

No Crying in Sports: The Playbook of Athlete Trafficking

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Background

The global sports industry is expected to grow to \$440.77 billion in 2021². Projected to outpace global GDP, the sports industry depends on talented individuals with the skills and discipline to chase their dreams³. Often young, socially, and financially vulnerable, athletes are targets for traffickers who hold the deceptive promise of wealth, fame, and opportunity. Traffickers, going by the alias “recruiter,” exploit young athletes through force, fraud, and coercion for social and economic power^{1,3}. Europe’s soccer industry has an estimated 15,000 trafficking victims each year⁵. There is a lack of publications and information surrounding the human trafficking of athletes despite its growing threat to human rights. Though the presenters have identified specific domestic and global legal cases surrounding the topic, they also recognize that the void of information perpetuates this issue and seek to address it.

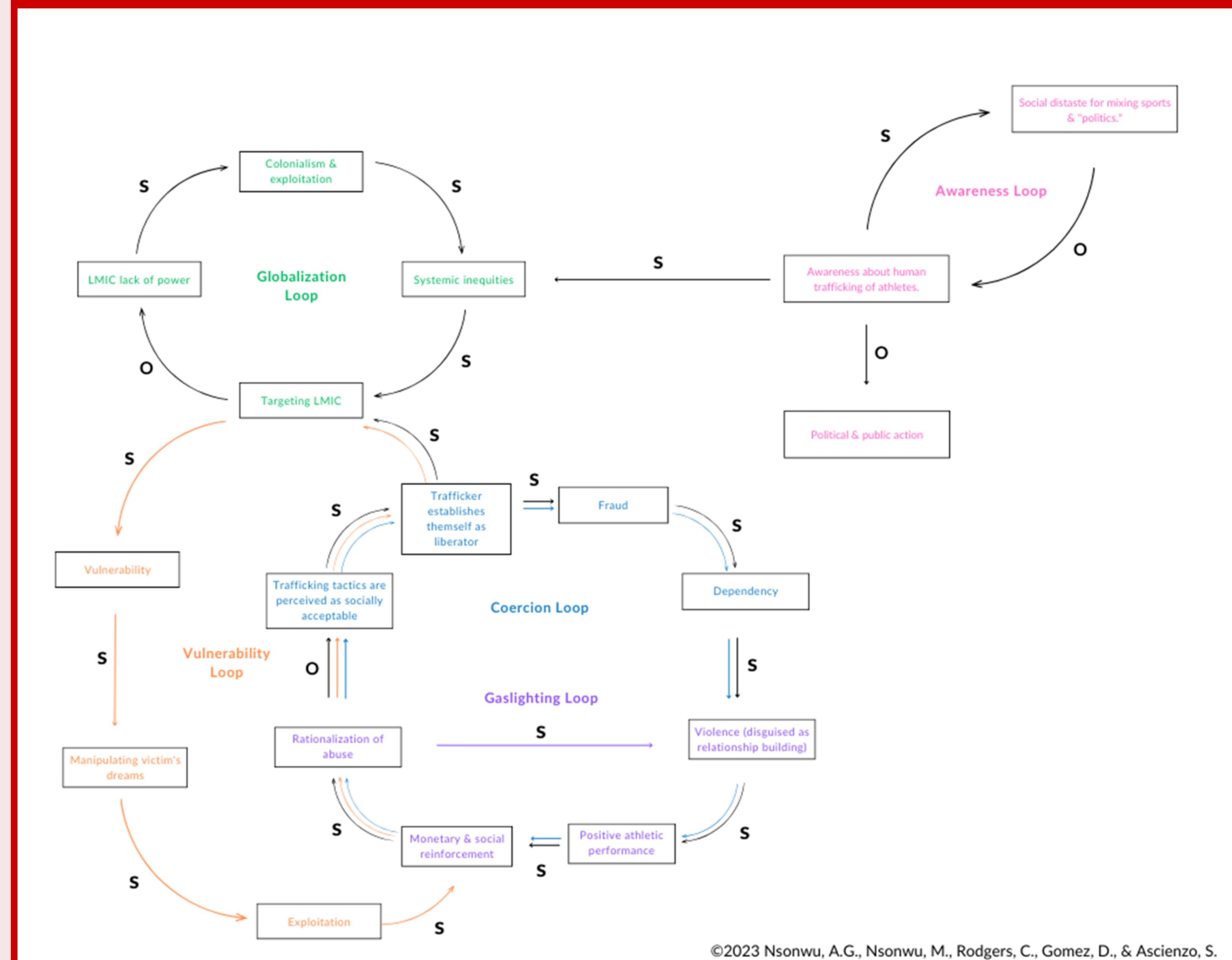
Objectives

- Define and conceptualize human trafficking within the sports industry through social work and public health epistemological approaches and discuss the challenges of conceptualizing this social problem.
- Identify areas within the global sports industry where human trafficking is most prominent.
- Identify and define key vulnerabilities of athletes throughout the recruitment process.
- Identify and discuss potential solutions and next steps to addressing this problem.

