

#15 (ELLA COCKBAIN)

This transcription was provided by a transcription service that claims a high degree of accuracy combining artificial intelligence and human checking. While their advertising claims accuracy for clear audio transcriptions, Reducing Crime LLC and Jerry Ratcliffe have not checked the transcription and make no warranties or representations of any sort, implied or expressed about the reliability, availability or accuracy of services, products, information or transcriptions contained on our website or in this document for any purpose. We make no claim that this transcription is verbatim. Any reliance that you place on the information contained within this document is strictly at your own risk.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Jerry Ratcliffe again with Reducing Crime, a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service, and leading crime and policing researchers.

Dr. Ella Cockbain is an Associate Professor in the Department of Security and Crime Science at University College London. We discuss the challenges of tackling human trafficking, and labor and sexual exploitation. Find out more in this episode at reducingcrime.com and on Twitter at [_reducingcrime](https://twitter.com/_reducingcrime).

The awesome Ella Cockbain is coming up in a moment, but first a quick heads-up that I'm lining up two new police commanders crime reduction courses in New Jersey and Florida. These three day courses are ideally suited to mid-level police command staff and senior analysts and the course is the only authorized training program accompanying the book, *Reducing Crime: A Companion for Police Leaders*. There'll be one course in Central Jersey in late January and another in the Tampa Bay area in February. What better way to beat the winter? Details will be available soon at reducingcrime.com/events and announced on Twitter at [_reducingcrime](https://twitter.com/_reducingcrime).

Dr. Ella Cockbain is an Associate Professor in the Department of Security and Crime Science at University College London and a visiting research fellow at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, and labor exploitation. Ella is interested in rigorous outcome-oriented research and nuanced evidence-informed responses to complex issues. She's worked closely with organizations across the public, private, and third-party sectors, and contributed to counter-trafficking interventions at national and international levels, including her co-chairing of the UK's National Working Group on the prevention of modern slavery.

Her new book is called *Offender and Victim Networks in Human Trafficking*. Ella and I talked over a nice cupper at the Jill Dando Institute for Crime Science in London. She told me about trafficking, exploitive business policies, legislation that makes things worse not better, and laundry detergent bubbles. In return, I learned how to use the right language around this whole area, question Norwegian sexual prowess, and upset Liam Neeson. So pretty much my normal contribution to an episode. How's your coffee?

Ella Cockbain:

It's all right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm a tea person. In America, it's different types of tea bags, and you can have it with lemon, you can have it with honey, and you come here, it's a cup of tea. There's a mug, there's a teabag, there's hot water, and there's some milk, and get on with it. I love that. I miss that.

REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Ella Cockbain:

Time to come home.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Won't go that far. Come home in time for Brexit. Yeah, that sucks.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah, that's true. Possibly not the best time to come home.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh yeah. A good cup of tea. Lovely. How did you get into this? You went to university as an undergraduate, didn't you?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Where'd you go?

Ella Cockbain:

I went to Oxford. I'm going to get torn apart for being even more ivory towers than I already was. [inaudible 00:03:04].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, no. Look, people have heard of Oxford. The podcast interview I did with Renee Mitchell, she is like, "Fuck it. I went to Cambridge." This is not something we play down. It's like, "That's great." What did you do at Oxford?

Ella Cockbain:

I did modern languages. So, Russian and German.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you succeeded. You're still here in academia, so you didn't fail, then.

Ella Cockbain:

And then I worked in advertising for a while and it got to the point where I was having to write strategy on the best way to do laundry demos. And whether having the bubbles and inch bigger or pink or purple would make people buy more washing powder.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, that's an exciting field to be in.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah, so I was losing the will to live and that's when I came back to academia and originally because of the Russia connection, I was particularly interested in trafficking from the former Soviet union to the UK, started working in the field and was told actually, "That's not our biggest problem right now." So, moved on over to do a lot of work on trafficking for the race forms of labor exploitation, and then working across a range of trafficking issues at the moment now. And I have nothing to do with washing powder.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's probably a good thing, right? So why is the field of trafficking... Why is it such a shit show? Because it's just become a political football, hasn't it? This whole field, it's really grown. Your profiles grown and you got lots of people following you on Twitter. There's a lot of attention being paid to it. There must be times you must think, "Can I just go back to figuring out the bubbles on laundry detergent?"

