnerability to human trafficking. The research questions were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the ways in which vulnerability to human trafficking is being researched and measured (e.g., what are the types of measurements and factors to describe and analyze what constitutes vulnerability to human trafficking)? • Are these approaches useful in determining vulnerability to human trafficking of individuals and groups in society and in informing interventions to protect them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand how vulnerability is understood by practitioners on the ground and if and how program design and interventions are informed by research on human trafficking vulnerability • To test validity of literature review findings with human trafficking practitioners leading anti-human trafficking programs on the ground
Methodology	<p>The literature review involved five key steps: strategy development, literature search, backward chaining, literature screening, and developing inclusions and exclusion criteria.</p> <p>The analysis of identified relevant studies focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mapping vulnerability factors and the underlying vulnerability definition proposed in each study, and • drawing out insights for a more nuanced understanding of human trafficking vulnerability and how to operationalize the concept to inform intervention and protection programs. <p>The analysis helped identify recommendations for the use of existing research in informing interventions to protect vulnerable individuals and groups.</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a set of pre-defined interview questions that were adapted during individual interviews.</p> <p>The first interview round involved 16 practitioners in the field of human trafficking in the South East Asia region. The objective was to develop insightful interview questions for round 2.</p> <p>The second interview round involved 12 human trafficking practitioners involved in NGO-led human trafficking related programs in Cambodia and Thailand.</p> <p>Interview transcripts were collated, and through a thematic content analysis we drew out common themes relevant to the two overarching research questions.</p>
Timeframe	June 2021 – November 2021	August 2021 – December 2021
Conducted by	ELEVATE Ltd.	Be Slavery Free and ELEVATE Ltd.

1.2 Findings from Literature Review

Prior to the interviews, a systematic literature review, entitled [Measurements of Vulnerability to Human Trafficking](#) was conducted to build a nuanced understanding of human trafficking vulnerability and to review current approaches to measuring such vulnerability as it might be useful in informing interventions to protect individuals and groups.

The literature review was based on an understanding of human trafficking vulnerability that built on definitions by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019):

- **Human trafficking vulnerability is understood to mean that some individuals are more susceptible to human trafficking as a result of exposure to some form of risk.**
- Drawing on IOM's Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability model (IOM, 2019), we recognized that vulnerable individuals are all situated in a broader social environment for which different levels of vulnerability factors can be distinguished, meaning those that manifest at an individual level; household/family, community; or structural level. In this context, factors at structural level refer to political, economic, social and environmental conditions and institutions at national, regional and international levels that influence the overall environment in which individuals, families and communities are situated (IOM, 2019).

The analysis of relevant studies identified in the literature review, helped identify critical considerations for a complete and nuanced understanding of human trafficking vulnerability. These include:

- **Vulnerability is a result of both risk and resilience**, i.e., factors that improve capabilities to avoid, cope with or recover from harm need to be equally considered. Risk does not equal vulnerability and risk factors alone do not equal vulnerability predictors.
- **The socio-cultural context influences how vulnerability factors play out.** Vulnerability factors cannot be taken out of the specific geographical, socio-economic, or community context.
- **Choice and autonomy in the decision-making process is critical but hard to capture.** It is clear that a person's beliefs and aspirations can influence their level of risk appetite. These include their cultural and religious beliefs.
- **Vulnerability factors come together in complex constellations.** Given the complexity of personal experiences, attitudes and decision-making processes, and how individuals are integrated into their families, communities, societies, and broader socio-economic context, there can be no single cause of vulnerability and no universally valid list of factors.

Moreover, the literature review helped draw out recommendations for the use of existing research in informing interventions to protect vulnerable individuals and groups. These recommendations are:

- **The complex interplay of vulnerability factors must be accounted for when using research to design interventions.** Using the existing research and measures to inform interventions will only be useful in the specific context of the research. Any attempt to categorize individuals into groups that meet similar vulnerabilities disregards the lived experiences, personal beliefs and aspirations that influence the individual decision-making process may fail to identify potential victims or misallocate resources into ill-informed interventions. Limitations of vulnerability measurements need to be accepted and accounted for when informing interventions.

