Computer Science Seminar

A Concern of Today: Technology-Facilitated Trafficking and Exploitation
Shima Rostami - Gateway Human Trafficking

November 26, 2018
10:00 - 10:50 am
209 Computer Science Building



After drug dealing, human trafficking is tied with the illegal arms trade as the second largest criminal industry in the world. Human trafficking is called a form of modern-day slavery in which traffickers use force, fraud and/or coercion to exploit vulnerable people including children. Many cases have surfaced from a variety of sources about the use of multiple technology platforms to facilitate domestic minor sex trafficking, including reports of the recruitment of minors for commercial sex on mobile-based social networking applications. "Technology," refers to information and communication technologies, particularly cyber and networked environments.

Technology allows users to exchange digital information over networks including online social networks, and mobile phones. In this regard, networked technologies have influenced and changed social behavior. Technology-facilitated trafficking refers to the social and technical ecosystem wherein individuals use information and communication technologies to engage in human trafficking and related behaviors to exploit vulnerable people.

A comprehensive study done from February 2014 to June 2016 conducted by Loyola University New Orleans' Modern Slavery Research Project, in conjunction with Covenant House International found that homeless youth in St. Louis are at high risk for sex trafficking — with fifteen percent reporting that they had been victims. An additional three percent report being forced into dealing drugs as youths, a form of labor trafficking. Then, the numbers are even higher when it comes to LGBTQ youth. Forty percent of homeless gay and lesbian youth in St. Louis surveyed in the study told interviewers that they had been victims of sex trafficking. Teens who had been in the foster care system were particularly at risk. Though they comprised 21 percent of those surveyed in St. Louis, they accounted for 29 percent of all sex trafficking victims.

Cyber technology has impacted various aspects of trafficking including visibility, coordination, transaction, exchange, and organization of the crime from grooming, recruitment, and control of victims, to advertising, movement, and financial transactions. An effective counter-trafficking response to human trafficking demands increased public awareness and understanding of how technology is facilitating trafficking in the 21st century.

Bio: Shima Rostami is a human rights and social justice activist who is involved in the prevention of human trafficking in the St. Louis metroplex, the state of Missouri, the U.S., as well internationally. As the Director of Programs, she has planned all the programs for Gateway Human Trafficking and been the driving force behind five conferences known as "Breaking the Chains of Human Trafficking" in addition to the Midwest Human Trafficking Conference in St. Charles County on September 28, 2018. Furthermore, she is spreading the word about human trafficking in many other ways.

Besides her academic training, she has experience working in several agencies affiliated with the Humanities and Humanitarian efforts including the American Red Cross of the Greater St. Louis Area where Gateway Human Trafficking received the International Services Award for their outstanding International Humanitarian Law (IHL) project known as Raid Cross.

Shima Rostami's doctoral studies focus on raising awareness, education, and student engagement regarding human trafficking by developing a Positive Youth Development (PYD) environment with an emphasis on Character Education (CE).

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