Ella Cockbain:

It's a difficult field because there's a fundamental tension there. On the one hand, you get these extreme cases of exploitation that fall under the trafficking umbrella, that really, really are horrific and absolutely, you would want more to be done about them.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Can you give me an example?

Ella Cockbain:

One case I'd worked on, a guy who was recruited while he was sleeping rough and then he was-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Here in the UK?

Ella Cockbain:

Here in the UK. He was taken to a site and moved around the country and exploited in the construction industry for 10, 20 years. So, that is no long, long time to be living in a shed or a horse box or a broken down caravan with five other people with nowhere to wash given a few pieces of bread a day.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And there was no way for him to figure a way out of that?

Ella Cockbain:

Well, he just didn't really have many other options. And that is the problem. It's much less about this abduction myth and this idea of people being chained to radiators and not able to escape for that reason. A lot of the time, it just comes down to psychological manipulation, limited alternatives. Where else are you going to go?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it's not like the movie Taken then.

Ella Cockbain:

No. So have Liam Neeson in Taken with American girl being snatched off the streets of Paris and that's just not what happens. But yeah, so you have these really extreme dreadful cases, but then, it's also really important to recognize that trafficking is not this neatly delineated issue that exists separately from everything else that's going on. And it's increasingly recognized that actually what we're dealing with here is a spectrum of exploitation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So trafficking's maybe not the best word. It's an umbrella term now, isn't it?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But really, there's not necessarily much trafficking. It's a great deal of just exploitation, right? Trafficking is involved.

Ella Cockbain:

There's movement of people often, but not always. In some places that doesn't have to be any movement for it to qualify as trafficking. The movement could be international, it could be within countries, it could be short distances, it could be permanent, or it could be just for a few hours. So there's real variation there. So yeah, I think exploitation in many ways is more harmful. Although again, it's quite a slippery concept that isn't clearly defined. In many ways, what we're talking about is labor abuses, sexual abuses, abuses of other human rights and dignities or welfare, things like taking people's organs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So there's this big amorphous thing that we're calling trafficking, but it's really exploitation as much as trafficking as anything else, but it seems chaotic. And now also seems to be a bit of a political football as well.

Ella Cockbain:

Absolutely. So trafficking is an easy issue for politicians to get behind because who doesn't care about people. And if you frame it-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's very easy to be on the tough on crime area, because nobody cares about traffickers, right?

Ella Cockbain:

And it gets painted in more and more dramatic terms. I was listening to a parliamentary debate the other day, where they were talking about merchants of evil and slave traders in reference to modern day traffickers who really that dramatic language is pretty misleading.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Really?

Ella Cockbain:

It's pretty inaccurate. And actually a lot of the time it's structures and systems that create the opportunity for abuse, just as much as individual people taking advantage of those loopholes, those opportunities. So we have, for example, a big tension in the UK between on the one hand, big push behind the anti modern slavery agenda, which has been the flagship project of prime minister May.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Theresa May.

Ella Cockbain:

Theresa May, exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or, by the time this comes out, ex-prime minister, Theresa May.

Ella Cockbain:

Yes. Good point. And on the other hand, the conservative government has been aggressively pursuing a hostile environment agenda on immigration. So, the introduction of things like an offense of illegal working. If you make it criminal for people to work, if they have irregular migration status, what you're doing is you're opening up a whole set of people who are then very vulnerable to exploitation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So this is fascinating. So we're trying to be tough on the individuals involved, but equally policy can create the circumstances that allow them to flourish.

Ella Cockbain:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because crime just needs an opportunity. Offenders take advantage of opportunity, the whole environmental criminology field, the opportunities field is about reducing criminal opportunities. And so what you're saying is that, in actual fact, government policies can create opportunities.