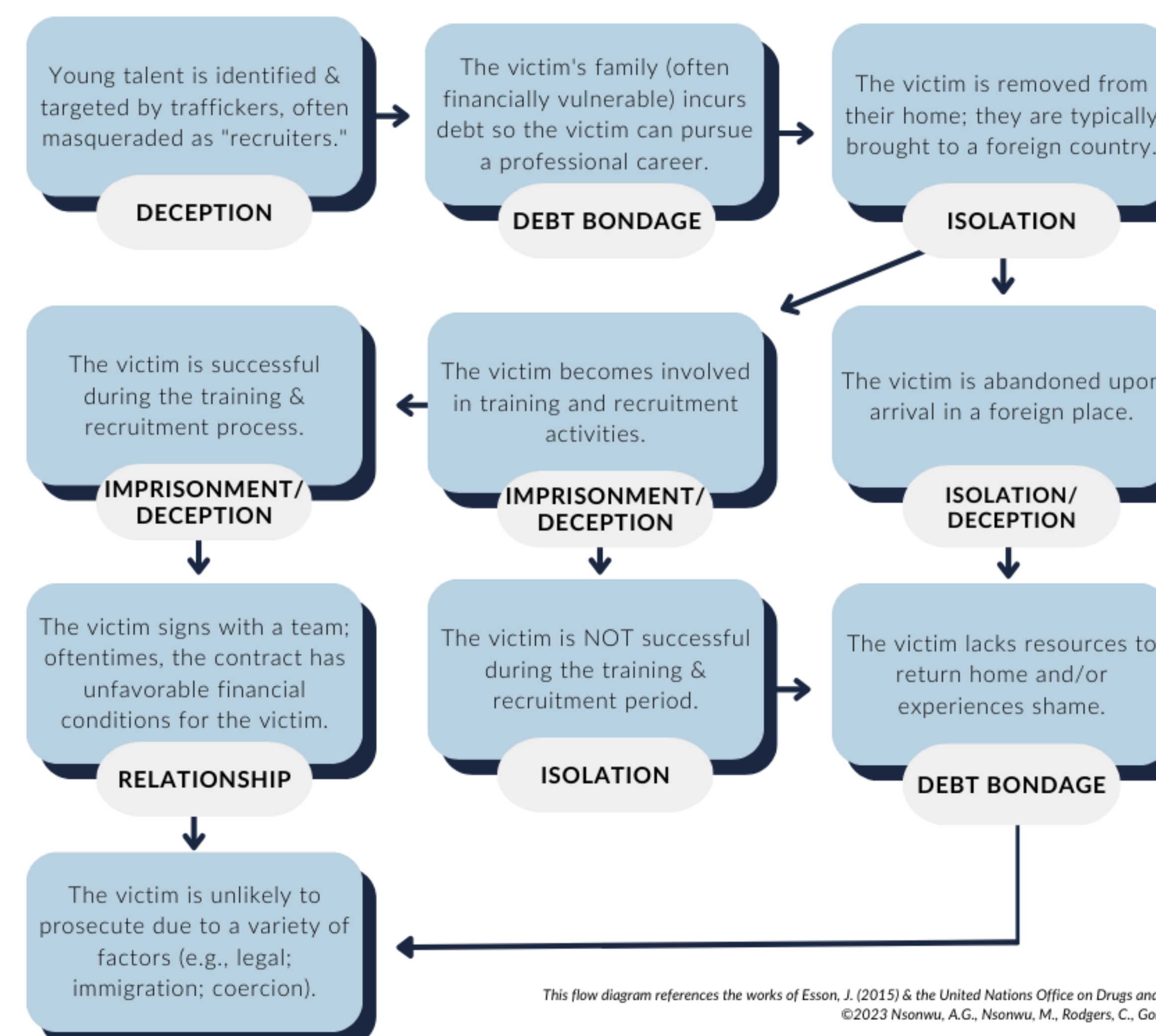
Methods

We conducted a systematic literature review that identified specific case studies to explore the state of the problem. We used publicly available secondary resources using a multidisciplinary group of journals, ranging from criminology, social work, and sports. Databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, PubMed, and DePaul were used, as well as various news publications and legal case filings. We included articles that addressed the human trafficking of athletes across the world. We excluded articles that discussed trafficking that takes place through the sports industry (i.e., prostitution at sporting events, labor trafficking of sporting event employees, and labor trafficking used to make sporting merchandise). Keywords used in our search included: 'Human Trafficking' AND 'Athletes,' 'Labor Trafficking,' 'Human Rights Abuses,' 'Sports Abuse,' 'Football Labor' AND 'Migration,' as well as 'Child Labor Trafficking.'

Results



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This flow diagram references the works of Esson, J. (2015) & the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Report (2009). ©2023 Nsonwu, A.G., Nsonwu, M., Rodgers, C., Gomez, D., & Ascienzo, S.

Conclusion

The human trafficking of athletes is the “exploitation of players; dreams” often perpetuated by “insufficient oversight by sport governing bodies and a lack of government enforcement”⁵. Areas within the global sports industry where human trafficking is most prominent are lower- and middle-income countries and countries that have been impacted by colonialism. Key vulnerabilities of athletes throughout the recruitment process are systemic inequities, living in lower-and-middle income countries, being 18 years old or younger, being away from home, and lack of familial support.

Call to Action

- (1) Educate and prepare high school coaches, school social workers, teachers, and administrators.
- (2) Increase prosecution efforts and build out legal understanding/accessibility.
- (3) Provide funding and increased access to client-centered services for survivors.
- (4) Increase awareness of the nuances and complexity of human trafficking.
- (5) Conduct further research on this topic to gain a better understanding and develop appropriate responses.

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Use QR code for additional references



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