



Official Transcript

Season 1, Episode 7

Davina Durgana, Ph.D.: How Devotion to Community Gives This Statistician Strength to Fight Human Trafficking

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Davina [00:00:18] Modern slavery, it's when you cannot refuse deny or leave a situation of work for either commercial sex or labor.

Megan [00:00:27] From ADECIBEL Media, I'm Megan Rummler and you're listening to ADECIBELvoices, a podcast that features intimate conversations with Asian American trailblazers who all have one thing in common, unabashedly pursuing their dreams while transforming the fabric of this nation. From food to business to tech to the arts. This is Asian America up close and personal.

Megan [00:00:53] October 18th marks Anti-Slavery Day and this date provides an opportunity to raise awareness of human trafficking and modern slavery into our daily conversations and responsibilities as global citizens.

Megan [00:01:07] Our guest today is Davina Durgana, an award-winning international human rights statistician who has developed leading global models to fight human trafficking and assess risk and vulnerability to modern slavery.

Megan [00:01:21] Davina is a Senior Statistician with Walk Free Foundation, an initiative fighting to end modern slavery, forced labor and human trafficking. And, is report co-author of The Global Slavery Index, a global study of modern slavery conditions by country.

Megan [00:01:38] Davina was named to the 2017 Forbes list of "Top 30 Under 30" in science for her work on statistical modeling, human security theory and human trafficking.

Megan [00:01:48] Davina Durgana, welcome to ADECIBELvoices.

Davina [00:01:52] Thank you Megan. I'm thrilled to be here.

Megan [00:01:55] Davina before we get into your work and career, I'd love to get to know more about your childhood and your upbringing.

Megan [00:02:01] I read that you went to high school in, is it Commack? Commack, New York. Is that Long Island?

Davina [00:02:07] It is Long Island. I'm a New Yorker.

Megan [00:02:08] You're a New Yorker. So were you born in New York?

Davina [00:02:10] I was born in New York.

Megan [00:02:11] I did not know that. That's fabulous. Did you grow up in New York then too?

Davina [00:02:15] Yes. So I grew up in New York. I actually only came to D.C. for undergrad for college. I went to GW and then met my husband there and he started working for the government. So, I went abroad for grad school and came back and did my Ph.D. in D.C. and I've been there since.

Megan [00:02:29] World Traveler. I love it. So then what was your childhood like in Long Island in New York?

Davina [00:02:34] Yeah, I had a really happy childhood. I'm the child of Guyanese immigrants. So, those are South Asian immigrants that were then in the Caribbean due to the sugarcane industry from the British Empire.

Davina [00:02:45] So kind of an interesting corollary to my career now in slavery, that you know my ancestors were indentured servants in the Caribbean. So kind of interesting.

Megan [00:02:54] Oh that's so serendipitous isn't it? How interesting.

Megan [00:02:58] Tell me a little bit about your parents. What did they do or what do they do?

Davina [00:03:01] Yeah my parents are kind of mavericks. So, they came here from Guyana. They of course had to start over and and get their education here. My dad's an engineer and he now owns a company with my mom working on telecommunications. So he builds cell towers throughout New York and New Jersey and, you know, the tri-state area.

Megan [00:03:19] And do you have siblings?

Davina [00:03:20] I do, I have two little sisters.

Megan [00:03:22] Oh so you're the oldest?

Davina [00:03:23] I am the oldest.

Megan [00:03:23] Oh my gosh, quite something to live up to. I bet the pressure is on in your family.

Davina [00:03:28] Oh, we all have our strengths I'd say.

Megan [00:03:30] That's wonderful.

Megan [00:03:31] So, Davina. What was it like growing up in the Durgana household? What kind of characteristics did your parents encourage and foster?

Davina [00:03:40] My parents were very strict.

Davina [00:03:41] I think that was a pretty normal thing for, you know, raising first generation Americans thinking that they wanted to hold onto cultural values but still integrate us into the school systems and the culture here. So, that was a bit of a challenge I think. But you know as the oldest I think we always have more of that than our younger siblings do.

Davina [00:04:00] So I think they were really focused on careers. They were really focused on what these studies could mean. They were very focused on our grades and making sure that we were really working to our full potential.

Davina [00:04:09] It was kind of a very loving household but also very motivated. You know almost everything had to do with school and homework and how we could achieve the most with what we had.

Megan [00:04:21] So was there a point in say your, you know, elementary schooling that everyone realized including yourself you were really good in math?

Davina [00:04:30] Yeah, actually my dad tells a funny story now. That in middle school I was always an honors and accelerated classes but there was in a particularly difficult math class for I think it was sixth graders.

Davina [00:04:41] And, it was like calculus and some really insane things. Yeah, it was an interesting trial program they were going through. But it was funny because all of my classmates who had continued on into the International Baccalaureate program with and like you know we stayed together in the same cohort, everyone was having trouble.

