Reducing supply: the effect of disaster and government intervention on child trafficking

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Motivation

Child Trafficking surrounding Disasters

- 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, 2005 Pakistan Earthquake, 2008 Myanmar Cyclone, 2010 Haiti Earthquake
- "Numerous reports" following catastrophic events (Terzieff 2005)
- Multiple UNICEF-commissioned studies find no evidence of child trafficking (Echo, 2005; Nwe, 2005; Richardson, 2005)
- News reports make child trafficking part of the disaster narrative because of Western perceptions of sex, childhood, and Southeast Asia (Montgomery 2011)
- Narrative eliminates agency

Argument

Child Trafficking involves Agency

- Parents make a choice
- "trafficking" becomes "migration"
- "abduction" becomes "negotiation"
- parents becomes strategic actors

Theory

Trafficker's chooses to recruit when

$$(1-p)u(B_T-(\omega_M+K))+pu(-P) > u(\omega_T)$$

p	prob of successful enforcement
P	punishment
B_T	benefit from trafficking
K	cost of moving child
ω_T	benefit from trafficker's out-side option
ω_M	offer to parents

Theory

Parents send child when

$$(1-p)u(\omega_M) > u(B_W + \omega_W)$$

p	prob of successful enforcement
B_W	benefit from keeping child home
$-B_W$	opportunity costs from keeping child at home
ω_W	benefit from child's out-side option
ω_M	offer to parents

Theory

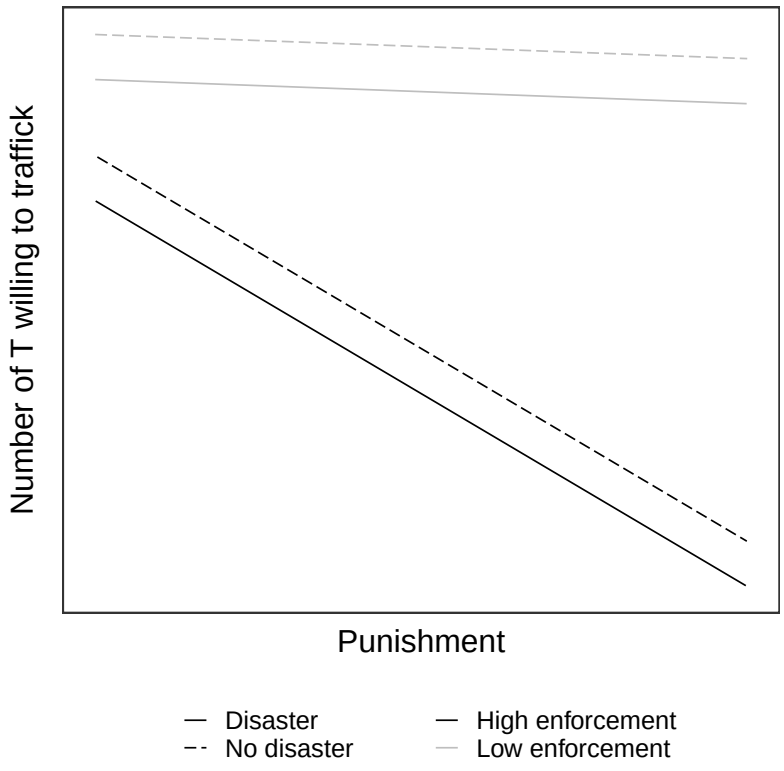
Indifference offer for trafficker is

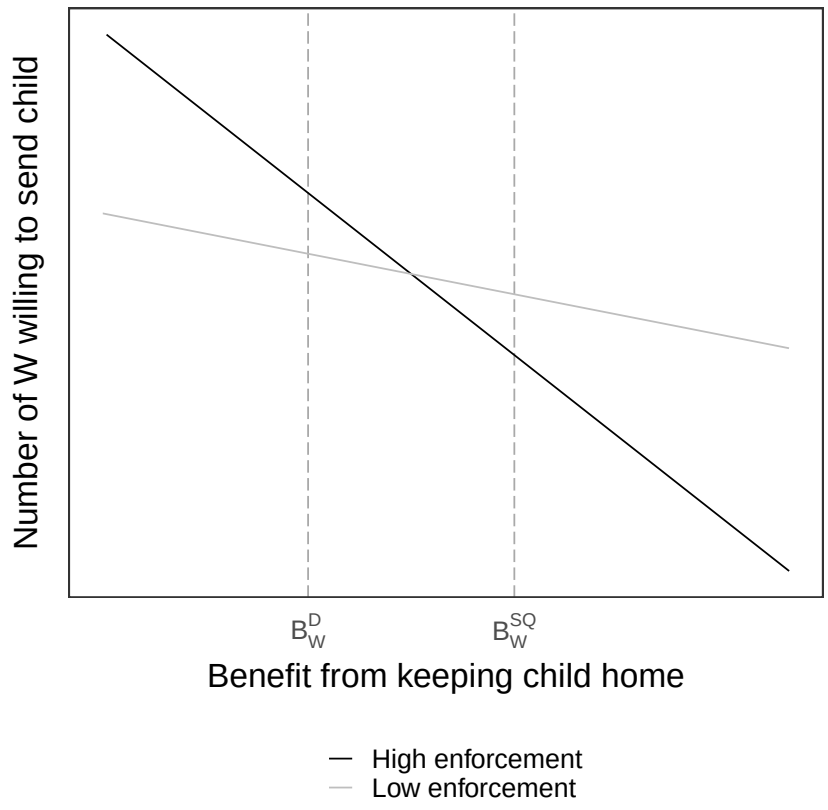
$$\omega_M^{T*} = \frac{(1-p)(B_T - K) - pP - \omega_T}{1-p}$$

and parents

$$\omega_M^{W*} = \frac{B_W + \omega_W}{1-p}$$

Theory


Number of T willing to traffick
Punishment
Disaster
No disaster
High enforcement
Low enforcement


Number of W willing to send child
B_W^D
B_W^{SQ}
Benefit from keeping child home
High enforcement
Low enforcement

Theory

Observation 1: Disaster and government intervention decrease the number of T willing to traffic but increases the number of W willing to migrate their child holding ω_M^* fixed at the pre-disaster/intervention level.

Observation 2: Disasters drop the market offer for a child but leave the number of T willing to traffic and the number of W willing to send their child unchanged.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: When disaster strikes, the willingness of parents to send their children into migration increases while the willingness of traffickers to recruit decreases.

Hypothesis 2: When disaster strikes, the recruitment offer necessary to convince parents to send their children decreases but so does the number of traffickers willing to recruit, leaving the amount of trafficking activity constant but at a lower offer.

Hypothesis 3: When disaster strikes and parents accept lower offers, traffickers are quicker to adjust than government enforcement and trafficking activity increases at first.

Hypothesis 4: Government intervention lowers the offer traffickers are willing to extend and raises the offer parents want to see to send off their children therefore decreasing trafficking activity at a higher offer.

Application: 2015 Gorkha Earthquake

Damages

- 9,000 killed; 22,000 injured
- 600,000 homes destroyed; 3 million homeless

News Reports

- girls rescued at the border
- children reported to hotlines
- adults sending children away

Application: 2015 Gorkha Earthquake

What actually changed?

- change in trafficking strategy
  selling education, escape
- change in trafficking language
  migration, earning, learning
- change in trafficking tactics
  false documentation
- no change in trafficking numbers

Conclusions

Approaching child trafficking as a market can help identify policies to address it

- acknowledge agency
- understand child migration and labor as fundamental issue

Even though the trafficking/disaster narrative is unsubstantiated, it is possible that disasters improve anti-trafficking enforcement