- **Research must merge risk and resilience factors to better inform interventions.** There is a need to not only mitigate vulnerabilities but also strengthen resilience. More research into resilience is needed so as to design interventions and tools that are able to overcome vulnerability and reduce the likelihood of trafficking.
- **Research must not ignore the topic of autonomy and traffickers.** To better inform interventions, more research must acknowledge the influence that one's individual autonomy, as well as the role of traffickers in the community and their tactics will have on how vulnerable an individual becomes.
- **Promote mixed method approaches with validated results.** To overcome shortcomings of the different measurement approaches, there is a need for a combination of methodological approaches. There is also a need to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and the strength of the underlying program theory by testing theories on the ground and evaluating their truthfulness in real life communities. In addition, it would be relevant to explore if cultural, community level knowledge is more effective at identifying vulnerable individuals and how to protect them.
- **Develop guiding principles for vulnerability measurements.** Judgment on what makes someone vulnerable can be clouded due to ingrained biases and assumptions of researchers and those implementing interventions. Developing standardized guiding principles for vulnerability measurements that consolidate findings from relevant quality research will help ensure that global learnings are captured and applied and that future vulnerability measurements are informed by academically sound methods and best practices.
- **Create a collaborative database of relevant research on vulnerability, accessible to practitioners.** There is a need for a more cohesive, collaborative ecosystem, both for research and for interventions, where different players work on different levels simultaneously to tackle the complex challenge of vulnerability to trafficking more effectively. Our recommendation is to identify and collate quality research on vulnerability and create an ecosystem for researchers and practitioners at different levels to share and collaborate.

The alignment of the interview findings with the key literature review findings and recommendations as listed above, is discussed in the conclusion section of this report.



2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Interview Design

The objective of the stakeholder interviews was to gain an understanding of how vulnerability is understood by practitioners on the ground and if and how program design and interventions are informed by research on human trafficking vulnerability. A second objective was to test validity of literature review findings.

As part of the second interview round, 12 human trafficking practitioners shared insights during semi-structured interviews conducted in October - November 2021. The list of key interview questions is provided in Table 2 below.

Interviewees included practitioners working with organizations that are involved in human trafficking related program work in Cambodia and Thailand, and in few cases also across Asia. The majority of interviewees are involved in NGO-led program work, a few are coordinating or informing the work of these NGOs through their role at a local coalition or consultancy. A detailed break-down is provided below:

- One international NGO
- One UN agency
- One international social enterprise

- One international humanitarian organization
- One philanthropic organization with Asian-based programs
- Two faith-based charity organizations
- Two local non-profit organizations with programs in Cambodia
- One Cambodian-based coalition
- Two consultants working with a range of organization types

There were slightly more male than female interviewees (i.e., five female and seven male).

Of the above, four interviewees are involved in programs targeted at preventing human trafficking, two are focusing on supporting trafficking victims and/or returning migrant workers, and four are working with both groups.

Most interviewees work directly with vulnerable individuals, migrant workers and their communities. This often involves working with community leaders (e.g., village chiefs) and provincial authorities. Most work closely with the Cambodian government at the national level. One interviewee's organization has also engaged in their programs recruitment agencies in Cambodia and companies employing migrant labor in Thailand.

Table 2: Overview of interview questions for round 2

Topic	Interview questions
Understanding of vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your organization's understanding of human trafficking vulnerability? • What is your perspective on human trafficking resilience? • What vulnerability factors (and at which level) are addressed in the organization's programs? Which other factors are critical to address human trafficking vulnerability?
Aspects informing program design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does vulnerability analysis inform program design? • Does research inform program design? • What else informs program design (e.g., which other stakeholders)?
Use of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What research do you use to inform your program/intervention design? • What vulnerability related research have you conducted and is this cross referenced with academic/other research? • Are there specific research documents which have influenced your programs? • How is relevant research being disseminated/shared?
What helps reduce vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can human trafficking programs be more effective / successful? • What would help you build a better future for those vulnerable to trafficking/slavery?

2.2 Limitations

Insights shared by interviewees represent their personal views and opinions and not necessarily that of the affiliated organization. Also, not all interviewees had a full picture of the organization's approach to determining and addressing human trafficking vulnerability. The insights shared in this report can thus not be regarded as representative of how organizations determine and address human trafficking vulnerability.



3 NARRATIVE SYNTHESIS OF KEY INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Following the interviews, interview transcripts were reviewed to determine key themes and findings from the stakeholder engagement. These are presented in the following sections.

3.1 How is Human Trafficking Vulnerability Understood by Practitioners?

Most interviewees agreed that the concept of vulnerability is complex and encompasses factors across many levels (i.e., individual, family, community, structural). Few interviewees mentioned that trafficking can appear to be almost “random” due to the multitude of factors leading to a person being trafficked.

