

00:02.19

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
Matt, welcome to the show.

00:04.12

Matt Friedman  
ah Happy to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

00:07.79

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
I appreciate it. And you're calling, when I say you're calling, we're we're talking by ah magic. You're all the way in Hong Kong and I'm in Texas.

00:15.45

Matt Friedman  
I am, and in fact, I'm in the future. I can tell you that, you know, 14 hours ahead of you, the future is looking quite good.

00:22.60

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
well I appreciate that. So is it New Year's Day or is it New Year's Eve there?

00:27.27

Matt Friedman  
It's New Year's Eve here, ah the morning of New Year's Eve, 31st.

00:28.82

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
Okay. Wow, that's crazy. Well, we're talking about human trafficking today. And when I say human trafficking, I think a lot of folks, if you ask them what that means, they would say, well, it's ah it's the trafficking of humans, but it's a lot more than that. There's more specifics. Can you kind of define it and tell us, tell me a little bit about what it is specifically.

00:52.00

Matt Friedman  
Well, I think the best way of kind of talking about human trafficking as far as a definition is just to give you some examples. So many of us heard about sex trafficking. This is where young girls are tricked and deceived in situations where they're forced to have sex with, you know, 3, 5, 10 guys a day every day. And this is something that we we hear about all over the world.

01:15.83

Matt Friedman  
That's only a subset of what we're talking about with human trafficking. Another form of human trafficking is forced labor. So

just to give an example of ah forced labor in this part of the world, a 15-year-old boy from Cambodia is told that he needs to go to Thailand to get a job. The family is poor. He needs to send money home.

01:36.39

Matt Friedman

He gets to Thailand. He's looking for work, not finding it. Human traffickers see this and go up to the boy and say, hey, brother, you're from Cambodia. I'm from Cambodia. Looks like you need some help. Let me lend you some money. Okay. Well, now that you have my money, um you have to stay with me. But guess what? I got this great job. I'm going to take you down to the ocean. I'm going to put you on the boat. ah Boat's going to go out for a couple of months. You'll catch some fish.

02:00.24

Matt Friedman

After that, the boat will come back. You'll have you know a lot of money in your pocket. You'll be a hearer to your family. And so he buys into this and he goes down, gets on the boat, doesn't realize he's been sold onto the boat. The boat goes out, but it doesn't come back after three months. It stays out for four years.

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Matt Friedman

This poor kid will end up working 15, 16 hours a day every day. If he doesn't, he gets beaten, he gets tortured. The only food he'll eat the entire time he's there is rice and fish, nothing nutritious. Imagine what that does to his body. They often give stimulants to to get this person to work. Sometimes that results in injuries if he gets injured.

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Matt Friedman

They don't bring the boat in. They throw them off the side of the boat. At the end of the four years, the boat comes in.

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A Study in Crime™ Podcast

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Matt Friedman

Guy gets nothing. Guy goes to the captain and says, well, you know, I'm going to tell the police what you did. Captain laughs and says, go ahead. We own the police. This would be an example of human trafficking.

02:56.27

Matt Friedman

um ah yeah Different from what people think about when it comes to forced prostitution. Another, I lived and worked in Bangladesh. We had two-year-old boys that were trafficked from Bangladesh to the Middle East. Now, for those of you who are parents, you know that a two-year-old doesn't have the manual dexterity and the concentration to do repetitive work. So what do you do with a two-year-old? You put them in the back of a camel.

03:20.96

Matt Friedman

Why? Because if you put an infant on the back of a camel, what does the infant do? They kick and scream, and what does the camel do? It runs. So they race camels, they bet on the races, and they use infants because they are small and won't slow the camel down. Assuming that the child makes it to age five, and a lot of them don't because they fall off and get trampled, they're beginning to gain weight, slow down the camel, and so they take these kids and throw them out onto the street.

03:47.51

Matt Friedman

So a time when most five-year-olds are beginning kindergarten, you have a five-year-old in a foreign country, doesn't speak the language by himself, ah and a forced to fend for himself. All of these basically have the characteristic of a person loses control of their life. Somebody else takes it over. And as a result of that, they basically can't make decisions for themselves. And that's why they call human trafficking a form of modern slavery. And that's the way we're looking at it here.

04:16.30

A Study in Crime™ Podcast

What about ah forced marriages? i I believe you mentioned that being part of it as well.

04:22.55

Matt Friedman

There's about 23 million people who are in forced marriages. ah When we think about marriages from the context of, let's say, North America, people fall in love and they set up their life together and they ah have children and so forth. In the case of forced marriages, a marriage takes place in order to have a person working within a household to support a bunch of other people.

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Matt Friedman

So it's always almost like marrying a person into a slave-like circumstance. For example, in parts of China, Vietnamese women will be brought into a Chinese family to take care of an elderly person and to do all the cooking and the cleaning. There's no real marriage

associated with it. It's kind of a scam to force a person to work within that context.

05:12.49

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Before we get on the air, you also mentioned something that I had never heard of, and that is scam centers. How does that relate to human trafficking?

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Matt Friedman

Well, and what we have is a new form of human trafficking. We're young, educated people from initially Asia, but now from other parts of the world, have been tricked and deceived into going to places.