Davina [00:04:55] And parents were complaining that they were spending six hours a day on homework with their kids with just this one class. And, my dad came and he was like, "I've never once done homework with Davina."

Davina [00:05:06] And the teacher was very funny, he was like, "Yeah, your daughter's really good at this." He was like, I just don't think she wants to be good at it.

Davina [00:05:14] So I was really also very good at French and Spanish and foreign language. And I love travel and work and culture. So, I think that kind of since they were both easy for me, I just chose what I liked better.

Megan [00:05:26] So then, was there a moment where you know statistics came into your world? What was that moment and how did you recognize that, hmm, I'm pretty good in the statistical arena here?

Davina [00:05:39] I was a National Merit qualifier. I knew that I was good at math but I don't think statistics itself came into my career path until I was actually working in the field.

Davina [00:05:50] So I was working on a national hotline talking to victims every day and understanding that the rhetoric that was going around about children and forced and commercial sexual exploitation for sex, was not the common case that we were encountering but the data wasn't really being analyzed that way.

Davina [00:06:08] So I kind of realized that we were manufacturing policy to protect children when in the United States they already have a lot of protections compared to

undocumented workers foreign nationals that are coming in and that labor trafficking was probably being given into service in the policy.

Davina [00:06:22] So I actually knew that going back to do my Ph.D. I'd want to focus on statistics because I didn't think that the policy matched the data.

Megan [00:06:29] How interesting. So you basically noticed a gap it sounds like in the system.

Davina [00:06:34] It was almost like I knew that I could do it. And, I knew that other people probably couldn't do it as well or maybe if they did, they just didn't have the interest to do it. So for someone that worked in my field I knew that I could make a difference in that way.

Megan [00:06:46] So I guess the question then I want to ask is, having identified a mathematical gap, how did you piece together, you know, a solution that said you know in order to achieve better answers I would have to apply this type of math?

Davina [00:07:02] Yeah. So that required learning about all kinds of advanced modeling and then basically using a mix of those skills to then create a vulnerability model or risk model that I use now.

Davina [00:07:11] And actually the model I created for the United States for my dissertation, I use a different version of that in my global work with the Global Slavery Index.

Megan [00:07:19] And we will definitely touch on that later. I still want to, I want to flush out your childhood here.

Megan [00:07:25] So now you're really deeply entrenched in, you know, the intersection of international relations human rights and fighting modern slavery. But as a child what did you dream about growing up?

Megan [00:07:35] What did you want to be as a child?

Davina [00:07:37] I wanted to be the president. I thought that being in politics would be so fun.

Megan [00:07:40] I love that.

Davina [00:07:41] And I also really like diplomacy. So actually even as a young kid in middle school I was a student ambassador with this program called, People to People. And I did a couple of trips with them. I went to Australia, Greece, Italy, France.

Davina [00:07:53] It was really interesting we did home stays. We were able to like live and go to their schools and meet people our age. I actually went to a few math classes in France and other places before my French was as fluent as it is now. And, it was so funny that we were all able to understand each other and to follow the same math.

Davina [00:08:09] So in a lot of ways my interest in foreign language, communications, international relations is fostered by a universal language such as math.

Megan [00:08:16] I love that as a child you wanted to be president. What was it about being president that attracted you as a child?

Davina [00:08:24] I think it had to do with policy. I think it was more that I wanted to see policies that I thought were fair and equitable and included others. And, it seemed like people in power could do that.

Davina [00:08:33] Eventually that evolved to diplomacy because it also meant representing interests of powerful countries in other places where voices might not be as heard.

Davina [00:08:40] So, I think at the end of the day it always comes to representing people in the policies that matter.

Megan [00:08:45] I mean what I'm really hearing is that a very young age you had a heightened sense of social justice.

Davina [00:08:51] Yes definitely.

Megan [00:08:52] But where did that come from?

Davina [00:08:54] So, I think that a sense of love for community. A love for your environment is a big part of how I grew up.

Davina [00:09:00] So, we had a really strong church community. I was part of their youth group. I was president for a few years. We did a lot of community service work.

Davina [00:09:07] Actually, the first time I encountered modern slavery was on a mission trip to El Salvador. I was teaching math and English and we were getting very close to these children in the community when right before we left we had to go to the funeral of a young girl who was related to one of the students.

Davina [00:09:23] And you know MS-13 has basically been pretty prominent in El Salvador since their civil war in the 80s. So it's just like a very stark reminder that this type of thing can affect people you care about.

Davina [00:09:33] And sometimes I think about this and my commitment to community really shown through a lot of how my parents approached the world and everyone around them.

Davina [00:09:42] They have a strong commitment to their religious communities but they also have this transcendent understanding.