Some factors, while well understood, can prove very complex to be addressed in human trafficking interventions. As an example, interviewees mentioned an individual’s aspirations and decision-making process. Interviewees noted that an individual’s decision to enter informal migration can be based on a multitude of factors including a limited understanding of the risks involved (which can also be informed by brokers coercing potential victims with stories of the money that can be made by migration), the lack of alternative options due to the cost of regular migration and a personal financial crisis.

One interviewee spoke of ‘modifiable risk factors’, those that can be addressed more easily, which may include an individual’s decision to continue education and skills training. The interviewee stressed that most NGOs are well positioned to target these factors, however structural factors require a systemic approach.

The organizations interviewed had varying approaches and often target specific issues. As an example, one interviewee stated that the focus of the organization is on strengthening the justice system and that the understanding of vulnerability is in terms of access to justice, in particular for people in poverty.

Table 3 below provides an overview of the key vulnerability factors that interviewees identified as relevant in the context of trafficking in Cambodia and Thailand. The types of vulnerability factors pointed out by interviewees highlight the need for various actors to address the root causes of human trafficking as they range from individual factors (e.g., access to resources) and community factors (e.g., social norms) to structural factors (e.g., economic situation, rule of law).

Table 3: Key vulnerability factors referred to by interviewees

Factor	Details
Local economic situation and income opportunities	<p>Most interviewees mentioned financial stress from debt and/or lack of income opportunities as a key vulnerability factor. One interviewee stated that most risk factors boil down to livelihoods and the local economic situation. Others thought the situation is more complex but recognized that often the local economic situation leaves few choices but to migrate. An example mentioned included the reliance on traditional agriculture-based livelihoods which are increasingly affected by climate change, causing financial crisis situations.</p> <p>Several interviewees pointed out the problem with debt in Cambodia. Interviewees shared that many people have debt from multiple banks, micro-finance institutions and loan sharks. Accumulating debt and other crisis situations can lead to individuals selling their assets which further reduces their income opportunities (e.g., in the case of land being sold) or to individuals making rash and uninformed decisions to seek work elsewhere resulting in irregular, risky migration.</p> <p>A majority of interviewees agreed that addressing limited income opportunities and indebtedness is critical to addressing trafficking. However, interviewees also acknowledged the complexity of such efforts as they would also require working at a policy level. One interviewee noted that programs targeting financial education and debt restructuring have thus not been successful.</p>
Organized crime and the justice system	<p>Few interviewees referred to the difficulty of tackling organized crime and mentioned examples of mafia-like structures and online casinos. They also mentioned the problem of brokers coercing potential victims with stories of the money that can be made by migration.</p>
Justice system	<p>The importance of the justice system was mentioned and the lack of mechanisms for labor agencies to refer human trafficking cases to law enforcement</p>
Education	<p>Few interviewees noted that a lack of education in combination with other economic factors can lead to increased human trafficking vulnerability.</p> <p>One interviewee stated that a lack of education leads to a lack of marketable skills. This makes individuals more likely to work in exploitative circumstances as there are limited income opportunities.</p> <p>The interviewee noted that “there is no work” in Cambodia, not even work requiring no or limited skills such as in factories or farms.</p>

Social norms and family structure	<p>Several interviewees touched on the fact that social norms are at the core of vulnerability and that there can be a Western bias in interventions when these norms are not understood or acknowledged.</p> <p>One interviewee also stated that social norms which ought to protect members of society can be manipulated in ways that lead to vulnerability and exploitation. Building resilience requires good understanding of these norms and manipulations.</p>
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More than half of the interviewees said they recognized the importance of building resilience by addressing factors that can help reduce human trafficking vulnerability. Factors mentioned by interviewees in this context are summarized in Table 4 below.

Most interviewees agreed that reducing human trafficking vulnerability requires multi-faceted interventions that include education and skills training combined with creating better livelihood and income opportunities within the country.

Interviewees had different opinions about which approach is most effective in combatting human trafficking. While one interviewee stressed that it is important to understand what makes someone vulnerable in order to be able to design human trafficking interventions, another interviewee noted that a shift of focus from vulnerability to resilience would help seeing those at risk not as victims but as empowered individuals that can drive their own change.