05:34.47

Matt Friedman

where when they get there, they're forced to basically scam others. So we all know about scamming and how elderly people are scammed out of their money and so forth, but this is a little bit different. And so this process began during COVID. During COVID in Cambodia, in Laos, in Myanmar, you had infrastructure for illegal gambling.

05:57.45

Matt Friedman

But when people couldn't come to these sites, you had all this infrastructure that was being used. So the criminals who were running these franchises came to realize that if you ask people for money, every fourth or fifth person who you ask would basically give it to you because you could trick them through lies and deception. So they said, okay, well, there's a hundred of us. That's not enough. Why don't we try to hire some people to work with us to do scamming across the world?

06:24.63

Matt Friedman

But when they ask Asian people to scam other Asians, they said, no, we don't want to do this. And so they said, OK, well, let's get them to the sites. And then basically we will we will convince them. So they started using false ads and advertisements to lure educated people to Cambodia. And once they got there, they put them in facilities where they would have nine foot walls. It had barbed wire. They had closed circuit television security. And then they were forced for 14, 15 hours a day to be a part of the scamming process. And so at the end of the day, if they didn't meet a particular um target, they would be beaten, tortured, tasered, terrible things would happen to them. So imagine ah a young graduate from Hong Kong University wants to take a couple of months off before he gets a job in Hong Kong. All of a sudden he finds himself in Cambodia.

07:16.46

Matt Friedman

and then his life kind and completely changes. Every single day he's beaten, every single day he's tortured because he's not meeting meeting his targets. According to the United Nations report that came out a year ago, there's about 250,000 young people in this situation, but that was a year and a half ago. What we're seeing now is that this is proliferating in South Asia, Africa,

07:39.22

Matt Friedman

Latin America, other parts of the world. So you have two crimes that have come together. One is human trafficking into the scam center and the other is the scam itself. And the way the scam works, it's called a pig butchering scam or a romance scam. And so basically a young person will present herself to a 55 year old guy who's divorced, who's lonely and basically say, hi, Michael, how are you? He'll get a text message. He'll come back and say, well, I'm not Michael. And she says, oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so and so. I'm a 27-year-old. I'm a Thai woman. And they will develop a kind of text messaging relationship that lasts for about a month. There's no mention of anything related to scams for that first month. They're just getting to know each other, falling in love. At least that's what he thinks is happening. And then she will say,

08:27.74

Matt Friedman

Why don't you invest in crypto? I just made 5,000 US dollars." So he looks into it and she says, okay, put 5,000 US in. He puts it in. The next day it's 10,000. She says, take the money out.

08:39.53

Matt Friedman

And then a couple of weeks later, she says, do it again. Put the 10 in, take the 20 out. So they have this relationship. She's demonstrated that the money goes in. And then she says, how would you like to make \$5 million? dollars You put \$1 million dollars in, it's going to go to five. You saw what happened with these other crypto situations. You know who I am, et cetera, et cetera. And so he puts the money in and then it's terminated. And they call it a pig butchering scam because you're fattening the pig before the slaughter.

09:09.55

Matt Friedman

And so this is a particular scam that is hitting all over the world. And the United States, I think about \$65 billion dollars has been lost, people's entire life savings. So this is another form of human trafficking that is new that very few people know about.

09:25.27

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it's hard to believe people fall for that kind of stuff but uh...  
these people are good people do fall for it

09:31.39

Matt Friedman

And they fall for it because of the emotional attachment that's developed.

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sure

09:34.91

Matt Friedman

So I know people, bankers and accountants who basically know better. They know that they should be ah weary of this, but because they entered into this relationship, it wasn't their head that was speaking, it was their heart.

09:48.26

Matt Friedman

And that's where they got into trouble.

09:51.29

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Before ah we started talking, I had mentioned in your biography that you had worked for the USAID as well as with the United Nations. I guess this all begs the question, how did you how did you get involved in human trafficking?

10:06.73

Matt Friedman

Well, as you mentioned, I was.

10:08.39

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All right, Matt, let me yeah rephrase that. You're not doing human trafficking. How did you get involved in being a a human trafficking activist? That's a better question.

10:18.60

Matt Friedman

Yeah, OK. So about 35 years ago, I was living and working in Nepal, working for USAID. I was a public health officer. And my job was to translate resources into healthier people. At that time, I had the HIV AIDS portfolio. And we were finding girls that were 12, 13 years old who were HIV positive. Now, Nepal is a very conservative culture. We should not have found that disease among that age group.

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Matt Friedman

So we went to the shelters where these girls were to interview them, and we heard pretty much the same story over and over again. And it went something like this. A human trafficker, guy around 20 years old, would go into a remote village and flash a bunch of money around. He wanted everyone to think he was rich. He'd then go around saying, I'm looking for a wife. He'd say, I don't want an urban wife. I want a village wife. He'd find a girl 12 years old, befriend her, and then go to the family and say, I'd like to marry your daughter.

11:14.55

Matt Friedman

They're thinking, wow, he's rich. He's handsome. He's going to take care of our daughter. He's going to take care of us. Everybody's happy. A couple of days later, they actually have a wedding ceremony. The entire community is there. After that, he goes to the family and says, I'm going to take your daughter to the capital, Kathmandu.