Davina [00:09:47] My mom's actually Hindu and my dad's Christian but they're both really well-known figures in each other's churches. In fact, my mom is the Treasurer and teaches Sunday school in our Presbyterian Church. But she's not even, she's not even Christian.

Davina [00:10:00] So it's just a very interesting kind of open-minded atmosphere.

Davina [00:10:03] And as I got older and you know I became a volunteer firefighter and an EMT.

Davina [00:10:07] I really care very deeply about relating to people at the community level at the individual level and the more you do that I think the more you see that social justice is really just advocating for the rights that we we all deserve.

Megan [00:10:19] You mentioned earlier, you spent time here in the nation's capital pursuing international relations at both George Washington University and American University, ultimately earning your Ph.D. with distinction from the latter.

Megan [00:10:31] And then you also pursued a second master's degree in Paris, France while studying human trafficking at Sorbonne. Am I saying that right? And the American University of Paris. I'm curious why Paris, why France?

Davina [00:10:45] Yes. So at that time I was still kind of thinking that diplomacy was going to be my future career goals so I actually took the LSATs. I did well on them. I applied to law schools and I was making a decision between what I thought would have the greatest impact on policy.

Davina [00:10:59] While I was here, I actually worked for both the public defender service and the attorney general's office in D.C. And, I just realized that a lot of the social justice I would do as a lawyer would be very fixated on small individual level cases, which are very important, but there are structural things that make that less impactful.

Davina [00:11:15] For example, public defenders have many times more cases than attorney generals do. So when you're thinking about the quality of legal provision you can give those groups, it's really dependent on your capacity and what kind of resources you have.

Davina [00:11:29] To me, that was a bigger fight that I probably wasn't, I was going to get very upset about I think in the long term. So, I went to France mostly because for my work with the U.N. you typically want to be fluent in at least three of the five U.N. languages. And because I knew French, Spanish and English, I wanted a complete professional and native fluency in French.

Megan [00:11:47] What age were you then when you'd reference the El Salvador experience? What age were you then?

Davina [00:11:54] I think I was 19.

Megan [00:11:55] Can you talk a little bit more about that what happened?

Davina [00:11:57] Yeah. And so we it was really an amazing experience. I spoke Spanish enough to be our group translator so aside from teaching English and math to a bunch of kids, and these are rural community kids outside of San Salvador, so we had classes of maybe 30 or 40 kids every session, two or three times a day. We got very close to them.

Davina [00:12:17] In fact, I was still working out the kinks in my Spanish and one of the young boys, my family was there with me as well, and one of the young boys that we got very close to, my dad wanted me to try to translate to his mother that we would adopt him. Like basically take care of his fees. Finance his education, not take him with us necessarily. He had a family. But I didn't really know how to explain that in Spanish. So I said adoptivo, which you know obviously sounds like adopt and the mother got very worried.

Davina [00:12:45] She's like you can't take him. And I was like, no we don't want to take him. We just want to pay for his schooling and support you guys. So it was a very funny situation. We had a great time there.

Megan [00:12:54] That's great. And then it was also during this trip that a young girl had confided in you about something traumatic that happened in her own life.

Davina [00:13:02] Yes. So actually one of the students had come to the whole group and said that the body of one of her cousins had been found.

Davina [00:13:08] So they invited us to a funeral and actually like the one of the last things we did in El Salvador with that group of people was go to a funeral for a child who had been abused and harmed by MS-13.

Davina [00:13:20] And, when you think about the culpability there, there was no autopsy, there were no police involvement. It was kind of an expected thing that if a child goes missing and hasn't been heard from or seen that this was this would be kind of par for the course.

Davina [00:13:33] And it was very upsetting because there was no real reason it couldn't be one of the kids that we came to love. So coming back to the U.S. I started working with every group I could on human trafficking thinking that international trafficking was going to be my full career but actually realized that it happens so much in the United States.

Davina [00:13:49] So it was an interesting career transition where my dissertation was actually focused on the U.S. and now of course I work more globally. So it's just an interesting weaving of these these many interests.

Megan [00:14:00] I guess when you came back and shifted your priorities or reshifted them. What was going through your head what were you thinking and feeling?

Davina [00:14:08] I felt helpless I think because I mean there wasn't an infrastructure to really understand how to help at that time. I mean even when I came back here and I really got into human trafficking, I was still defining human trafficking every time I told someone what I was interested in.

Davina [00:14:21] This is pre "Taken." So nobody really knew what the crime was and it wasn't something everyone was talking about. And that's partially I think what fueled my family's concern that this wasn't going to be a viable career path. That no one would ever find research on this or work on this. So we're very lucky in that way that it did become such a popular topic and something that people are funding and it's made a real difference in how we've approached this.

