

‘They don’t play or run or shout...They’re slaves’:¹ The First Survey of Children’s Literature on Modern Slavery

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Abstract

This article provides the first survey of children’s literature on modern slavery and analyses the emergence of this movement. Exploring fictional texts and survivor accounts, this article explores how these texts bring modern slavery to children from the news and media. It examines the various trends that emerge from these pieces, including the countries included, types of slavery highlighted, the ages and genders of individuals, and the authors of these texts, survivors or not. It also includes preliminary conclusions about the effectiveness of those texts as educational tools, discussing how these texts highlight signs of slavery and unpack its scale.

Key words: children’s literature, modern slavery, fictional, non-fictional, human trafficking

¹ Francesco D’Adamo, *Iqbal* (New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2003), 111.

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The use of children’s literature in the fight against slavery dates back to the late eighteenth century, when American antislavery activists used literature, both fiction and non-fiction, to garner support in the fight for emancipation.² Antislavery organisations published texts such as *The Youth’s Emancipator*, *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet* and *The Young Abolitionists* that condemned slavery, declaring ‘if you make children abolitionists, slavery must come to an end’.³ Noah Webster’s ‘Story of the Treatment of African Slaves’ in *The Little Readers Assistant* from 1790 explained the cycle of slavery and declared that God would condemn its supporters.⁴ Nevertheless, after the thirteenth amendment of 1865, children’s books no longer called for abolition. Instead, they taught children about the history of slavery in America, educating them on movements such as the Underground Railroad, and publicising information on leading antislavery figures, such as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. In the realm of children’s literature, slavery became a thing of the past. However, slavery is alive today, and at the time of writing, there were an estimated 40.3 million individuals enslaved around the world, with 29.4 million people in forced labour and 15.4 million individuals in forced marriages.⁵ Organisations such as Anti-Slavery International and End Slavery Now continue the fight against this human rights issue by helping individuals escape, lobbying for antislavery legislation, and educating the public about the prevalence of slavery. Nevertheless, for over one hundred years, antislavery organisations and activists failed to use children’s literature in the fight against slavery. During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, juvenile texts predominantly reflected on slavery, depicting it as an issue of the past. However, over the past thirty years there has been a proliferation of texts educating children on modern slavery.

From 1992 onwards, novels, short stories, and comic books offered educative stories of slavery both from the survivors’ perspective and omniscient narrators, bringing this human rights issue from the news and media into children's

² Paula T. Connolly, *Slavery in American Children’s Literature 1790 - 2010* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 13–90.

³ *The Youth’s Emancipator* 1842–1843, *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet* 1847 and *The Young Abolitionists* 1848. Quote from ‘To Juvenile Anti-Slavery’ in Connolly, 3.

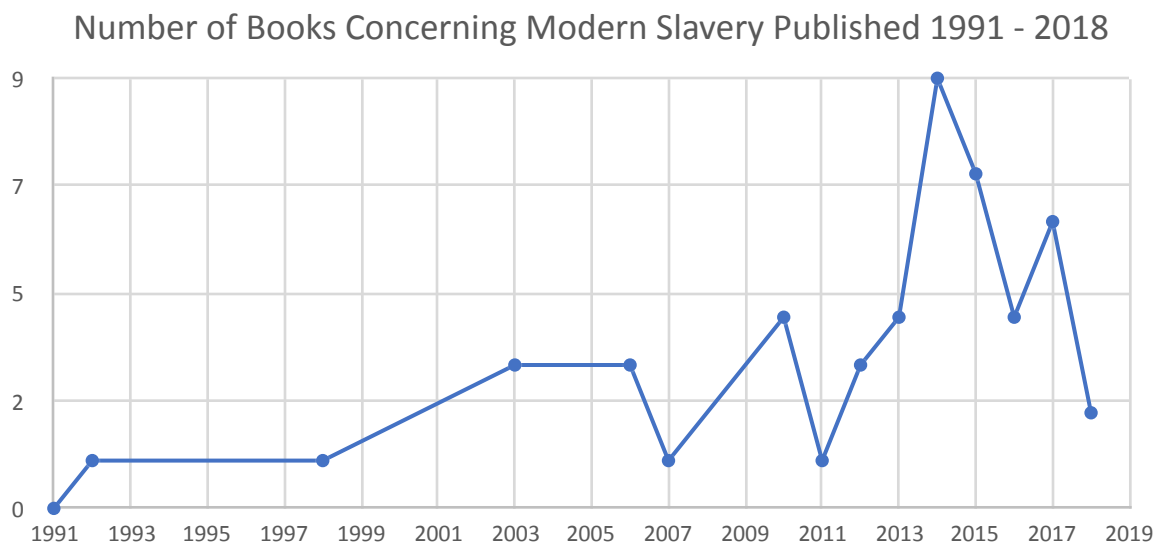
⁴ Noah Webster, *The Little Reader Assistant* in Connolly, 17.

⁵ *Global Slavery Index 2018*, The Minderoo Foundation Pty Ltd, available at <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/resources/downloads/>.

literature. This article will provide the first survey of children’s literature on modern slavery, analysing the emergence of fifty-one fictional and non-fictional texts predominantly published in the U.S.A. Using John Rowe Townsend’s definition of children’s books as those that publishers place on children’s literature lists, whether fiction or non-fiction, this article will analyse the emergence of modern slavery children’s books from 1992 to the present day.⁶ It will explore fictional books and survivor accounts, examining and analysing various trends that emerge from these texts. This will include discussion of the initial stages of the movement, the various countries in these texts, the types of modern slavery highlighted, the ages and genders of the individuals, and comments on the authors. Furthermore, the article will conclude with preliminary ideas about the educational value of these texts, commenting on how they highlight the signs of slavery and unpack its scale for young readers.

A New Movement

This survey of children’s literature on modern slavery focuses on fifty-one texts published since 1992, with fourteen focusing on survivors’ experiences, and thirty-seven telling fictional stories. This new movement emerged in 1992, and the publication of children’s books on modern slavery began at an inconsistent and low rate, with books published sporadically until 2010, and no more than four texts being published in one year until 2013. However, as shown on the graph below, there is a sudden increase in the publication of texts in 2014, with nine published in this year and seven in 2015.



⁶ John Rowe Townsend in Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjaer, *Language and Control in Children’s Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.