11:30.05

Matt Friedman

But I'll be back in three months. But that's not what's going to happen. Instead, he takes her to Mumbai, India, to the red light district where the brothels are. Now, this girl's never been more than 20 kilometers away from her house. When she's in India, she thinks she's still in Nepal.

11:45.16

Matt Friedman

When he gets there, he puts her in a room and he says, honey, stay here. I'll be back in a few minutes. As she was coming into this neighborhood, she saw these women dressed funny, these men milling around. She said, no, no, no, no, no. You know, don't leave me. He says, it's okay. I'll be right back. He then goes to the madam to get the \$500 for having sold her to the brothel. He has the gold from the wedding and he hands the wedding pictures over to her. He then leaves to go back to Nepal to do this again and again, maybe 40, 50 times in the year.

12:14.12

Matt Friedman

The madam then goes into the room where the girl is and says, guess what? Your husband just sold you to me, and you're gonna be with 20 guys a day every day, because I say so. You can imagine her shock. No, no, no, my husband loves me. No, that's what happened. When many of these girls internalize it, they say, well, I'll kill myself before I do those shameful things. I'm a good Hindu girl. The madam then brings out the photo of the family and says, she's your mom, your dad, your brother. If you hurt yourself, we'll hurt them. So she's trapped in this situation.

12:43.95

Matt Friedman

In order to make him to a prostitute, it's quite simple. You get a couple of professional rapists, and over a two-day period of time, they take this girl and rape her 20, 30 times until eventually she just lays back and accepts whatever happens to her. After that, she's put on the line. She'll be with 20 guys a day, every day, till after a couple of years, she gets what's called black eye, where she's so depleted physically and emotionally and spiritually. Nobody wants her, so they throw her out onto the street.

13:11.66

Matt Friedman

Many of these girls languish in India die of AIDS, but some of them get back, and those were the girls we were talking to. But I didn't understand the evil of this until I actually went to um India. I was invited by the Indian government to do public health checks in those brothels.

13:27.77

Matt Friedman

I went into one in the brothel, I had a police officer with me, and there was an 11-year-old trafficking victim. She saw this Caucasian guy, saw this opportunity. He literally ran up, wrapped herself around me and said, save me, save me, they're doing terrible things to me. I looked down at this child who was hysterically crying. I turned to the police officer, said, we need to get her out of here. He said, we can't do that. So what are you talking about? You're a cop. He says, well, if we try to do that, we'll both be killed.

13:56.04

Matt Friedman

To make a long story short, we left, we came back with a lot more police, but of course she was gone. I tell that story because I wasn't one of those 15-year-olds in high school who said, when I grow up, I want to become an activist. In fact, I did everything I could not to be one. I wanted to basically make a lot of money and live the good life. But every once in a while in life, we are tested. That was my big test.

14:18.18

Matt Friedman

I failed miserably. After that, I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. And I did what a lot of activists eventually do, surrendered to the fact that now that I've been exposed to this, this is what I'm going to do with my life. And 35 years later, here I am talking to you.

14:33.34

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Well, that is so very sad. Evil is a good a good description of it, that's for sure. Let's talk about technology. Is that a game changer? I mean, has social media been used in in human trafficking?

14:47.94

Matt Friedman

Social media is huge. and In fact, all over the world, you have um people who are predators that will lure people into a situation where um they become victims of human trafficking. um I'll give a Chinese example, but the same happens in North America and Europe and all over the world.

15:07.18

Matt Friedman

where you know a 14-year-old girl, she's misunderstood, doesn't have a lot of friends, eventually gets on ah a chat room. and you know She's just watching and observing and then all of a sudden she starts to engage a little bit. and Then these predators who are on these chat rooms will engage and present themselves as if she's 14, they'll say, well, I'm 15 years old when in fact it could be a guy with six computers open and he's just grooming all of these women simultaneously.

15:37.11

Matt Friedman

and So he presents himself as a a boy her age and then they go back and forth and they have this relationship Yeah, pictures are shared and it's ah ah you know, somebody who's in on this scam ah will will be presented as as her boyfriend and then eventually they get a point to a point where um He says well, why don't we meet? You know, I'll come to a particular location we can drive and have a picnic and get to know each other and so forth and so on uh... they eventually meet up and uh... you know he's the guy who is uh... in the photograph but he it seems different uh... to her he he he doesn't seem as friendly he doesn't seem as uh... engaged etcetera because he doesn't know about what what's transpired they go to a restaurant and then uh... he puts a roofie in in her coca-cola or her drink or whatever and then she wakes up in a mall hotel room

16:33.44

Matt Friedman

She's naked, compromised pictures have been taken. And basically he says, okay, well, unless you sell your body, um when we ask you to do so, then you are, all these photos are going to go to your family and to your school mates and everything else.

16:48.36

Matt Friedman

We have all that information from your phone. So what basically they do is they use social media to lure a person into a situation where

they're compromised and then out of face in in this part of the world in Asia faces everything. You can't be embarrassed yourself. You can't embarrass your family. This face prevents them from you know ah telling anyone and then they enter in this situation thinking that that's the only solution that they have.