Table 4: Factors referred to in interviews that can help reduce vulnerability to human trafficking

Factor	Details
Safe migration	<p>Having access to regular, affordable, safe migration channels was regarded as key to safe migration and reduced vulnerability. Interviewees follow a variety of approaches to achieve this. Some interviewees referred to pre-migration education and awareness as being critical in informing better migration choices, planning, and risk-informed decision making. Yet, one interviewee stated that there is no evidence that interventions targeted at raising awareness of potential migrant workers have any impact on migration decisions and resulting trafficking risks.</p> <p>The role of government and employers were stressed. Interviewees mentioned that risks can be reduced if “the justice system is working” and vulnerabilities can be reduced if employers carried the burden of migration and recruitment costs.</p>
Support network	The importance of providing potential migrants with a support network and local safety net in destination and origin country was mentioned.
Livelihood and income opportunities	Several interviewees highlighted livelihood and income opportunities. One interviewee stressed that long term resilience starts with building income opportunities and informed that many survivors indicated that they would not have migrated if their economic situation had been better”. One interviewee highlighted the role of government in improving income opportunities by, for example, subsidizing farmers.

3.2 Does Vulnerability Research Inform Program Design?

As a result of the literature review, we suggest that given the complexity of the concept of vulnerability, current research on how to measure and analyze vulnerability, would provide crucial insights for programs on how to identify at risk individuals and effective interventions. With this in mind, we asked interviewees a series of questions to understand what influences program design and interventions and if research plays any role in this.

A majority of the interviewees mentioned that their programs are informed by

- needs assessments in target communities which often take the form of surveys with potential and/or returning migrant workers or human trafficking survivors,
- stakeholder engagements with local NGOS, government, and target community whereby the Cambodian government was one of the most mentioned by key stakeholders, and
- the organization's country studies and national strategies,

Only three interviewees stated that academic research or research by international development and/or UN organizations is used to inform program design. Aside from these, other types of research used to inform program design include the following:

- insights gained from case work (e.g., surveys with victims/survivors/ returning migrants),
- (human trafficking) country studies by own or other organizations,
- monitoring and evaluation studies from previous programs,
- baseline studies by local authorities, and
- the organization's own research (examples mentioned included research on the impact of COVID-19 on Cambodian migrant workers and a longitudinal study on the re-integration of sex trafficking survivors).

Four interviewees referred to specific methodologies applied by their organizations to identify vulnerable individuals. One interviewee stated that the organization uses a type of spider web analysis in defining vulnerability risk factors with the main ones addressed by the organization being lack of job opportunity, lack of access to information, and lack of employable or income generating skills (skills were not further defined). Another interviewee referred to the organization having identified modifiable human trafficking risk factors. The third interviewee referred to baseline studies conducted with local authorities to identify vulnerable households. The fourth interviewee's organization has used IOM's determinants of migrant vulnerability to inform own research on vulnerability and protective factors among a select group of irregular migrant workers.

We find that the type of vulnerability research covered by our literature review (i.e., academic research and in-depth case study analysis by UN organizations) plays a small role in program design and that frameworks and models to determine human trafficking vulnerability put forward in these research papers are only used by very few organizations. Studies by local authorities and organizations are the main type of research used to inform program design. This brings up the question, if and how the referenced local studies help determine human trafficking vulnerability and if and how they inform the organization's understanding of vulnerability factors discussed in the previous section. The scope of our interviews did not allow us to further examine this point. Further interviews and research are needed to analyse how local studies help build a nuanced vulnerability understanding and inform program design.

3.3 Shortcomings in Program Design and The Use of Vulnerability Research

Interviewees pointed out shortcomings of academic research and that of international development and UN organizations. They stated that the limited relevance and accessibility of this type of research impedes its use for informing vulnerability programs. This might explain why it plays a less important role in program design compared to other types of research (e.g., baseline studies, case work analysis). The shortcomings of and challenges associated with research as mentioned by the interviewees include:

- **Lack of access to research:** Interviewees stated that academic research is not being used to inform programs due to lack of access (i.e., some research is not available beyond academic circles, and it is expensive to access even when there is internet access) and due to lack of time and resources to access and review research on the NGO side.
- **Lack of research on resilience:** Interviewees stressed the lack of research on how to effectively reduce vulnerabilities.
- **Shortcomings of existing research:** Interviewees noted that research is often outdated and does not reflect current migration trends within a specific geographic context. An example mentioned is the lack of research on the impact of COVID-19 on trafficking. One interviewee also noted the problem of less accurate methodologies being used for studies on the prevalence of human trafficking. Interviewees also noted that some academic research and research by international development and UN organizations seek to ‘prove’ a model or framework developed outside the local setting and might thus be of lesser relevance to local circumstances.
- **Obstacles impeding the use of research by local organizations:** Interviewees stressed the value of research by local organizations. They mentioned obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure that such research is more widely and effectively used to inform program design. These barriers include that research by local organizations tends to be less widely distributed than research by international organizations and that it may not be considered by governments. It was noted that governments might disregard such research if they consider it not to be representative of the country due to lack of a representative sample size.