Although the number of texts published have since decreased, the increase in publications in 2013 can be attributed to the release of the Global Slavery Index, which estimated that there were 29.8 million individuals in modern slavery around the world.⁷ As modern slavery became a more public and pressing issue, authors and publishers recognised the need to raise awareness and educate young people on this issue. As the graph shows, the majority of texts were published in the twenty-first century and only two texts were released in the 1990s, namely *Taste of Salt* by Frances Temple and *Iqbal Masih and the Crusaders Fight Against Child Slavery* by Susan Kuklin.⁸ Based in Haiti, the former was published in 1992 and tells the story of Djo, a seventeen-year old bodyguard to Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the country’s first democratically elected President.⁹ The reader learns that Djo was sold into slavery as a young boy to work on a sugar plantation. On arriving, Djo asks another worker Donay ‘what is happening’, to which he replies that ‘they have sold you boy’ and ‘it is only for the season... just be careful you not fall into debt. For then they do own you’.¹⁰ Whilst this text does not focus on modern slavery, his experience as a forced labourer is an important part of Djo’s story. Conversely, Kuklin’s text focuses on modern slavery and details the activism of Iqbal Masih and the Bonded Labour Liberation Front’s (B.L.L.F.) fight against child slavery in Pakistan. Masih was a bonded labourer who worked as a carpet weaver to pay off his parents’ debt. After escaping the factory, the twelve-year-old attended a convention of the Brick Layer Union where he met Ehsaan Ullah Khan and learned that bonded labour was illegal. With the B.L.L.F. activist’s help, Masih freed the other children held in his factory and began attending the Bonded Labour Liberation Fund School. Although very young, Masih became a renowned activist against child slavery, helping the B.L.L.F.’s campaign to free children and giving speeches about the importance of education. Kuklin’s text was published in 1998, three years after Masih was murdered, and her biography celebrates his activism, whilst simultaneously educating the reader on modern slavery and bonded labour.

⁷ *Global Slavery Index 2013*, The Walk Free Foundation, available at <https://cdn.walkfreefoundation.org/content/uploads/2016/03/14153121/Global-Slavery-Index-2013.pdf>.

⁸ Frances Temple, *Taste of Salt: A Story of Modern Haiti* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992). Susan Kuklin, *Iqbal Masih and the Crusaders Fight Against Child Slavery* (New York: Henry Holt & Company 1998).

⁹ This text contains fictional characters and events, but is based on fact and contains sections from Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s sermon and speeches.

¹⁰ Temple, 53–54.

Inspiration from Survivors

Masih’s account forms the foundation for several other texts and this is a common theme in children’s books on modern slavery, whereby authors draw inspiration for their fictional texts from survivors’ accounts. *The Carpet Boy’s Gift* by Pegi Dietz Shea and *Iqbal* by Francesco D’Adamo celebrate the life and activism of Masih through their fictional characters Nadeem and Fatima. In the former, Nadeem hears Masih speak at a B.L.L.F. march and learns that the work he does as a bonded labourer is illegal.¹¹ In the latter, Fatima works alongside Masih in the carpet factory and she is inspired by Masih’s determination to leave life as a slave and look to a free future.¹² Both texts inform children about modern slavery through fictional stories based on Masih, allowing them to highlight his experience, celebrate his life, and educate young readers on bonded labour and modern slavery. Another text based on survivors’ accounts is *Borderland*. This comic, created by Dan Archer, Olga Trusova and John Knight, takes the accounts of human trafficking survivors and turns them into comic artwork, with information alongside the narrative to educate the reader on modern slavery.¹³ In ‘Lera’s Story’, the reader learns about forced criminal exploitation, where Lera’s mother forces her to sell poppy seeds after her failed attempt to sell her daughter into marriage.¹⁴ Moreover, the story ‘Chipped Away’ is based on three testimonies from a case of five-hundred Ukrainians trafficked to Russia for potato farming. Through the artwork, the reader learns that these people were threatened, beaten, starved, and forced to live and work in harsh conditions, before anti-trafficking organisations helped them escape.¹⁵

While these authors have taken inspiration from narratives, several authors have conducted their own research on modern slavery to write fictional texts and educate children on the issue. Two examples of this are Kashmira Sheth’s *Boys Without Names* and Patricia McCormick’s *Sold*. Both books, set in India, discuss child slavery—the former focuses on boys who are kidnapped and forced to make souvenirs, and the latter discusses the trafficking and sexual exploitation of young girls. Both authors include detailed statistics about modern slavery in their texts,

¹¹ Pegi Dietz Shea, *The Carpet Boy’s Gift* (Thomaston: Tilbury House Publishers, 2003).

¹² D’Adamo, *Iqbal*.

¹³ Dan Archer, Olga Trusova and John S. Knight, *Borderland* (Washington: International Organisation for Migration, 2010).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

‘They don’t play or run or shout... They’re slaves’: The First Survey of Children’s Literature on Modern Slavery.
James.

and they conducted thorough research when writing their books.¹⁶ Sheth consulted with a non-profit organisation in Mumbai that worked with trafficked children, and writes that their work ‘provided me with invaluable insight about what is being done to help these children’.¹⁷ McCormick spent time with Nepali girls who had been trafficked from remote villages to Kolkata, alongside talking with aid workers from India and Nepal, and survivors themselves, which she described as ‘touching and inspiring’.¹⁸ In an interview from 2010, McCormick commented that she wrote the text with the ‘idea of activating people’ and was amazed at the fundraising efforts many people undertook in response.¹⁹ Indeed, *Sold* inspired students from Williams High School in Virginia, U.S.A. to help survivors of sex trafficking. They created a mural and raised money for Courtney’s House, a local charity that helps survivors of sex trafficking, with students donating three dollars to place their handprints around an Eli Wiesel quote that reads ‘Let us remember: what hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander’.²⁰

Survivor Narratives

Many survivors have also written biographies or contributed their narratives to children’s books to educate young readers and raise awareness of this issue. Examples of texts by survivors include: *Hidden Girl* by Shyima Hall, *The Slave Across the Street* by Theresa Flores, *Trafficked* by Sophie Hayes, and *Slave: My True Story* by Mende Nazer.²¹ Hall and Nazer were forced to work as young children, while Hayes and Flores were sexually exploited by men they trusted. Other examples of texts not written by survivors but including their narratives are: *A Babe in the Woods* by John Anthony Davis, *Daddy’s Curse* by Luke Dahl, and *Breaking Free* by Abbey Sher. Survivors use their experiences to educate children on modern slavery, explaining how they were exploited, detailing their escape, and describing what their life has been like post-enslavement. For instance, Maria

¹⁶ Kashmira Sheth, *Boys Without Names* (New York: Balzer and Bray, 2010) 135. Patricia McCormick, *Sold* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 271–276.

¹⁷ Sheth, 313.

¹⁸ McCormick, 271.