Ella Cockbain:

Yes and in the exact same way, business practices can create opportunities. So if we're talking about trafficking for labor exploitation, then we need to look at things like the decline of unionization, reduce collective bargaining coverage so workers less able to stand up for themselves as a group, zero hours contracts, more precarity in the workforce. So all these factors that actually mean you have a disempowered workforce that is far less able to stand up for their rights.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So that's going to be similar to the situation potentially in the United States, where we have issues about border walls and increased focus on legal immigrants and these things aren't going to stop people coming into the country, but is the potential there to create more opportunity for exploitation of people?

Ella Cockbain:

Trump, for example, loves the whole trafficking angle because it plays into Mexicans are racist, central and South Americans are people traffickers bringing people across the border. And it is that individualization of evil for want of a better word. Whereas actually desperate people with limited alternatives end up in situations where they are very vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've done work for probably close to a decade in El Salvador. And I get the driving forces that push people away. The violence down there... It's unconscionable. But to some degree, the counter argument would be, well, they're not wrong. There is trafficking coming into the United States. What you're saying is that there's a potential to create policy that actually increased the opportunities for trafficking and exploitation. It has this unintended consequence.

Ella Cockbain:

Well, that's an interesting question because the term unintended consequence implies it's accidental. In this area, I think we need to ask some serious questions about which consequences are unintended and what was the consequence that people knew was going to happen and didn't particularly care? And we see that very, very obviously, the distinction when it comes to measures that are packaged up as ways of combating sex trafficking.

For example, in the States, the introduction of the FOSTA-SESTA legislation, which is Fight Online Sex Trafficking And Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, which is designed as this big package of legislative reform that will tackle this absolute evil that is sex trafficking. But actually what it is in reality, is it makes life very, very, very difficult for anyone in the sex industry. Be it someone there by choice, be it someone there by circumstance because of limited alternatives or someone who's coerced.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the FOSTA-SESTA Act, which is US legislation and now is law, actually has the potential to increase the very thing it's designed to try and combat?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. It makes people much more vulnerable to abuse. So what it does is it effectively holds businesses accountable for the material they're hosting on their website. So it makes it illegal to host content related to advertising prostitution. Regardless of whether that commercial sex exchange is consensual or not. So what that does is it pushes people underground. It makes it far harder to find clients safely. It makes it far harder to vet clients safely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm sure it also increases risks in terms of managing money and the finances around all these areas as well. So for people who are not being trafficked, but people who are voluntarily deciding that sex work is how are they going to seek some of their employment, we're actually making it harder for them and driving them towards the very thing that the act is designed to stop.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think that those consequences were potentially known by the framers of the legislation?

Ella Cockbain:

Yes. There was a lot of discussion before the legislation was passed about the harms that for example, sex worker organizations envisage these laws with do and they weren't properly listened to. And it was brought in and these harms are then playing out. There's been stories of law enforcement in the States saying what we're now struggling with is now that these big sites where we could find all the ads have gone, don't host these ads anymore. It's much, much harder for us to identify suspicious cases where we do think there's genuine abuse.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, good grief.

Ella Cockbain:

So it's failing on the front it was designed to do extensively. And at the same time it's causing huge collateral damage to an already vulnerable and marginalized population of sex workers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How can we demonstrate this?

Ella Cockbain:

The trouble is, and this is where trafficking becomes such a complex field to work in, is that it's not neutral terrain.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It comes with this moral baggage that people bring.

Ella Cockbain:

Enormous moral baggage, highly emotive, highly politicized, despite being a crosscutting political issue. And that makes it very, very challenging. So a big policy question at the moment is around prostitution laws and there's a big push towards introducing something called the Nordic model where what you do is you criminalize the act of buying sex while supposedly removing the sanctions on people selling sex.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That makes no sense whatsoever.

Ella Cockbain:

No, it's total madness.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And this they're doing this in Norway?

Ella Cockbain:

They've done it in Norway. They've done it in Sweden.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To be fair, it's so damn cold up there probably nobody's having sex anyway when the Norwegian summer lasts about 25 minutes. And I'm sorry listeners from Norway. I know there's three lessons from Norway who are now just fuming. It's cold and expensive in Norway. So, that makes absolutely no sense. You're decriminalizing it to some degree. Let's just keep the relationship- [crosstalk 00:15:05].