17:14.44

Matt Friedman

Social media is also used in those human trafficking to scam center situations where they will um ah use social media to promote a fake job and so forth. And so, yeah, it's very much a part of what you will see people being lured in all over the world.

17:32.45

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And it may seem cavalier to just keep asking questions and not continue to say how depressing and how sad this is. But that's the point of the podcast of this episode is to get this information out so that other people can be aware.

17:49.11

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of what a big issue it is. And speaking of that, let's talk about the scale of the problem. I have no idea how big it is. ah I mean, obviously it's worldwide, but can you kind of give me an idea of the scale of the of the problem? I mean, percentages, maybe prostitution, slavery, what, tell me a little bit about that.

18:06.90

Matt Friedman

Well, according to the United Nations, and this figure came out, post COVID is about 50 million people in what's called modern slavery or human trafficking. Out of that, about 23 million would be in forced marriages. We talked about that earlier. The rest would be in forced labor circumstances. That's 27 million.

18:26.66

Matt Friedman

And that includes the you know people in sweat shops and fishing boats and agriculture situations, forced domestic servitude and so forth. Out of that number, about 6.3 million would be sex trafficking victims. So you have approximately 9.2 million people entering into modern slavery per year.

18:48.73

Matt Friedman

which translates to about 25,200 per day, or a new um human trafficking victim every four seconds. So if we count to four, one, two, three, four, somewhere in the world, somebody's entering into modern slavery. Now, a lot of people in North America will say, okay,

well that happens in Africa or Asia,

19:10.88

Matt Friedman

According to these same statistics, about 700,000 victims of human trafficking are in the United States alone. And that would include a sex trafficking victim because by definition, if a girl is under the age of 18 and she's in prostitution, she's a sex trafficking victim. There's tens of thousands, of if not hundreds of thousands of young people in that situation.

19:34.19

Matt Friedman

across north ah North America. You have the people who picked the tomatoes and the oranges that come in under the radar. um Many of them are exploited because they use smugglers to get them into the country that incur some type of a debt. And so that they are then beholden to those individuals. You have domestic servitude cases. And so it's ah it's one of the most pervasive um human rights issues of our time. And yet very few people know much about it.

20:04.46

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Yes, speaking of being here in the US, I think we always think it it happens somewhere else, you know not here, although it does. and But we tell ou ourselves that it's somewhere else.

20:15.66

A Study in Crime™ Podcast

That way we can you know sleep at night and not even have to think about it. It's just ah it's a terrible, terrible thing.

20:19.99

Matt Friedman

Well, my wife and I did a ah presentation tour across the United States, 70 consecutive days. We started in uh... seattle went down the west coast to texas up to chicago uh... down to of florida and then up to new york uh... did about a hundred and fourteen presentations did this to universities schools uh... you know the non-government organizations the u.s. government officials corporations and so forth and and you know i would ask people when i get to about uh... the fifteen minute mark how many of you people in this room knew

20:57.83

Matt Friedman

even 10% of what I was talking about before I said it, and in a room of 100, I usually wouldn't get more than one or two hands. If you don't know about an issue, you're not going to care about it. If you don't care about it, you're not going to do anything. And so part of the problem that we have is that general awareness related to human

trafficking is so low that it's really difficult to convince people that there's there's an issue that needs to be addressed.

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You know, speaking of your wife, she is very accomplished. Can you tell me a little bit about her?

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Matt Friedman

Yeah, I mean, Sylvia, my wife is a social i um influencer. She's somebody who has written some amazing books. She has a book that just came out called Fearless. She has addressed the issue of human trafficking in many ways. ah As an investigative journalist, as a philanthropist,

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Matt Friedman

ah She recently kind of segued into private equity so that she can raise capital to eventually support issues related to philanthropy and so forth. ah She's just ah an amazing human being, a partner in crime, if you will.

22:06.43

Matt Friedman

in terms of us coming together and addressing this particular issue. ah She was just identified as the top voice in Hong Kong out of 3.4 million people ah related to um you know, influencing people through her messages on LinkedIn. I encourage people to to go on to LinkedIn to to see what she does. Sylvia Friedman, and I'm also on LinkedIn. I do a lot of posting on the issue of human trafficking. You know, we talked about how

22:40.08

Matt Friedman

um Social media can be used in a negative way, but it can also be used in a positive way to raise awareness, to educate people, to give them the information they need to prevent themselves from finding themselves in these situations. And so we use these platforms in order to ah basically help people to understand what it is we're talking about, what's happening to these other people, ah to raise awareness and perhaps some empathy and understanding of the issue.

23:09.26

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Well, you guys are doing great work. And i will include your your link pro linkedin I will include your LinkedIn profile in the show notes so that folks can maybe reach out to you.

23:20.77

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Let's get down to what this is all about. I mean, it's all about money, isn't it?

23:28.11

Matt Friedman

yep

23:29.28

A Study in Crime™ Podcast

How much money are we talking?