¹⁹ Cindy Hudson, ‘Interview with Patricia McCormick, Author of *Sold*’, *Mother Daughter Book Club*, February 23, 2010, <https://motherdaughterbookclub.com/2010/02/interview-with-author-patricia-mccormick/>.

²⁰ Lora Strum-Vaitas, ‘Titans Put Up a Hand to Stop Sex Trafficking’, *Theogony*, June 9, 2011.

²¹ Shyima Hall and Lisa Wysocky, *Hidden Girl: The True Story of a Modern Day Child Slave* (New York: Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing Division, 2014). Theresa L. Flores with PeggySue Wells, *The Slave Across the Street: The True Story of How an American Teen Survived the World of Human Trafficking* (Boise: Ampelon Publishing, 2010). Sophie Hayes, *Trafficked: My Story of Surviving, Escaping and Transcending Abduction into Prostitution* (London: HarperCollins, 2012). Mende Nazer, *Slave: My True Story* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003).

Virginia Farinango’s narrative highlights the difficulties survivors endure in rebuilding their lives after their escape. Sold by her parents as a domestic servant at the age of seven, Farinango struggles to reconcile with her parents after her escape, writing:

It might feel good to be able to forgive them, respect them, maybe even love them. But that hasn’t happened, and I’m beginning to doubt it ever will.²²

Shyima Hall also writes of the difficulties she faced in having a relationship with her parents, who sold her to a family as a domestic servant at the age of eight.²³ After her escape, Hall had a telephone conversation with her parents, where her father yelled ‘you have disrespected me’ and demanded ‘how could you leave those people who took such good care of you’.²⁴ Over the years, Hall struggled to come to terms with her parents’ actions and battled missing her family against the hurt of their betrayal.²⁵ Both Hall and Farinango highlight the difficulties survivors face after their enslavement, demonstrating to young readers that the battle is not over once someone has escaped slavery.

Several survivors also use their texts to highlight indicators of slavery and educate readers on the various possible signs of an enslaved individual. Many survivors encourage readers to be vigilant and speak out if they suspect slavery, with Hall remarking that ‘it only takes a single phone call to put the steps into action that could rescue someone like me’.²⁶ Hall and Theresa Flores’ texts include large sections that inform children of physical signs and behaviour that could indicate modern slavery, with Hall citing poor clothing and hygiene. She writes that ‘if you see someone who is dressed in clothes that do not fit, that are more out of style and much dirtier than the people they are with, that could be an indication’ and notes that their behaviour may be vastly different to their companions.²⁷ Hall explains that when the family went on holiday she was ‘not allowed to participate

²² Resau and Farinango, 279.

²³ Hall was sold into slavery at the age of eight years old by her parents and forced to work for a family in Cairo, who then trafficked her to America where she continued to work for them until a neighbour’s concerned phone call led to her escape.

²⁴ Hall and Wysocky, 83.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 83–85.

²⁶ Flores was sexually exploited as a teenager by her classmates when, after being raped by one classmate, she was blackmailed by his cousin who took pictures of the rape and threatened to give these to her father unless she had sex with whomever they wanted. Hall and Wysocky, 216.

²⁷ Hall and Wysocky, 83.

in the fun activities...I could not go on the rides or swim with the dolphins. And when the food or souvenirs were purchased, they were never for me’.²⁸ Similarly, Flores highlights signs of slavery, commenting that she published her account ‘to educate others on modern day slavery’.²⁹ In her text, she lists the many ‘clues that a person might be a victim of human trafficking’ or exploitation, such as physical abuse, lack of independence, poor health, and new “friends” and/or material possessions.³⁰ Flores also explains that traffickers come from all socio-economic backgrounds’, noting that ‘there is no stereotypical look to traffickers and pimps’.³¹ The chapter ‘Parents and Professionals’ also explains what they can do if they suspect a child is being abused and/or enslaved. Hall, Flores and many other survivors believe educating people on the signs of slavery is vital in eradicating this issue and preventing the exploitation of others. Indeed Hall encourages the reader to do something rather than nothing, as ‘if you do nothing and the person is in need of help, that would be a tragedy’.³²

Slavery Around the World

Hall and Flores’ accounts are based in the U. S. A., whereas Sheth and McCormick’s fictional texts are set in India. Overall children’s books explore the issue of modern slavery around the world, highlighting its occurrence in South East Asia, the Americas, Africa, and Europe. Texts based in South America include Deborah Ellis’ fictional novel *I am a Taxi* (set in Bolivia), Maria Farinango’s account *The Queen of Water* (set in Ecuador), and the comic *Les Mariposas* by Natsuko Utsumi and Tiffany Pascal (set in Colombia and Ecuador).³³ For Europe there is the comic *Borderland* by Trusova, Archer and Knight, and Sophie Hayes’ survivor account *Trafficked* set in Italy. Finally, in Africa there are the biographies of Mende Nazer from Sudan, and Shyima Hall from Egypt.³⁴ However, children’s books predominantly set modern slavery in the U.S.A. and India, where the Global Slavery Index from 2018 estimates there are 403,000 and 7,989,000 enslaved

²⁸ Ibid, 217.

²⁹ Ibid, xviii and xiii.

³⁰ Flores, 218-220.

³¹ Ibid, 317.

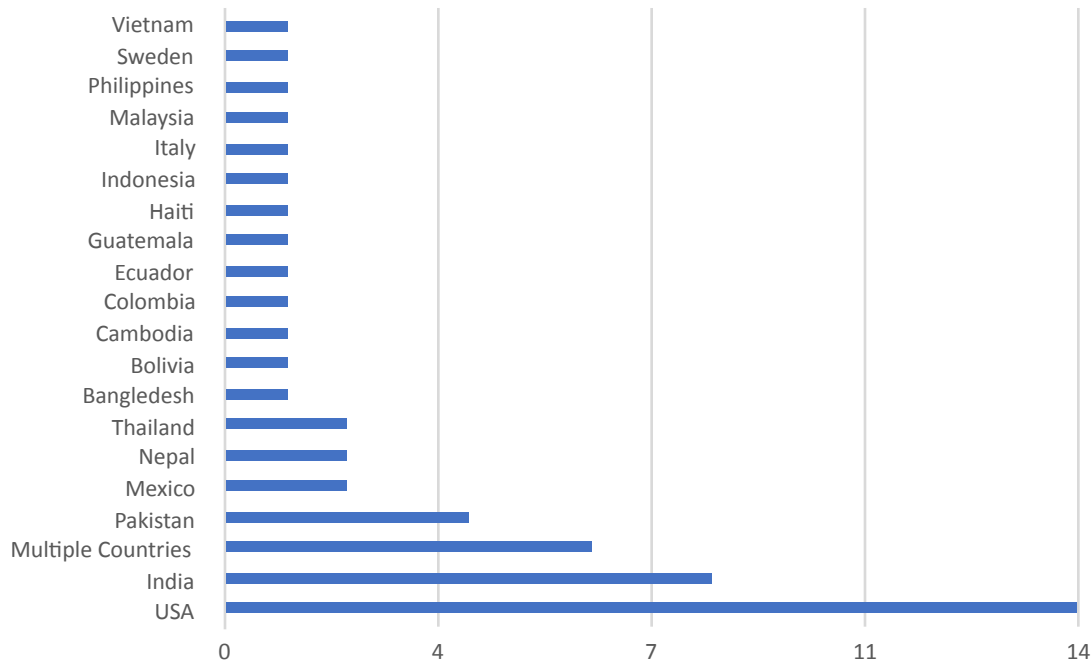
³² Ibid, 220.