Ella Cockbain:

That is how the people proposing this legislation say it is. They say it's decriminalizing. It's not. What it's really doing is it's criminalizing people selling sex by proxy because their clients are now doing something illegal. So they're pushed into much more dangerous situations. They have to go to areas they might not go to. There's potentially taking on riskier clients and not being able to vet them as well. And also, there's still, and we're seeing this in Ireland right now, a whole host of laws that are being used to crack down on people selling sex.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So now what we have is these types of legislation are being suggested for the UK.

Ella Cockbain:

They're being suggested for the UK while shamelessly maintaining the pretense that this will combat trafficking and that it will reduce the burden on vulnerable people and completely ignoring all the evidence to the country, including for example, very recently two migrant sex workers in Ireland were jailed and they were jailed under brothel keeping offenses. And what they were doing is they were working together for safety. So the idea that this legislative change is going to protect so-called victims is just flagrantly untrue.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So they weren't necessarily being trafficked. They weren't being pimped out. What's the right language around this?

Ella Cockbain:

Pimped isn't a great word because it comes with a lot of baggage and it comes with a lot of racial baggage, as well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So they weren't being exploited?

Ella Cockbain:

Exploited [crosstalk 00:16:29].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They weren't being exploited. Thank you. So they won't be exploited by a third party. They weren't being trafficked. They were voluntarily working as sex workers and the legislation was used in what sounds to me like the most inappropriate way towards people who are the least likely harmful people in this environment. So there's all this evidence that this stuff is harmful. What is it like being a researcher working in this environment then, when the area we're working in is this whole politically charged, moral, probably should have air quotes around that because some of it sounds very immoral, environment?

Ella Cockbain:

It's endlessly frustrating.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You want to go back to laundry bubbles, don't you? Let me back to the laundry detergent. I want to write policy papers on bubble size.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. It's interesting. It's a fascinating area. But it's a hugely frustrating area because I think there's some really questionable and worrying things going on in this space. I think there's also a lot of people who work in this space, be it as academics or be it as practitioners or policy makers, because they genuinely do want to make conditions better for people. But there's, again, this tension between advocacy and accuracy. So we have these big sweeping claims, which pretty much everyone in the field knows are unsubstantiated finger in their air myths, like trafficking as the fastest growing crime threat or trafficking is the third most profitable organized crime, claims about the scale, which are based on very dubious statistical exercises that lack transparency, lack rigor, like for example, the global slavery index claims there are 40.3 million slaves in the world.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's not accurate?

Ella Cockbain:

Nope. Not in the list. It's based on methods that are very, very secretive, that have been heavily criticized, a very small number of identity cases.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So we're talking could be wrong by tens of millions?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But they said 40.3 to give it that spurious accuracy feel to it.

Ella Cockbain:

The thing is fluctuate millions each time because they shift their algorithms or their methods slightly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But, as somebody who knows very little about this field, what I'm starting to understand from you is that there isn't, it's either slavery or not slavery. What we have is this continuum of absolutely awful cases in one hand. And as you progress down this continuum, you just gently slide into people who are voluntarily engaged in activities.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah and-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Everything in between.

Ella Cockbain:

... Lower level labor abuses, which are also bad and should also be tackled. But there isn't that appetite to tackle those because a lot of those are a function of our global economic system and the way businesses operate locally. And there isn't that incentive.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So they like to frame trafficking as sex trafficking and vulnerable children and women because that looks good on our annual reports with photographs of us seeming to care, but we're not actually talking about the exploitation of migrant workers that we pay minimum wage to, to do incredibly long hours and six and a half days work a week.

Ella Cockbain:

Exactly. And sometimes, labor trafficking, more and more attention is being paid to it, but it's still treated as this exceptionalized separate issue. As if that's somehow completely different from routine labor abuses.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I get the sense from following you on Twitter and seeing some of the Twitter exchanges. Let's call them by their polite term. The shit show that is sometimes Twitter, right? Wake up in the morning, "What the fuck is going on now?" I get the sense that a lot of this stuff is racially tinge as well. That we do love to demonize don't we?