23:31.68

Matt Friedman

Well, according to the latest statistics, it's about \$236 billion dollars generated annually. That's the second largest transnational crime, second only to drug trafficking. So you're talking about an industry that generates ah close to ah three quarters of a billion dollars a day every day. um And when you're dealing with numbers that big, you can imagine that this gives organized crime tremendous money to then franchise into all kinds of other things, drug trafficking,

24:04.57

Matt Friedman

gambling, extortion, you know. um So we're really talking about an issue that um ah needs to be dressed in in ah in a very systematic way in order for this to go away. Now, the problem with that number of the 236 billion generated from the profits of modern slavery is that the amount of money that is used to fight this globally, when you add up all of the government and United Nations and NGOs combined,

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Matt Friedman

is about 350 million US dollars. That's 0.13% of the profits. So the bad guys have tremendous resources and the people who are trying to fight this have hardly any resources at all, which results in last year, out of 50 million people, only about 110,000 of them were helped out of modern slavery. That's 0.2%. Not even 1% of the people are being helped.

25:00.35

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Oh, wow.

25:00.65

Matt Friedman

So you heard what happens to people. Their life is stolen away from them. They are forced into these situations where if you're a woman, you have to have sex with 20 guys, or if you're a man on a fishing boat or a kid on a camel, you you have this terrible life experience.

But you know the world has very few resources set aside in order to address this.

25:23.61

A Study in Crime™ Podcast

Well, I want to talk about what can be done, what countries can do, but let's first let's take a quick break and I'll be right back.

25:34.49

A Study in Crime™ Podcast

Okay, I'm back with Matt Friedman, human trafficking expert and the CEO of the Mekong Club. As I mentioned earlier, I think people, especially here in the US, think that these kinds of things only happen in other countries. So you already talked about making people care. How do you make folks care about this problem, which is obviously huge and worldwide.

25:57.42

Matt Friedman

Well, I think one of the first things is to help raise awareness about it. If you don't know about an issue, you're not going to care about it. And so ah getting information out through podcasts like this that help people to understand that this happens not only in Asia, ah but in the United States as well to fellow citizens, you know, the 14 year old girl who has a fight with their family and then gets on a bus and runs away and ends up in the big city.

26:24.47

Matt Friedman

only to be you know um groomed by a a pimp and then forced into prostitution is ah is a big issue. um you know A lot of people who are tricked and deceived into coming to the United States with the expectation of a job only to eventually to be held in place because of debt and threat ah are forced to do things against their will and so forth. Understanding how this works is a really an important part of helping people to understand that as Americans, they have a role to play in addressing this.

26:57.26

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Well, one of my next questions would be where? Where does this happen? Obviously all over, but are there are there any countries in the in the world where human trafficking is really most prevalent?

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Matt Friedman

Well, in terms of the actual numbers, India and China would be the two countries that have the largest number. But you have to remember that both of those countries have 1.4 billion people in them.

27:23.26

Matt Friedman

Now, to put that into perspective, the United States has about 340 million, which is even not even the round off of the the numbers. of you know if you If you round off to a billion, imagine if the United States had a billion additional people.

27:35.86

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
Right.

27:38.61

Matt Friedman

and so you would assume that countries that have large population size would have that type of situation. But per capita numbers, this would be in a country that you look at the average, the size of the population and the percentage of people who are in modern slavery, it would be people countries like North Korea, Iran, you know, Iraq, um you know, ah It would be other countries like Myanmar that would be on the list. and so Those countries per capita could have one person out of 100, which would be in this modern slavery type situation. so As I mentioned, the the number is 50 million. If we had done this interview two years ago, the number would have been 40 million. It went up because of COVID.

28:25.13

Matt Friedman

What you had was desperation around the world.

28:25.67

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
Wow.

28:28.19

Matt Friedman

Let's say that you were a garment worker in Bangladesh and you were making pretty good money and then all of a sudden COVID hits, your factory closes not for a couple of days or weeks or months, but for years. In order to survive, you you use your savings, you run out, you start borrowing money when you can't pay the money back. The money lenders take family members away to put them in fishing boats, sweatshops, or brothels, or whatever. And so COVID significantly increased the number. But yeah there's no country in the world that doesn't have modern slavery. In fact, I... ah would often, when I present to high schools, ask, ah you know, I would say, which countries in the world don't have human trafficking? And people would say Japan and, you know, they'd say Sweden and United States and all of those countries have have the issue. If you can take advantage of a person and do it in such a way that nobody sees it happening, it doesn't matter where you are in the world. ah People will take

advantage of it. So that's why we see it just about everywhere.

29:27.25

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Well, and in terms of proactive measures, in terms of doing something about it, are there any specific countries, any nation states that are actively involved in human trafficking?

29:38.24

Matt Friedman

Well, I think ah North Korea would be a good example of that. What they do is they take their workers and they send them all over the world and basically um ah That money gets sent back to the government.

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Matt Friedman

um you know Even now in Ukraine, you have North Korean soldiers that are being sent to fight in Ukraine for the Russians. None of those guys are going to be paid.

30:00.89

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Yeah, that's right.

30:01.08

Matt Friedman

ah Whatever money gets generated from that goes back to the government. And so North Korea would be a good good example of that.

30:09.65

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you've worked in You've worked with a UN n in your career. what What's a UN and I mean, what what about the international community? What are they doing about it? are they Is anybody doing any any specific things?