³³ Deborah Ellis, *I am a Taxi* (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2006). Laura Resau and Maria Virginia Farinango, *The Queen of Water* (New York: Random House Children’s Books, 2011). Natsuko Utsumi and Tiffany Pascal, *Les Mariposas* (New York: Cause Vision, 2016).

³⁴ Archer, Trusova and Knight, *Borderland*. Hayes, *Trafficked*. Nazer, *Slave*. Hall and Wysocky, *Hidden Girl*.

individuals respectively.³⁵ There are fourteen texts based solely in the U.S.A., two based in America and another country, and eight based in India.³⁶ All eight texts based in India are fictional narratives – alongside McCormick’s and Sheth’s books, Lynne Kelley’s *Chained* tells the story of a young boy who works in a circus to pay off his family’s debt and Kimberly Rae’s *India Street Kids* series follows the story of two children who work in a sweatshop.³⁷

Geographical Locations of Texts



38

Conversely, children’s books based in America include several survivor narratives, including the accounts of Hall and Flores, and Abbey Sher’s *Breaking Free*, which details the experiences of Somaly Mam, Minh Dang, and Maria

³⁵ *Global Slavery Index 2018*, 78 and 88.

³⁶ Many books have several locations, either through the trafficking of the survivor as in Hall’s case, or because there are multiple stories.

³⁷ Lynne Kelley, *Chained* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, 2012). Kimberley Rae’s *India Street Kids* series contains three novels – *Capturing Jasmine* (Greenville: Journey Forth Books, 2014), *Buying Samir* (Greenville: Journey Forth Books, 2014) and *Seeking Mother* (Greenville: Journey Forth Books, 2015).

³⁸ For ‘Multiple Countries’, modern slavery texts are set in Eastern Europe, Cambodia and the U.S.A., Colombia and Ecuador, Egypt and the U.S.A., South East Asia and Sudan and the U.K.

Suarez.³⁹ Nevertheless, fictional novels still outweigh survivor narratives, with eleven of the former and four of the latter.⁴⁰ Examples of fictional texts include *Trafficked* by Kim Purcell, and *Where is Dylan* by Natsuko Utsumi and Foo Swee Chin.⁴¹ Purcell tells the story of seventeen-year-old Hannah, who is trafficked from Moldova to America to work as a maid, but her dream turns into a nightmare when she is forced to work sixteen-hour days, sleep in the garage, is confined to the house, and receives no pay.⁴² The *Where is Dylan* comic portrays the sexual exploitation of two teenagers, Ashley and Dylan. Ashley is blackmailed by her older boyfriend with ‘sex videos and pictures of her’, making her believe that ‘if I don’t sleep with those guys...he would put the pictures and videos of me on the internet’.⁴³ Similarly, Dylan is taken advantage of by his “friend” Tom, who rapes him before forcing him to perform sexual acts for other men, telling Dylan ‘you owe me a favour’ for taking him off the streets.⁴⁴ It is important that children’s books set modern slavery in the U.S.A. alongside developing countries, such as India, to highlight the fact that this is a worldwide issue affecting everyone. However, more work must be done to demonstrate its occurrence in other areas of the world, such as Europe and Australasia, so children truly understand its widespread nature.

Types of Slavery

Children’s books highlight different types of modern slavery, educating young readers on the ways it can manifest and explaining what slavery is. As shown in the graph below, the two most prevalent forms of slavery in these texts are forced sexual exploitation and forced labour. Twenty texts focus on sexual exploitation, including Cause Vision’s *Evelina*, Clara Roberts’ *I Have Been Sold* and *Taken* by Nevah Neal, and twenty-two highlight forced labour, such as *Circle*

³⁹ Abbey Sher, *Breaking Free: True Stories of Girls Who Escaped Modern Slavery* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 2014).

⁴⁰ Theresa Flores published two separate books on her sexual exploitation. Theresa L. Flores with PeggySue Wells, *The Sacred Bath: An American Teen's Story of Modern Day Slavery* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2007).

⁴¹ Kim Purcell, *Trafficked* (London: Walker Books Ltd., 2006).
Natsuko Utsumi and Foo Swee Chin, *Where is Dylan?* (New York: Cause Vision, 2016).

⁴² With no money and no official documentation, Hannah has no way to escape and return home. She believed that she had an authentic passport, but when she arrives in America she learns that her documentation is fake. Purcell, 86.

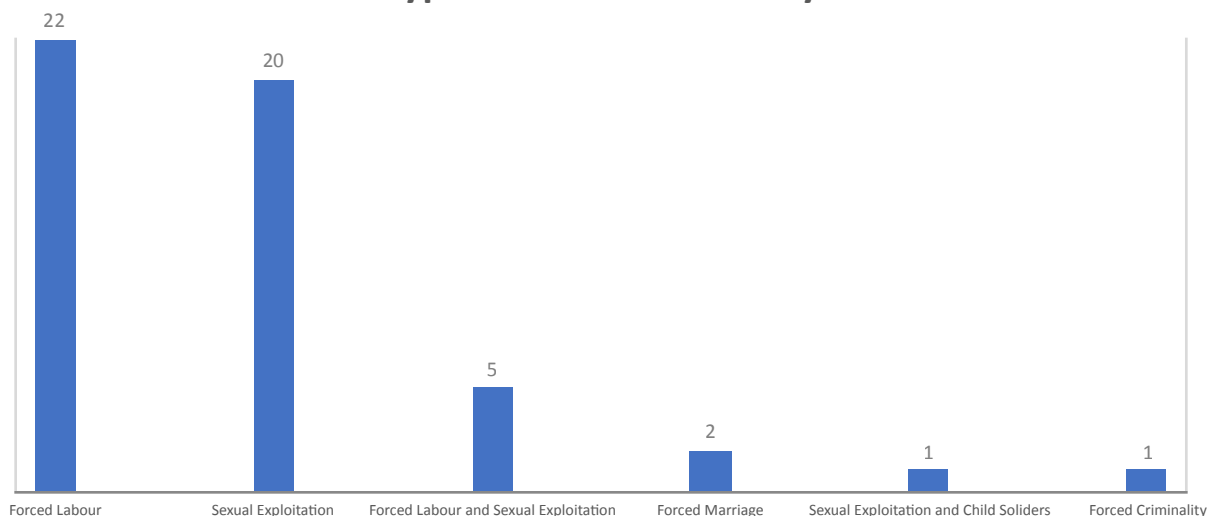
⁴³ Utsumi, *Where is Dylan*, 13.