Ella Cockbain:

Yes. And this, interestingly, is there from the very beginning. So the origins of modern responses to trafficking date back to the early 20th century and a big moral panic around the so called white slave trade. And really this was wrapped up with a social hygiene agenda. So again, morality coming in, fear around sex work. It was wrapped up with fear of immigrants and this whole idea of this threat, let's say in New York from the opium dens and the local women being corrupted. And so we see that with trafficking today, as well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So is it actually more realistic that unlike in Taken, the characters being rescued by Liam Neeson, what's much more lightly is a Liam Neeson type character, is actually taking away his housekeeper's passport and paying her a minimum wage?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. Basically what it comes down to is-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And if you're Liam Neeson, by the way, I'm not talking about you, please don't come and sort me out. I'm a big fan. Love your work.

Ella Cockbain:

You'll know you've made the big time when Liam Neeson pays to sue you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I said Liam Neeson type character. Shit. Now I'm in it. Love his work. Love his work. Great movies. Realistic. Absolutely on point.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. Really the issue is how are you defining the problem? Because the nature of the problem comes around to what are you identifying as trafficking cases in the first place? So we've seen a really interesting shift in the UK since the modern slavery act came in in 2015. There's a much, much higher proportion of identified suspected trafficking victims are British and that's largely been driven by the attention around so called county lines. So this idea of young people and vulnerable adults being used to move drugs from urban areas to rural areas and sell them.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We almost don't have a decent measure of exploitation in trafficking because we keep redefining it. And so every time we do that, the measures start to change because people start classifying it in ways that they weren't doing so in the past.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. So there's absolutely this exploitation crease and it again comes down to the fact you have these broad and inclusive definitions that could cover lots of stuff.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But it isn't that a good thing?

Ella Cockbain:

In many ways it is a good thing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because it's shining light on criminal opportunities that perhaps hadn't received a focus in the past.

Ella Cockbain:

Yes, absolutely worth paying attention to these issues, especially where people are being exposed, especially when we're dealing with something like children. At the same time, it's very, very difficult from the perspectives of things like measurement. If it's not crystal clear what is and isn't being counted as trafficking. So for example, some child sexual exploitation cases will be seen as trafficking. Others won't. But there isn't really a agreement on when they should be and when they shouldn't be. So we have these figures for suspected trafficking cases in the UK. And at last count it was close on 7,000. So it's been going up year on year since the data first started being collected in 2009.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Each case is an individual victim?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. Individual suspected victim. But if you went all child abuse we're now treating as trafficking, rather than a unclearly defined subset of it, then potentially your numbers just explode through the roof.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. [crosstalk 00:23:26]. Changes the scale of what you have to provide.

Ella Cockbain:

Right. Do you just want to be identifying more and more potential trafficking victims and giving them that label? Or do you want to be providing people with meaningful longterm support?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And if we can't even accurately measure it, we don't know if we're having any effect on it.

Ella Cockbain:

Absolutely. And that's particularly an issue with big global estimates of scale, but I am being quite scathing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The only person that's going to come out of this badly is me. Because Liam Neeson is going to hunt me down. I'm screwed at the result of this. I've got to edit Liam Neeson out. Every time I mention him, all the listeners are going to hear is... Because I put white noise on the back of it.

Who's doing this well?

Ella Cockbain:

I think there's some really good research in the States by Amy Farrell and colleagues looking around law enforcement responses to human trafficking.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that the law enforcement response is good? Is law enforcement figuring out how to deal with this?

Ella Cockbain:

She has a wonderful quote that really stuck with me in one of her articles about how, I'm paraphrasing here, so too often we rest on the comfortable assumption that once you've passed the laws you've done what needs to be done. And actually, in the States as well, there's this big implementation gap.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Politicians love the idea of passing laws because it's all they can do, but they never want to sink the money into actually doing anything, implementing those laws.

