

## Government and Non-Government Policy Responses to Anti-Trafficking Initiatives: A Discursive Analysis of the Construction of the Problem of Human Trafficking in Australia and Thailand

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**Abstract :** Human trafficking is a gross violation of human rights and thus invokes a strong response particularly throughout the global academic community. A longstanding tension throughout academic debate remains the question of a relationship between anti-trafficking policy and sex industry policy. In Australia, over the previous decade, many human trafficking investigations have related to the sexual exploitation of female victims, and convictions in Australia to date have often been for trafficking women from Thailand. Sex industry policy in Australia varies between states, providing a rich contextual landscape in which to explore this relationship. The purpose of this study was to deconstruct how meaning is constructed surrounding human trafficking throughout these supposedly related political discourses in Australia. In order to analyse the discursive construction of the problem of human trafficking in relation to sex industry policy, a discursive analysis was conducted. The methodology of the study was informed by a feminist theoretical framework, and included academic sources and grey literature such as organisational reports and policy statements regarding anti-trafficking initiatives. The scope of grey literature was restricted to Australian and Thai government and non-government organisation texts. The chosen methodology facilitated a qualitative exploration of the influence of feminist discourses over political discourse in this arena. The discursive analysis exposed clusters of active feminist debates interacting with sex industry policy within individual states throughout Australia. Additionally, strongly opposed sex industry perspectives were uncovered within these competing feminist frameworks. While the influence these groups may exert over policy differs, the debate constructs a discursive relationship between human trafficking and sex industry policy. This is problematic because anti-trafficking policy is drawn to some extent from this discursive construction, therefore affecting support services for survivors of human trafficking. The discursive analysis further revealed misalignment between government and non-government priorities, Australian government anti-trafficking policy appears to favour criminal justice priorities; whereas non-government settings preference human rights protections. Criminal justice priorities invoke questions of legitimacy, leading to strict eligibility policy for survivors seeking support following exploitation in the Australian sex industry, undermining women's agency and human rights. In practice, these two main findings demonstrate a construction of policy that has serious outcomes on typical survivors in Australia following a lived experience of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The discourses constructed by conflicting feminist arguments influence political discourses throughout Australia. The application of a feminist theoretical framework to the discursive analysis of the problem of human trafficking is unique to this study. The study has exposed a longstanding and unresolved feminist debate that has filtered throughout anti-trafficking political discourse. This study illuminates the problematic construction of anti-trafficking policy, and the implications in practice on survivor support services. Australia has received international criticism for the focus on criminal justice rather than human rights throughout anti-trafficking policy discourse. The outcome of this study has the potential to inform future language and constructive conversations contributing to knowledge around how policy affects survivors in the post trafficking experience.

**Keywords :** Australia, discursive analysis, government, human trafficking, non-government, Thailand

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