30:20.88

Matt Friedman

Well, I mean, yeah all the governments in the world have laws and they have processes and procedures, but it's not enough to really make much of a difference. um For six years, I ran one of the largest United Nations programs in the world. We had offices in China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. The problem that I had with the United Nations is I spent a lot of time in five-star hotels, eating really good food, debating and discussing what needed to be done to address modern slavery. A lot of it was theoretical, esoteric, and in it we weren't close enough to the action. So the UN does things, but it doesn't do things that necessarily significantly reduce the problem.



31:04.21

Matt Friedman

As I said, we're helping less than 1% of the victims globally. There's no mechanism in place that's coming anywhere close to having a significant impact on addressing this problem. Now, just to put this into perspective, in the United States, globally around \$21 billion dollars is spent to address HIV AIDS. And that's a serious disease, and that money helps to reduce the issue and problem. The problem associated with it, drug trafficking around \$30 billion dollars a year. The US government, which is the largest donor in the world, spends about \$150 million. So you have this terrible crime that doesn't get anywhere close to the amount of money.

31:46.54

Matt Friedman

that's needed in order to have a significant impact. Obviously, what you would need globally to address this is billions of dollars, and that just hasn't taken place. And part of the reason for this is there's just a lot of distractions. You have the Ukraine war, to the Israeli war, you have elections in different locations, you have global warming, all kinds of things that basically distract people from this particular issue. And as a result of that, we're really not making anywhere close to the progress that we need to make to help the people who are in this situation.

32:16.27

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I was just kind of chipping at the sides of it. Not good. Um, speaking of proactive, you are the CEO of the Mekong club. And I got to admit, when I heard Mekong club, I'm thinking a discotheque in Hong Kong, but that's not what it is. So tell me what the Mekong club is. How did it come to be a pass and what are y'all doing?

32:39.77

Matt Friedman

So um years ago, when I was working for the United Nations, ah at that time, the the the estimated number of human trafficking victims was 21 million.

32:51.11

Matt Friedman

And it hasn't jumped from 21 to 50. It's just that the the ability to to calculate this has improved over time. and But at that time, it was 21 million. But at the same time, we knew that globally, we were only helping about 34,000. And so we, and in my office at the United Nations, said we need to really figure out what can we do to have a significant impact. And so when we went and looked at the statistics,

33:18.05

Matt Friedman

Out of the 21 million, about a quarter of the cases were sex trafficking, the rest were forced labor. But associated with forced labor was the fact that these cases were associated with supply chains. Supply chains are where the business world is, you know where clothes are made and where manufacturing takes place and where fish come from and so forth. And so we said, let's talk to the private sector. So as a UN official, I'd fly up to Hong Kong to interview corporations and so forth. And what I heard from a lot of the C-suiters to captains of industry is that they didn't know much about the issue. They recognized the the ah business risk associated with it, but they didn't want to have a conversation with somebody like me who came from the United Nations and could name and shame them. So gradually over time, I continued to go back and forth and eventually

34:10.87

Matt Friedman

um Some corporations said, what we need is an organization to work with the private sector to help us to understand the issue of human trafficking. So we set up the Mekong Club. Now, we called it the Mekong Club because the name doesn't mean anything.

34:26.38

Matt Friedman

The private company said, if you call it human trafficking or human rights, we as private companies can't go to you because people are going to ask, are you going to them because you have this problem? So call it something that doesn't mean anything. And so the Mekong River goes through, you know, China and Southeast Asia club didn't mean anything. And that's the reason why we came up with that name.

34:48.53

Matt Friedman

So for the first couple of years I just presented to C-suite and directors and companies about the issue and then a number of things changed. You had legislation out of the United States and the UK and Australia and Germany and Canada that said If you're a big company, you have to basically report what you're doing to address modern slavery. It's called transparency legislation. This allows consumers to see what big companies are doing. and Another thing was there were there were major lawsuits against you know hotels, against companies that buy seafood from Thailand and so forth. And the plaintiffs are saying by you ah you know buying and using these services, you're contributing to human trafficking.

35:30.65

Matt Friedman

Now, a lot of those lawsuits weren't being won, but they would trickle into social media and and traditional media and and would name and shame these companies. and Then you had you know media coverage significantly increasing about this topic, almost doubling every year

for the past 10 years.

35:46.66

Matt Friedman

and then what's called ESG, which is the indicator that companies use to determine how they're addressing the issues of our time, includes S, which is the social side, which requires companies to demonstrate that they're doing right within their supply chains related to the the workforce and so forth. So as a result of all of these, we transitioned to into an association. Our association includes some of the largest banks, manufacturers, retailers, hospitality sector companies in the world.

36:17.92

Matt Friedman

And what we do is we train them, we educate them, we ensure that their supply chains have no exploitation along um the the continuation of their supply chain. So if you have a big company that has 350,000 people that are working for them,

36:33.86

Matt Friedman

We ensure that that company has nothing in their supply chain that would have any kind of indicator of exploitation. And by doing that, we are able to address the issue of human trafficking in ah in a mechanism that is closer to the action, because they can actually influence and ah and and fix things if they find it.

36:55.49

Matt Friedman

Now you'll never hear about this, but you know companies face issues and we work with them when we fix it. Once it's fixed, it's sustainable and it prevents that from ever happening again. So it's another way of addressing human trafficking.