⁴⁴ Dylan runs away from his abusive father and ends up on the streets when he meets Tom, who drugs and rapes Dylan after gaining his trust. Utsumi, *Where is Dylan*, 25-28.

‘They don’t play or run or shout... They’re slaves’: The First Survey of Children’s Literature on Modern Slavery.
James.

of *Cranes* by Annette LeBox and *Yasmin’s Hammer* by Ann Malaspina.⁴⁵ Five books discuss both forced labour and sexual exploitation, namely Dan Archer’s comics *Borderland* and *Nepal*, and Natsuko Utsumi and Jed Siroy’s *Stolen Promises*.⁴⁶ The high number of children’s books discussing forced labour aligns with the fact that this is the most prevalent form of slavery, with an estimated 24.9 million individuals.⁴⁷ Conversely, sexual exploitation is less predominant, with 4.8 million individuals.⁴⁸ The inclusion of stories of sexual exploitation in children’s books is surprising, yet this highlights the difference between the subject matter of books for teenagers and those for young readers. Texts for the former are more explicit in detailing the abuses of slavery, whereas books for the latter censor such details. Indeed accounts of sexual exploitation are reserved for teenage audiences and deemed inappropriate for younger readers. Although it is important children are made aware of the different types of slavery, authors must tailor their stories to their audiences.

Types of Modern Slavery



⁴⁵ Natsuko Utsumi and Yusaku Emoto, *Evelina* (New York: Cause Vision, 2013). Clara Roberts, *I Have Been Sold* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016). Nevah Neal, *Taken* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017). Annette LeBox, *Circle of Cranes* (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2012). Ann Malaspina, *Yasmin’s Hammer* (New York: Lee and Low Books, 2010).

⁴⁶ Archer, Trusova and Knight, *Borderland*. Dan Archer, *Nepal: ‘I was 14 when I was sold’*, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22250772>. Utsumi and Siroy, *Stolen Promises*.

⁴⁷ ‘Findings’, Global Slavery Index 2018, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/highlights/>.

⁴⁸ *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*, International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation (ILO Publications, 2017), available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf, 39.

‘They don’t play or run or shout... They’re slaves’: The First Survey of Children’s Literature on Modern Slavery. James.

There are four texts that look at other types of slavery, namely child soldiers, forced criminality, and forced marriage. Although primarily focusing on sexual exploitation, *Grace’s War* by Debbie Watkins includes the story of Aaynana who was kidnapped and forced to become a child soldier. The comic *Coercion* by Thomas Estler tells the story of Flora, whose boyfriend King Jones forces her to steal for his gain.⁴⁹ Moreover, there are two comics by Natsuko Utsumi, *Hoa and Lan* and *Forbidden Love*, that discuss forced marriage.⁵⁰ The low number of children’s books on forced marriage can be explained by the fact it was not defined as a type of modern slavery until recently. In September 2017, Anti-Slavery International won their campaign to have forced marriage included in the estimates of people in slavery by the International Labour Organisation.⁵¹ This recognition led to estimates of around 15.4 million individuals in forced marriages, over a third of which are children.⁵² With this new estimate and definition, one expects to see an increase in the number of texts discussing forced marriage.

Gender and Slavery

The texts discussed thus far include both male and female survivors and characters. However overall there is a strong gender discrepancy in these texts, with the majority highlighting the modern slavery experiences of girls and women over boys and men. Of the fifty-one texts, only ten books focus on the modern slavery experiences of boys. Of these ten texts, all of which focus on a child’s experience, six are fictional and four are survivor accounts. Three of the survivor accounts are biographies of Iqbal Masih, and the remaining text is Frances Temple’s *Taste of Salt*, which does not focus on modern slavery but discusses Djo’s experience in the wider context of his story.⁵³ Examples of fictional texts with male characters include Deborah Ellis’ *I am a Taxi*, Kimberly Rae’s *The Street King*, Lynne Kelley’s *Chained*, and Charlene Nall Vermeulen’s *Josh Bergman is*

⁴⁹ Thomas Estler and Sacred Mountain, *Coercion* (New York, 2017).

⁵⁰ Debbie Watkins, *Grace’s War: One Woman’s Journey to Rescue Girls from Modern Slavery* (Bloomington, WestBowPress, 2017). Natsuko Utsumi and Yusaku Emoto, *Hoa and Lan* (New York: Cause Vision, 2013). Natsuko Utsumi and Foo Swee Chin, *Forbidden Love* (New York: Cause Vision, 2018).

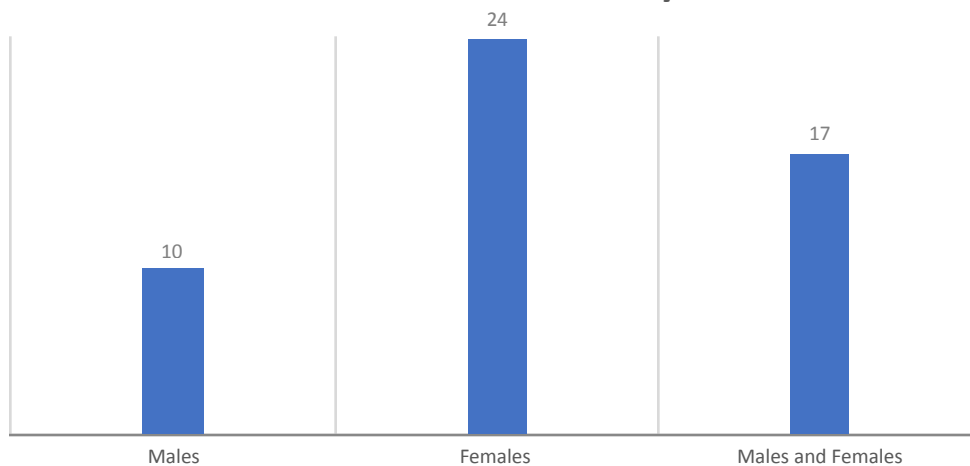
⁵¹ ‘Official: Forced Marriage is Slavery’, *Anti-Slavery International*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.antislavery.org/official-forced-marriage-slavery/>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Shea, *The Carpet Boy’s Gift*. D’Adamo, Iqbal. Kuklin, *Iqbal Masih and the Crusaders Fight Against Child Slavery*. Temple, *Taste of Salt*.