Interviewees also provided useful insights on how a lack of a good research and evidence foundation for programs can lead to poorly designed interventions that will fail to effectively reduce human trafficking vulnerabilities:

- **Lack of research and evidence foundation:** Interviewees pointed out that some programs lack a strong research and evidence foundation and are instead informed by individual views of, for example, program staff with “a good idea” that might emphasize unsubstantiated vulnerability assumptions.
- **Funder bias:** Interviewees discussed the tendency for organizations to design interventions around topics better aligned to the mission and vision of the funding organization, regardless of there being robust research to back these up.
- **Lack of impact analysis:** Interviewees mentioned that some programs lack a rigorous analysis of the impact of interventions i.e., evidence of how interventions have effectively reduced vulnerabilities. Interviewees also noted that impact analysis can be biased when conducted by staff implementing programs.

These comments corroborate our literature review finding on the importance of a strong evidence and research foundation to inform program design. When programs lack a systematic use of sound vulnerability research and

measurement frameworks, they are more prone to bias from funding priorities and individual views of program staff, which undermines their analytical clarity and evidence-base.

In the conclusion section, we will shed light on how to improve the use of research in vulnerability interventions as suggested by interviewees.





4 CONCLUSIONS: ALIGNMENT OF INTERVIEW INSIGHTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS

With the interviews we set out to understand how vulnerability is understood by practitioners on the ground and if and how program design and interventions are informed by research on human trafficking vulnerability. As a second objective we also sought to test validity of our literature review findings. In the following we discuss if and how interview insights and literature review findings align and revisit some of the key recommendations put forward as a result of the literature review.

Overall, the interviews corroborate most of the literature review findings and provide valuable additional insights into critical research gaps. More importantly, however, they have pointed to the need for effective mechanisms ensuring that sound human trafficking research informs interventions with demonstrable impacts. This reiterates a key recommendation that we drew out from the literature review and which we like to repropose and further refine at this point:

There is a critical need for creating a collaborative ecosystem, both for research and for interventions, where different players work on different levels simultaneously to tackle the complex challenge of vulnerability to trafficking. This ecosystem should help analyze what has worked and has not worked and establish best practices or guiding principles for vulnerability measurements, program design and interventions.

The following two sections provide further information to substantiate this recommendation.

4.1 Understanding of Human Trafficking Vulnerability

We find that interviewees have a good understanding of human trafficking vulnerability and that their views are aligned with the four critical considerations for a nuanced vulnerability understanding that were identified through our literature review which are:

- Risk does not equal vulnerability and risk factors alone do not equal vulnerability predictors. Vulnerability is a result of both risk and resilience.
- The socio-cultural context influences how vulnerability factors play out. Vulnerability factors cannot be taken out of the specific geographical, socio-economic, or community context.
- Choice and autonomy in the decision-making process is critical but hard to capture. A person's beliefs and aspirations can influence their level of risk appetite. These include their cultural and religious beliefs.
- Vulnerability factors come together in complex constellations. Given the complexity of personal experiences, attitudes and decision-making processes, and how individuals are integrated into their families, communities, societies, and broader socio-economic context, there can be no single cause of vulnerability and no universally valid list of factors.

Most interviewed practitioners understand human trafficking vulnerability to be the result of multiple factors across different levels which cannot be easily addressed by a single stakeholder but require concerted action by all key stakeholders including the government. As an example, within the context of Cambodia, interviewees pointed to the need to build interventions that take into account the local economic situation as a key factor driving human trafficking vulnerability as people have limited livelihood and employment opportunities and often take-up debt. The lack of employment opportunities combined with the expenses associated with the formal migration system and a limited understanding of migration risks can lead to informal migration choices. We also found that insights and evidence of effective interventions (e.g., gained through longitudinal impact studies) are regarded as particularly useful which supports the opinion of many interviewees that human trafficking resilience is a critical aspect for interventions.

A key recommendation of the literature review included the need to develop guiding principles for vulnerability measurements. We found that conclusions on what makes someone vulnerable can be influenced by ingrained biases and assumptions of researchers and those implementing interventions. Interviewees noted that some programs lack a strong research and evidence foundation and are influenced by donor funding priorities or individual views of program staff.