37:08.84

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That's I mean, that's excellent. Getting businesses involved. um Obviously, this is a money. Human trafficking is is all about the money. And of course, businesses ah are about money making a profit. ah But you want to do so in a way that you're not breaking laws that you're doing good stuff instead of bad. um Let's take this down to a micro level. I'm a student. Let's say I'm a student in Wyoming or my housewife in New York. What can I do about it?

37:38.14

Matt Friedman

Well, I'll tell the story that kind of puts this into perspective, and then I'll answer that question. um So years ago, when I was in Nepal, I desperately wanted to do something to address the issue of human

trafficking. So I decided I was going to write a book. As part of that process, I went from shelter to shelter to interview the sex trafficking victims. And I went to one shelter, and there was a girl named Gita.

38:01.20

Matt Friedman

She was about 15 years old, and every time I approached her, she said, no, no, no, no, I don't want to give my story. But as I interviewed every everyone else, she sat and listened. She was sitting there the whole time. When I finished and I was leaving, Gita comes running up and said, I changed my mind. So Gita sat on one side of the table, the rest of us on the other side of the table, and over a three hour period, she told the worst story I'd ever heard of rape and torture and disease and murder and betrayal.

38:29.24

Matt Friedman

Honestly, I'd heard hundreds of stories. I had never heard anything that bad. I really didn't even know what to say to this young girl. Finally, I turned to her and I said, wow, Gita, you must be so angry at the traffickers for the horrible things they did to you. This girl paused and paused. And then she finally said, no, I'm angry at you and you and you. She pointed at us. She said, where were you? Said that every single day she woke up and prayed for somebody to come and help her. Nobody came. Said she went to school till she was 12. She knew that all of this activity related to this illegal activity was right out in the open. Nobody was doing anything.

39:05.46

Matt Friedman

She said she wasn't angry at the traffickers. She said they're just bad people doing what bad people do. Bad things. She said she was angry at the good people. At society for allowing a 15-year-old girl to be commercially raped 7,000 times.

39:20.85

Matt Friedman

only to eventually get AIDS and she was dying. So I tell this story because Keaton pretty much understood that the 35,000 people like me around the world that are trying to address this is insufficient to make a difference. That the only way we're gonna make a difference is if everybody kind of steps up and does something. So I usually say to my audiences and I present to maybe a hundred times a year through audiences that range from 20 people to 5,000 people. If I could get everyone to do just one thing, you know, a year related to this, that would be one times whatever the population I'm in front of. If it's a hundred, one times a hundred. If it's a thousand, one times a thousand. And so people often say, well, what is it that I can do? Well, one thing you can do is, ah you know, learn about the issue.

40:10.05

Matt Friedman

Well, guess what? From listening to this podcast, you've already done your one thing. How easy was that? But if you tell another person about this, you've done another thing. And if you tell another person, another every person you educate and inform about this, you've expanded you know the awareness raising and that's a big important part of the process. Or if you see an article you shared on LinkedIn or Facebook or Instagram or whatever, you've done another thing.

40:34.14

Matt Friedman

Another thing you can do is to be a responsible consumer. Before you buy branded items, go online to see whether or not that company has a policy or procedure related to human trafficking.

40:43.82

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Excellent.

40:44.04

Matt Friedman

They do congratulate them. If they don't, simply state, I like your products. I'd feel more comfortable if you had this. If you do it in a respectful way, companies will react to that and they will make the changes that are needed.

40:55.86

Matt Friedman

You can volunteer. um You know, my Network has about 140 professional volunteers. In fact, my youngest volunteer was nine years old. This girl saw me in a documentary and on how she got my email address, but she contacted me and said, Mr. Friedman, human trafficking is a terrible thing. I want to help. I said to her, well, you're only nine years old. She said, so what?

41:19.60

Matt Friedman

I said, you're nine years old. She said, nine-year-olds of the new 16-year-olds give me a chance. And I said, well, what is it you think you can do? She said, I could find anything on the internet. That's my God-given gift. And so I had some second year Ivy League law students. I gave them an assignment to collect some information online. They couldn't find it. I gave it to her. Two days later, she came back. I had everything I needed. Because we as human beings all have inherent gifts.

41:47.34

Matt Friedman

For some people, it's public speaking. Some people, it's organizing. It could be you know writing or doing speeches or selling t-shirts. It doesn't matter. If you apply that to volunteerism, you can really make a difference. Donate or fundraise. There's a lot of organizations that didn't survive during COVID because you know the resources weren't there. you know Skipping a couple of meals and taking that money and identifying a local organization and donating to them can really make a difference.

42:15.92

Matt Friedman

So these are the types of things that can be done. it's If everyone did that and a million people or 10 million people did that, it would add up to something quite big and it would really make a difference.

42:26.68

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That's the power of numbers. I like to say that's the power of numbers. And I like to say you can't do everything, but you can do something. ah Speaking of what she said, where were you?

42:34.06

Matt Friedman

Absolutely.

42:37.85

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and Now I know where you got the title for your pre ah your most recent book. Can you tell me about that?