Missing.⁵⁴ In comparison, there are twenty-four texts focusing on the female experience of modern slavery, with fifteen fictional texts and nine survivor accounts. Examples of fictional texts include *Grace’s War* by Debbie Watkins, *Naked* by Stacey Trombley, *Dime* by E. R. Frank, and *Little Peach* by Peggy Kern.⁵⁵ The nine texts that discuss female survivors’ experiences include *A Babe in the Woods* by John Anthony Davis, *Breaking Free* by Abbey Sher, *Daddy’s Curse* by Luke G. Dahl, and *The Queen of Water* by Laura Resau and Maria Virginia Farinango.⁵⁶

Genders in Modern Slavery Books



It is important to note that there are seventeen books discussing the experiences of males and females together, such as Kimberly Rae’s *India’s Street Kids* series, and most comics created by the organisation Cause Vision. This American-based non-profit organisation was founded by Natsuko Utsumi in 2010 and raises awareness of human trafficking in under-informed communities. Their

⁵⁴ Ellis, *I am a Taxi*. Kimberley Rae, *The Street King* (South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014). Kelley, *Chained*. Charlene Nall Vermeulen, *Josh Bergman is Missing: Human Trafficking is Real* (29:11 Publishing, 2018).

⁵⁵ Watkins, *Grace’s War*. Stacey Trombley, *Naked* (Fort Collins: Entangled Teen, 2015). E. R. Frank, *Dime* (New York: Atheneum Books For Young Readers, 2015). Peggy Kern, *Little Peach* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2015).

⁵⁶ John Anthony Davis, *A Babe in the Woods: A True Story of Human Trafficking* (Norris: Raven Publishing, 2015). Sher, *Breaking Free*. Luke G. Dahl, *Daddy’s Curse: A Harrowing True Story of an Eight-Year-Old Girl Human Trafficking and Organised Crime Survivor* (CreateSpace Independent Platform, 2017). Resau and Farinango, *The Queen of Water*.

project is sponsored by the American Embassy and, at the time of publication, had distributed over 100,000 copies of twelve comics in thirteen different countries.⁵⁷

Their comics are based on journalistic research and interviews, with the first comic *Evelina* published in 2013 to warn teenage girls in Mexico about the dangers of sex trafficking.⁵⁸ The organisation has published several comics highlighting the exploitation of both men and women, boys and girls. For instance, *Stolen Promises*, set in Malaysia, focuses on the dangers facing migrant workers, describing how Stella and Anton were trafficked and forced to work for no pay.⁵⁹ Similarly, *Phea’s Dream*, set in Cambodia, focuses on forced labour and describes how the male character Sambath was tricked into working on a fishing boat for no pay.⁶⁰ The sexual exploitation of young boys is also alluded to in *Secrets*. Nene, Analisa and Joy are sexually exploited by Sarah, who became involved in child pornography when she became pregnant after months of sexual exploitation.⁶¹ When Sarah became pregnant, her abuser tells her:

‘You stupid girl!!! No way I’m supporting someone as gross as you! Go back to your village and operate an online child porn site or something! There must be lots of poor children that you can recruit! You can make enough money to raise your fatherless baby’.⁶²

On one occasion, the webcam viewers see Sarah’s young son in the background and ask ‘who is that boy’ and demand he ‘join the girls’.⁶³ Sarah refuses, telling them ‘he is only six years old’, but her boss orders her to include him, telling her ‘if you want to have a successful business, get the boy involved!’⁶⁴ Although there are several texts that include both male and female experiences of slavery, the majority focus on that of women and girls. The predominance of women and girls in these children’s books is largely because they make up a larger

⁵⁷ The countries that Cause Vision have distributed comics to include Mexico, Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia, U.S.A., Thailand, Indonesia, Colombia, Ecuador, Malaysia, Philippines and Guatemala.

⁵⁸ Emoto, *Evelina*. Teachers from Mexico City received a preview and then requested 50,000 copies of the comic. A Kickstarter campaign then raised funds for the distribution of 12,000 copies in 110 schools throughout Mexico. ‘A Comic Book To Fight Human Trafficking in Mexico’, Kickstarter, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/449223050/a-comic-book-to-fight-human-trafficking-in-mexico/description>.

⁵⁹ Natsuko Utsumi and Jed Siroy, *Stolen Promises* (New York: Cause Vision, 2016).

⁶⁰ Natsuko Utsumi and Tiffany Pascal, *Phea’s Dream* (New York: Cause Vision, 2014).

⁶¹ Natsuko Utsumi and Jed Siroy, *Secrets* (New York: Cause Vision, 2017), 29.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 15.

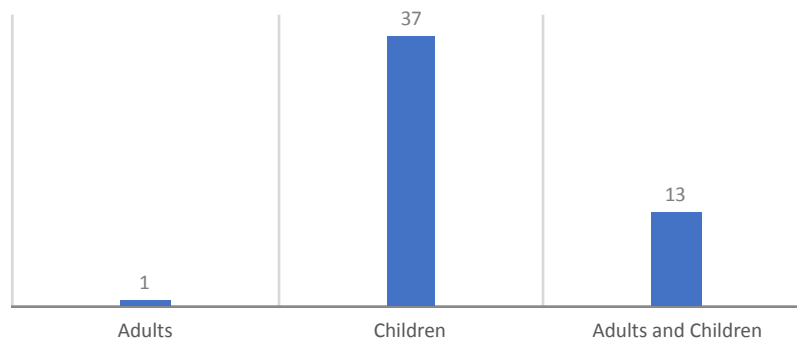
⁶⁴ Ibid, 21.

proportion of enslaved individuals. The Global Estimates of Modern Slavery from 2017 show that 71% of enslaved individuals are female—99% of individuals being sexual exploited are female, alongside 84% of people in forced marriages and 58% in privately imposed forced labour.⁶⁵ Thus, children’s books reflect the gender discrepancy that occurs in modern slavery. Nevertheless, it is important that children’s books do not disregard the fact that men and boys are also affected by this human rights issue.