Ella Cockbain:

Exactly. If you start to see trafficking as part of the bigger picture, then we need to be asking questions about things like austerity measures, funding for mental health services, funding for general houses, funding for the police. In many ways, it's easier to say we're going to put 5 million into tackling trafficking than to say we're going to fundamentally look at the way our labor markets operate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's interesting in having followed policing in some fashion for now, the last 35 years, this just seems like a new initiative without ever taking anything away. I've never seen an area of police work taken away from the police, over the last 30 years, but I've seen stuff added to it. And it never comes with additional resources. The policing changes are probably likely to have modest impact. Whereas what we're really doing is not tackling the structural capacity and nor the opportunity structures. Deregulation of business is going to encourage them to exploit workers because they'll make more money.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. And we have in the UK, for example, woefully under resourced labor inspectorates that are far below the national minimum standards expected internationally.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There'd be some listeners from America going, "What's a labor inspectorate? They don't even have that in some places.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. But your chances of actually being checked up on a very, very low. With policing what I would say is two things. So there's been a big investment in a national police transformation program around slavery-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Here in the UK.

Ella Cockbain:

Here in the UK. One thing that's quite worrying is, they've been funded to do a lot of work and have been trying very hard to bring up awareness and understanding and improve data collection. And the numbers of recorded offenses

have gone up. And lots of stuff's been going on, but it was funded very short term. And then the big question is, well, what happens next? And the second question, your second point, is the more I engage with sex worker organizations, they are experiencing things which are framed as welfare checks and really it's feeling like surveillance and enforcement under the anti-trafficking umbrella. And I think that scenario where we need much, much better engagement with sex worker groups and representation at the table and traffic into discussions, and the same goes for those who represent domestic workers, bringing these groups to the table to ensure that anti-trafficking measures aren't harmful to other groups affected.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It sounds almost like we can't even decide what are the goals we're trying to achieve. And that's the part that worries me most about this is the 21st century, sorry to be depressing here for a moment, but it sounds like we can't accurately measure this. We can't decide how to define this. We can't figure out what we want to do in terms of addressing it. And we can't even figure out... We've got all these competing goals. It sounds like we have no clear idea what we're doing. And I'm trying to think about this from this perspective, not of a national policy maker, but if I was trying to figure out a policy for a city like London or a city like Philadelphia, I wouldn't even know where to start on the basis of this amorphous, ill-defined concern with all these potential harmful consequences. Was that accurate?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. I think lots is going on. There's some good things that are being achieved. I think there's some not very good things that are happening, but I think, yeah, the lack of clarity and focus and transparency is a real concern. So, A, we need clarity around definitions, but B, we need investment in really good, larger scale, original research that would help you understand, for example, these things that are used so widely as indicators actually are those just characteristics of the general job market.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So that comes to something that I wanted to talk about. I'm trying to think about it from the policing perspective, because there is increased focus on the public and police officers being asked to identify the signs of trafficking and is that area reliable? So there's two pieces to this. How robust is that? And then the second piece I want to ask is how do we know what to do with it when we see it?

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. So the issue of indicators is a really, really big challenge in this space and something that worries me more and more. What you have is a set, a long list of indicators that are used in varying versions, very widely. And they often form the basis of measurements and they form the basis of awareness campaigns.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I've seen these things. Yeah. Be aware of trafficking.

Ella Cockbain:

And people are being told to spot the signs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm not really sure I have any idea what I'd be looking at.

Ella Cockbain:

No, I don't think most people can. In some instances, yes, potentially you can spot abuse and you should be reporting it and you could do good things.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So obvious things like?

Ella Cockbain:

Like I see my neighbor has someone living at the end of their garden in a shed that is emaciated, I'm talking extreme because I think when you go to the extremes, it becomes easier. But often what these indicators are, is they've been developed a long time ago around expert consensus on what we might see in trafficking. And they haven't really ever been tested. They've not been updated. And we don't know A, to what extent they genuinely apply to cases identified as trafficking and B, and just as importantly, how good are they at distinguishing between trafficking and non trafficking?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, say we do find it. So, I'm senior police officer in a town in the United States, for example, and I get called somewhere. There is a suspicion that there is trafficking taking place at... Stereotype, but here we go, a nail salon, right? In the town. I don't get a real sense that we know what to do with that. We might investigate that individual premises, but what do we do as a citywide policy?