42:43.83

Matt Friedman

Yeah, I mean, that that had a ah profound effect on me. you know I just assumed when this when I was interviewing that ah young woman that she was going to say she was angry at the traffickers, but she was pretty much calling us all out. And every once in a while, you have an experience like that where you expect something to go a particular way and it doesn't, and then it opens up your mind to things. But you know i would I would go even further than just talking about human trafficking. If you stop and look at the world,

43:12.91

Matt Friedman

It needs a lot of healing. It's not just human trafficking. It's poverty. It's bullying. It's, you know, ah you know, and gender. ah

43:22.21

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clean water.

43:23.38

Matt Friedman

Oh, you know, everything. yeah There's all these types of things. and In all of these cases, you have that the world is helping less than five percent. And the reason for that is there's this expectation that governments and the United Nations and the non-government organizations have the resources to address them. They don't. We need everybody to kind of step up and be a part of the process. And so I wrote another book called Be the Hero, Be the Change. And in that, I argue that we as human beings don't pick our causes.

43:53.06

Matt Friedman

our causes pick us. What I mean by that is that like I didn't go and one day wake up and say, well, there's poverty and there's you know health issues and there's you you know disparity in human traffic. me I think I'll pick human trafficking. Something about that issue is in my DNA.

44:13.01

Matt Friedman

I kept coming back to it because there's something about my personality that was drawn to that particular issue. For me, it's human trafficking. For my sister, it's animals. Animal rights is everything to her. She doesn't care about human beings in the same way. For my brother, it's climate change. So if you figure out what your cause is, I encourage people to get involved and actually do something to help.

44:37.04

Matt Friedman

And when you do that, it's heroic because, you know, what most people think of heroes is a person who runs into a burning building and helps rescue the the kid or, you know, prevents ah a woman from being hit by a bus or something. We we think heroism is this this really extreme, courageous act when, in fact, i I define heroism as any person who steps up and does something for another human being.

45:03.12

Matt Friedman

or for the world that has no expectation of getting anything in return. It's kind of a kindness or a kind act. If we could just get people to understand that if we move in the direction of accepting responsibility for the global issues of our time, the world would be a much better place.

45:20.27

Matt Friedman

And that's, I think, where we need to be in order to solve all these huge issues that we have, because they're not going to go away just by

having, you know, these institutions addressing that we as human beings have to be a part of the solution.

45:25.45

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
One person at a time.

45:33.59

A Study in Crime™ Podcast  
Sure. Well, I don't want to be a downer. But sadly, slavery is the history of humanity from the very beginning. Always has been, unfortunately, in every age. ah So my one of my last questions is, will it ever end?

45:53.41

Matt Friedman  
Okay, so um when you hear that less than 1% of the ah world, ah the victims are addressed, you you might think that it's impossible. I was ah in ah a university classroom and somebody asked that question, so I gave a hypothetical. I said if there was an asteroid that was um ah coming towards Earth, and it would hit us in two years. And if we could end human trafficking, the asteroid would go to the left or the right. Do you think that we as a population could address it? And the answer is absolutely yes, because we would do everything in our powers to address this issue. We would have the will and the motivation to be able to address it. So it's a hypothetical. But the point I'm making is that

46:42.31

Matt Friedman  
Any of the issues that we face, including modern slavery, if the world really decided enough is enough and this has to be addressed, it could be tackled. You know, ah the world decided that they needed to eradicate polio, which was a terrible disease that, you know,

46:57.89

Matt Friedman  
did horrible things to people and you know a lot of people died from it and they remained as a result of it and so forth, we decided we were going to do it. It's within the realm of possibility. It's just that once again, if you don't know about an issue, you're not going to care. And so that's why awareness raising is so relevant and important. And so that's why you know I do these podcasts and I do webinars and I get in front of as many people as I can to try to get the message across that you can play a part in helping to address this. Even simple things. And I listed them a few minutes ago. If you're a part of that and everybody else is doing that, we can make a difference. But it's not going to happen by just assuming that the 35,000 people like me are going to save the world from modern slavery. We all have to have a part to play.



47:43.49

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Well, I love your positive attitude about it. That's certainly necessary. And as you're talking, and I'm thinking until then, until the governments and the people of the world get together and decide to really do something about it, you can end it one person at a time, right?

47:59.81

Matt Friedman

that's right in fact i mean when you

48:01.48

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If you have any information about human trafficking, by the way, you can call the Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888. Matt, you are you're doing Yeoman's work, as they used to say in the olden days, you're making a difference.

48:16.23

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And I love to hear about people that are passionate about making a difference in this world. I will give you the last word. What did you learn?

48:24.57

Matt Friedman

That's right.

48:25.51

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What did you take away from your experience so far in dealing with human trafficking?

48:27.13

Matt Friedman

In fact, I mean, when you

48:31.23

Matt Friedman

um Human beings are suffering in immense ways. A lot of people don't know about it. For us to be able to address it, awareness is needed. But then we need to change the way we as human beings think to accept some responsibility and accountability and to be a part of the solution.

48:52.75

Matt Friedman

And ah despite the fact that a lot of us feel like it's so far away

from your life that you can't do anything, there are things that can be done. So I encourage people to learn about this, ah make a commitment to do something, get your family and friends involved, and perhaps the world could be a safer place unless people will find themselves in this situation.