We found that four interviewees referred to vulnerability measurement frameworks or models applied within their programs to determine human trafficking vulnerability. We conclude that theoretical frameworks for measuring vulnerability are of lesser importance in program design and that studies by local organizations are the main type of research used to inform program design. Unfortunately, we were not able to determine if and how these studies help inform understandings of vulnerability factors and who is most vulnerable (and thus a key target group of interventions). This deserves a more in-depth analysis than the current interview findings would allow for and represents a critical focus for further research.

With this in mind, we reemphasize that developing standardized guiding principles for vulnerability measurements that consolidate findings from relevant quality research will help ensure that global learnings are captured and applied and that future vulnerability measurements are informed by academically sound methods and best practices. This would ultimately support the analytical clarity and evidence-base of human trafficking interventions.

4.2 Making Research More Valuable for Vulnerability Programs

Interviewees provided valuable suggestions on what type of research would be most useful for human trafficking interventions and how to enable better dissemination and integration of research findings in the design of human trafficking programs. As outlined in Table 5 below, recommendations and insights provided by interviewees align with the recommendation drawn out from the literature review on several aspects.



Table 5: Alignment of recommendations drawn from literature review and interviews

Recommendations and insights drawn from interviews	Alignment with literature review findings
<p>Interviewees highlighted the type of research needed to inform effective human trafficking interventions. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longitudinal research: Interviewees noted that longitudinal studies can help better analyze the complexity of vulnerability and the impact of interventions and how they might play out over time. One interviewee highlighted the need for longitudinal research that engages with program beneficiaries over several years to better measure program impact. There are only very few longitudinal research studies. The importance of long-term research studies to capture impact was also emphasized by another interviewee. This longitudinal research also tends to better capture the context of the vulnerabilities, which should be informing interventions. • Research based on engagement of local communities: Several interviewees stressed the importance of effective engagement with local communities to inform program design. One interviewee stressed the importance of going beyond tokenistic needs assessments and of involving “the voices of those who are most affected” in the project design and “cross referencing that information with secondary data or research-based data”. • Private-sector engagement: Interviewees stressed the value of stronger engagement of the private sector such as recruitment agencies and companies employing migrant workers to better capture their influence on diverse migration experiences. • Sector-specific research: Interviewees mentioned that there are trafficking vulnerabilities specific to certain industry sectors that are important to explore further e.g., seafood industry in Thailand. This should include an analysis on how demand for cheap labor influences irregular migration. Some of the interviewed organizations are already doing work in this area, such as surveys with returning migrants to understand which sectors are “more prone to exploitation”. 	<p>As a result of the literature review, we suggested that the complex interplay of vulnerability factors must be accounted for when using research to design interventions. Interviewees shared valuable additional insights on the type of research needed to help inform human trafficking interventions, such as longitudinal studies and studies that are based on sound engagement of local communities.</p>

<p>Research on resilience: Interviewees stated that research has too often focused on the problem rather than the solutions and that a stronger focus on factors that can reduce vulnerability is needed. This focus would benefit from building on longitudinal impact studies of safe migration programs. There is a need for more research on safe migration and successful counter-trafficking interventions and on how to effectively reduce vulnerability. The value of further reviewing interventions that lead to networks of support within communities or that engage trade unions and labor dispute resolutions was mentioned</p>	<p>Interviewees confirmed the literature review finding about the need for more research into resilience that can inform interventions and tools that are able to overcome vulnerability and reduce the likelihood of trafficking.</p>
<p>Sound program monitoring and evaluation: Interviewees acknowledged the need to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. They stressed the importance of measuring long-term impact over short-term program outputs and the need for more honest and transparent capturing of what has not worked.</p>	<p>As a result of the literature review, we recommended testing vulnerability theories on the ground and evaluating their validity or accuracy in real life communities. If designed accordingly, sound program evaluations as suggested by interviewees can help test the validity of vulnerability theories and help build a stronger evidence base.</p>
<p>Sharing of research: Interviewees shared ideas on how to improve the accessibility and effective use vulnerability research. They suggested a repository for human trafficking research in Cambodia as well as regular networking and learning events within a country network of key organizations and stakeholders to facilitate networking, shared learning, and collaboration on research. Two interviewees mentioned that positions are being created within their organizations for research advisors/leads to ensure better integration of research findings.</p>	<p>Interviewees confirmed the need for a collaborative database of relevant vulnerability research, accessible to practitioners as recommended as a result of the literature review. They added further insights on useful approaches to ensure research feeds into the work of local organizations, such as dedicated staff positions.</p>

5 REFERENCES

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