Age and Slavery

There is a strong prevalence of female individuals in these texts, yet the predominance of child characters over adults is even greater. Indeed Sophie Hayes’ *Trafficked* is the only text that focuses on an adult’s experience of modern slavery. Hayes was twenty-four years old when she was kidnapped and sexually exploited by her boyfriend Kas. When Hayes arrived for a “holiday”, Kas confiscated her passport and threatened to kill her family if she did not prostitute herself for his financial gain.⁶⁶ Hayes was sexually exploited for six months before a life-threatening illness landed her in hospital, where her parents were called and took her home to England.⁶⁷ The text’s explicit nature means it is aimed at teenagers and young adults, with a view to educate young, vulnerable people about the dangers of trafficking. It is the only text emphasising an adult’s experience, with most books highlighting how modern slavery effects children—thirty-seven texts focus on children and thirteen contain both adults and children.

Ages of Characters In Texts



⁶⁵ May Bulman, ‘Women and girls make up ‘nearly three quarters’ of modern slavery victims’. *Independent*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/modern-slavery-victims-women-girls-majority-world-report-a7954066.html>

⁶⁶ Hayes, 75-77.

⁶⁷ Hayes called her parents under the watchful eye of Kas but they realised something was wrong. They drove to Italy around the time that Hayes was admitted to hospital and were close by when they got the call, meaning they could quickly get to Hayes before Kas could hide her away again. *Ibid*, 220-222.

Cause Vision’s comics provide the greatest range of age in characters, with both children and adults included in their texts, including Sambath in *Phea’s Dream*, Anton, Stella and Zara in *Stolen Promises*, and Sarah in *Secrets*.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, these adult characters are not the main characters—the story is always told from the child’s perspective and the twenty-something adults always form part of the “side-story”, where the child character learns what can happen should they accept a job abroad or trust an older boyfriend.⁶⁹ For example, in *Secrets* the sexual exploitation of Nene, Analisa, and Joy forms the main story, with Sarah’s past abuse forming a side story that explains how she came to exploit the three girls. Another example is Zara in *Stolen Promises*, an adult who tells the main child characters Kasih and Hana that she was sexually exploited by Leo, the man that Kasih is unknowingly communicating with online.⁷⁰ Zara tells the young girls that Leo promised her an exciting life in Kuala Lumpur, but when she arrived Zara was raped, abused, and sexually exploited for Leo’s gain.⁷¹ Cause Vision’s comics, and other children’s books on modern slavery, portray this human rights issue through child characters to educate children on the dangers of human trafficking and raise awareness about the ways in which children are enslaved. Although it is important that children are aware that adults are also affected, educating the child reader on how it can affect them and their peers is a priority for these texts.

Children’s Books as Educational Tools

This survey of children’s books on modern slavery demonstrates that antislavery activists are returning to this form of protest to raise awareness of this human rights issue among the younger generation. Authors and publishers are educating children and young adults about the prevalence of slavery, including whom it affects, where it occurs, and how it manifests. Many of these texts are read by children in schools, community groups, and at home, making them crucial educational tools.⁷² The importance of children’s literature as an educational tool has been widely supported. In his justification for an analysis of children’s

⁶⁸ Utsumi and Pascal, *Phea’s Dream*. Utsumi and Siroy, *Stolen Promises*. Utsumi and Siroy, *Secrets*.

⁶⁹ These examples are from Stella, Anton and Zara in *Stolen Promises*.

⁷⁰ Utsumi and Siroy, *Stolen Promises*, 21-22.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Sold* by Patricia McCormick is widely read in American schools, including the aforementioned Williams High School in Virginia. Cause Vision’s comics are also distributed in schools all over the world, as well as hostels, remote villages and at young reader events, such as the 2017 Komikon in the Philippines.

‘They don’t play or run or shout... They’re slaves’: The First Survey of Children’s Literature on Modern Slavery.
James.

literature, Peter Hunt contends that it is impossible for such texts not to be educational, as they will always reflect a certain ideology or didacticism.⁷³ There are numerous studies highlighting the importance of children’s books in educating children on various important subjects, such as race and cultural differences.⁷⁴ For example, Marta Collier contends that immersing children in stories of their own people will develop a cultural mirror image that reflects children’s place in the world as valid, valuable and voiced, therein enhancing their educational experience.⁷⁵ Children’s books on modern slavery are crucial educational tools in two important ways—firstly they highlight the various signs of slavery and secondly they unpack the scale of this issue.

As previously demonstrated, several survivor accounts highlight indicators of slavery, with Hall and Flores prioritising informing children about possible indicators of modern slavery. They urge the reader to educate themselves on these signs and make the authorities aware of any suspicions. Hayes’ account also includes key information on signs of slavery, along with organisations and helplines the reader can use to gather more information and voice any suspicions. There is also a chapter by Bex Keer from STOP THE TRAFFIK, which includes signs of modern slavery. She writes that an example of where someone has been trafficked from a community could be if their accommodation is empty or if they have left their job without contacting their colleagues, friends, or family.⁷⁶ Keer also explains what someone can do if they suspect modern slavery, encouraging people in the U.K. to contact the police or an antislavery organisation, such as STOP THE TRAFFIK.⁷⁷ Moreover, the text lists the contact details of the Sophie Hayes Foundation, CrimeStoppers, the Salvation Army, the U.K. Human Trafficking Centre, STOP THE TRAFFIK, and the William Wilberforce Trust.⁷⁸

⁷³ Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children’s Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1994), 3.

⁷⁴ Much research has been conducted on the importance of having characters of colour in children’s literature, with a focus on African American characters. See Nancy Larrick, “The All-White World of Children’s Books”, *The Saturday Review*, 11th September 1965, 63-65 and 84-85, Dorothy M. Broderick, *Image of the Black in Children’s Fiction* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1973), Rudine Sims, “Strong Black Girls: A Ten Year Old Responds to Fiction about Afro-Americans”, *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 16, no. 3 (1983): 21-28, Elena Monoyiou and Simoni Symeonidou, “The wonderful world of children’s books? Negotiating diversity through children’s literature”, *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 20, no. 6 (2016): 588-603, and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, Debbie Reese and Kathleen T. Horning, “Much Ado About *A Fine Dessert*: The Cultural Politics of Representing Slavery in Children’s Literature”, *Journal of Children’s Literature* 42, no. 2 (Autumn 2016): 6-17.

⁷⁵ Collier also maintains that including African American characters in juvenile literature is crucial to the enhancement of black children’s educational experience. Marta Collier, “Through The Looking Glass”, *Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 235.

⁷⁶ Bex Keer in Hayes, 301.