Ella Cockbain:

I think it's really, really, really, really challenging. I have a lot of sympathy for individual officers encountering suspected victims of trafficking that we know that people who have been trafficked and abused may not disclose for lots and lots of reasons. They might be afraid of recriminations from the people who've been exploited in them. They might be scared of immigration enforcement.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, they may come from places where the relationship with law enforcement isn't what it could be.

Ella Cockbain:

Exactly. So there's lots and lots of reasons why someone who genuinely would qualify under whatever national standards, as a trafficking victim, wouldn't say so. But there's also people who just quite simply aren't exploited in that they don't self-define as it. And they think the circumstance they're in is acceptable. So how you distinguish between the two is really, really charged.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm here to rescue you. I don't want to be rescued.

Ella Cockbain:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Stop taking away my employment.

Ella Cockbain:

Absolutely. And that's why there's a big move again, coming back to the sex worker community, because a lot of the pushback has been happening there, towards this call for rights, not rescue.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. The piece that I find so difficult about this is that with these broad brush legislations that seek to protect people at one area, they also penalize people at the other end of the spectrum who are voluntarily engaged, for example, in sex work. And they're not being exploited by a third party and they're not being trafficked and it's taking away their agency for their own employment and for their own decisions about how they want to live their life.

Ella Cockbain:

Absolutely. And the other issue building on that is that a lot of portrayals of trafficking victims are very, very two dimensional and it's this perfect victims. And don't recognize that actually these are complex people too, who have agency, who make decisions, who make choices, often under very constrained circumstances, and that doesn't stop the main victims, but we need to recognize that a lot more. And also, it then boils over into what you do once you've identified someone as a potential victim, because again, you need to respect their autonomy and their agency in being able to make decisions about what's best for them next.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think what's really interesting, for me, from this discussion is a realization that what we're actually talking about is this continuum where so much of what we should be concerned about isn't so easily labeled and identified as teams of people from former Soviet block with heavy weapons shepherding lots of people together in container trucks, but it's actually a much more amorphous, creeping exploitation that's just very punishusly working its way through our society. It feels like a really challenging area to be working in.

Ella Cockbain:

That's a good characterization of it. And it's also a much, much bigger challenge to try and address, which perhaps is scary.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Scary, probably because we're not talking about the size and shapes of bubbles in laundry detergent. This work has real implications for people in the United States and in Australia and in the UK, and even in Norway where it's incredibly cold and there just aren't enough Liam Neeson's to go around.

Ella Cockbain:

Yeah. And as is individual research working on trafficking related issues, that's the tension I feel more and more. I'm working on identified cases at the extremes. And I think they're important. And I think by understanding these better, we can do more to combat them. But at the same time, I'm increasingly aware that we've got to put these individual

cases within their context. And we've got to look more at the systems and we've got to ask difficult questions about what needs to be done there, as well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So we're not going to arrest our way out of this problem. It's much better to use these cases as examples of identifying where the structural weaknesses are in our society and shutting down the opportunities.

Ella Cockbain:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you don't want to go back to laundry detergent?

Ella Cockbain:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What I can do is on the podcast page of reducingcrime.com, I can put a link to some of the materials that you have so that people can read a little bit more about this area. Because I think lots of people are going to find it fascinating.

Ella Cockbain:

That would be great. Thank you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I will also put a link to an email address where people can contact me, even though I'm going to be going into hiding because Liam Neeson and Liam Neeson fans are going to be stalking me. Liam, you're never going to listen to this, but if you do, love your work and yeah, Taken was a splendid movie, even if we just learned it didn't bear much relationship to most of the exploitation trafficking that goes on. And I'm sure your housekeeper's wonderful too. And legitimately employed. I never meant to cast dispersions there. Oh, dear God. All right, then.

So I'm just going to go off and form the Liam Neeson fan club to-

Ella Cockbain:

Excellent. Sign me up.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... To assuage my guilt. And I'm just going to finish off by saying Ella Cockbain, thank you very much, indeed.

Ella Cockbain:

Thank you for having me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

You've been listening to episode 15 of Reducing Crime, recorded in London in June, 2019. Other episodes lurk at reducingcrime.com or the usual podcasty places. New episodes are announced on Twitter at [@_reducingcrime](https://twitter.com/_reducingcrime). Hey, be safe and best of luck.