⁷⁷ Keer recognises that contacting the police is not always possible in other countries. Keer in Hayes, 302.

⁷⁸ Hayes, 307.

There are also several fictional children’s books that highlight indicators of modern slavery, with Cause Vision providing strong examples. Every comic contains a specific section on ‘What is Human Trafficking’ and signs of ‘Trafficked Children’, and advises the reader on ‘how to report suspected cases of trafficking’, alongside providing the details of local organisations that combat modern slavery. These sections accompany each story, in which the various signs of exploitation are further demonstrated. For example, when Ashley in *Where is Dylan* is sexually exploited, it is her unexplained school absences, slipping grades, and new material possessions that concern her friend Jessica and prompt her to voice her fears.⁷⁹ Moreover, each comic book is tailored to the distribution country, highlighting the different types of slavery and enslavement methods most prevalent in that country. For example, Stella and Anton in *Stolen Promises* travel to Malaysia for work and find themselves trapped as forced labourers.⁸⁰ These characters’ stories reflect the current situation in Malaysia, in which the majority of slavery victims are both documented and undocumented migrant workers.⁸¹ Stella and Anton’s passports are confiscated, their contracts violated, wages withheld and movements restricted, all of which the Trafficking in Persons (T.I.P.) Report identifies as common factors of enslavement among migrant workers in Malaysia.⁸²

Another example is *Secrets*, in which women and children are sexually exploited in a remote village in the Philippines, which aligns with the T.I.P. Report observation that ‘women and children in indigenous communities and remote areas of the Philippines are the most vulnerable to sex trafficking’.⁸³ The Report goes on to state that ‘young Filipino girls and boys are increasingly induced to perform sex acts for live internet broadcast’, which is precisely what happens to Nene, Analisa, and Joy.⁸⁴ Thus, Cause Vision’s comics and survivor accounts are vital in educating children on the signs of enslavement. They implore the reader to learn about the signs of slavery and the different ways it can manifest, in the hopes that they can help someone if the situation arises.

⁷⁹ Utsumi and Chin, *Where is Dylan?*, 9-10.

⁸⁰ Utsumi and Siroy, *Stolen Promises*.

⁸¹ *Trafficking in Persons Report June 2018*, U.S. Department of State Publication, Office of the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights (Designed and printed by A/GIS/GPS, 2018), accessed September 6, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/282798.pdf>, 289.

⁸² *Ibid*, 289.

⁸³ *Trafficking in Persons Report June 2018*, 352. Natsuko Utsumi, *Secrets*.

⁸⁴ *Trafficking in Persons Report June 2018*, 352. Utsumi, *Secrets*, 13-14.

The Scale of Modern Slavery

These texts educate children on modern slavery by unpacking the scale of this human rights issue. The Global Slavery Index of 2018 reported that 40.3 million individuals are enslaved, with 29.4 million people in forced labourer and 15.4 million individuals trapped in forced marriages.⁸⁵ Facts and figures about modern slavery are communicated to readers in several survivor accounts, including Flores, Hall, and Hayes’ accounts. In the latter, U.K. coordinator of STOP THE TRAFFIK Simon Chorley states that there were ‘at least 12.3 million people in forced labour worldwide’ and ‘approximately 2.5 million are victims of human trafficking’.⁸⁶ Flores and Hall also state that there were ‘twenty-seven million’ individuals enslaved worldwide, an accurate estimate at the time of publication.⁸⁷ Fictional texts also provide such figures—Sheth’s *Boys Without Names* includes numbers on child labour from 2008 and McCormick’s *Sold* contains detailed statistics about modern slavery.⁸⁸ Children’s literature further unpacks the scale of modern slavery through the stories and accounts themselves. These modern slavery texts highlight various forms of modern slavery and demonstrate its occurrence across five continents—North America, South America, Europe, Africa and Asia. At the time of publication, Cause Vision alone has distributed over 100,000 copies of 12 comics in 13 different countries, informing children around the world about modern slavery, with comics passed out in schools, donated to visitors at the 2017 Komikon in the Philippines and given to children in hostels and remote villages.⁸⁹ Thus, children’s books unpack the scale of modern slavery by highlighting the facts, establishing its widespread nature and demonstrating the different ways in which slavery can manifest. Alongside emphasising the different signs of slavery, unpacking its scale educates children on modern slavery and thus these texts are important educatory tools.

Conclusion

This article presents the first survey of children’s books on modern slavery and highlights activists’ use of juvenile literature to protest this human rights issue.

⁸⁵ ‘Findings’, Global Slavery Index 2018

⁸⁶ Hayes, 305-306.

⁸⁷ Hall and Wysocky, 23. Flores, 282. This figure was thought to be an accurate estimate at the time of printing.

⁸⁸ Sheth, 135. McCormick, 271-276.

⁸⁹ Cause Vision have set their stories and distributed comics in the following countries – Mexico, Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Colombia, Ecuador, the U.S.A., Malaysia, Philippines, Guatemala and a forthcoming publication in Sweden.

Exploring the emergence of children’s books on modern slavery from 1992 to the present day, this article considers how fictional and non-fictional texts bring modern slavery to children. It highlights the texts written by survivors, noting how they educate children on the difficulties of life post-enslavement and the various signs of its occurrence. Listening to and using survivors’ experiences is vital in the eradication of modern slavery, with survivor Minh Dang noting that the antislavery movement must ‘be more inclusive’ and ‘ensure that survivors can contribute in meaningful ways’.⁹⁰ Although fictional texts dominate this field, many of these authors base their fictional stories on survivor accounts and/or carry out their own research to raise awareness of slavery’s impact on people around the world. It is important that children’s books continue to employ survivor narratives, using their experiences and knowledge to educate children on this issue. This survey also demonstrates the breadth of children’s literature on modern slavery. It highlights how these texts place slavery across five continents, with most based in the U.S.A. and India, and emphasises different types of modern slavery, with a focus on sexual exploitation and forced labour. It also analyses the individuals in these texts, examining how women and girls are more prevalent than men and boys, with child characters prevailing over adults. Preliminary analysis of these texts reveals their educational value and demonstrates that they are important educatory tools on this human rights issue. Children’s books highlight the signs of slavery, educating the reader on how it manifests and what they should do if they suspect its occurrence. Moreover, these texts unpack the scale of slavery, demonstrating its prevalence around the world and reinforcing to young readers the importance of eradicating this issue. Children’s books are vital in raising awareness and educating young readers on modern slavery and the antislavery movement, and thus their creation and distribution must continue.

⁹⁰ Minh Dang, ‘Survivors are speaking. Are we listening?’, *Global Slavery Index 2018*, 19.

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