Davina [00:14:44] So now there's many organizations doing really great work. You can talk about legislation in almost every country that talks about modern slavery or is considering you know many countries are considering slavery legislation.

Davina [00:14:55] You have also an opening I think at the U.N. level of other issues that can be included in slavery like practices. So, now we're talking about forced marriage we're talking about the use of children in armed conflict. We're talking about the use of child brides for terror groups.

Davina [00:15:09] I mean, there's so many things that I think are helpfully being brought under this umbrella and it gives us so much room to try to engage with different actors.

Megan [00:15:17] We'll be right back after this word from our sponsors.

Stacy [00:15:21] This podcast is brought to you by our sponsors 8 Media Group, a Washington D.C. area video production company whose mission is to create collaborate and resonate. Find them at 8MediaGroup.com.

Megan [00:15:33] If you're just joining us, we've been talking with Davina Durgana, an international human rights statistician. October 18th marks antislavery day. Davina is fighting slavery with her own unique superpower: mathematics.

Megan [00:15:47] As a senior statistician with the Walk Free Foundation, she helps produce statistical analysis on modern slavery around the world. She was named the American Statistical Association's 2016, "Statistical Advocate of The Year," and serves as several expert groups for the United Nations, the Department of Justice and the National Science Foundation.

Megan [00:16:09] Davina, you touched on this a little bit earlier right before the break, what is modern slavery today and how is it different from maybe the past images and concepts that we've come to think of in mass media?

Davina [00:16:22] Yeah. Thank you Megan, that's a great question.

Davina [00:16:23] So, basically modern slavery and especially at the U.N. level, we follow basically the broadest definition of this. It's based on something called the Palermo protocol. But effectively it's when you cannot refuse deny or leave a situation of work for either commercial sex or labor.

Davina [00:16:40] Obviously a lot of other practices can fall under that. So another one that we really talk about is forced marriage where someone may be compelled to marry someone forced by their community without will. And, then of course forced to provide domestic service or sexual services by form of even reproduction.

Davina [00:16:55] So, it's kind of an interesting crime that covers a lot of things. Those are people that are working on deep sea fishing boats obtaining the tuna that we can purchase so cheaply. Those are people and nail salons and massage parlors and restaurants. I mean they're pretty much everywhere.

Megan [00:17:11] It's actually the opposite of what the mass media has put out there over the years. You think of, you know, handcuffs or you think of I don't know some you know darkly lit alley but this is actually happening in broad daylight is what I'm hearing.

Davina [00:17:26] Absolutely. And it's fueled by consumption which is the most compelling part of modern slavery to me is that unlike other crimes like rape or sexual assault, there's not always a clear justification that we can follow or model but there is an economic incentive for trafficking.

Davina [00:17:42] People are doing this for cheaper labor, cheaper profits or they're doing it to make more money themselves if their traffickers. So I mean it's something that we can actually look to economically and try to figure out a way of predicting.

Megan [00:17:54] So Davina where in the United States is human trafficking and modern slavery happening the most and what are some things some signs that we can maybe be on the lookout for if we happen to be suspicious or uncomfortable about a situation?

Davina [00:18:09] Absolutely. So in the United States you know we have a very diverse society. We have a strong economy, we have a lot of opportunities for exploitation. Whenever you have the confluence of both very wealthy and very poor people in the same place and also an economy that requires a lot of low wage service workers.

Davina [00:18:28] So one of the things that you want to think about is that a lot of agricultural workers especially right now with the immigration climate being so unclear is that a lot of people are very frightened to come forward for assistance.

Davina [00:18:39] So people that are maybe undocumented or don't have a permanent status in the United States are going to be more hesitant about coming forward even for unrelated crimes like domestic violence or sexual assault because they would fear deportation.

Davina [00:18:53] So in a climate like this I think you see a lot of foreign national workers at high risk of exploitation and heightened vulnerability because they're less willing to come forward.

Davina [00:19:03] So what that would look like would be in agricultural settings you're talking about strawberry pickers people that are working in tomato fields. There are a lot of great groups doing wonderful work on this such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and other advocacy groups.

Davina [00:19:15] You also would see this in any low wage service profession. So that could be waiters, waitresses and nail salons massage parlors. That could be short order cooks at restaurants that could be people who work tend bar. It could be anywhere really.

Davina [00:19:31] And so what you want to look for conditions where people seem unduly miserable or to be working for very long periods of time. If you see in a work establishment like the nail parlor or nail salon or a massage parlor that there appear to be mattresses or hot plates or things that would imply that people may be living on the work premises and in undesirable conditions.

Davina [00:19:51] Those are things that you would read that would raise questions for me. Also typically massage parlors, nail salons that are open very late like unreasonable hours, maybe 24 hours or seem to have a lot of male clientele or patrons, that's an indicator exploitation may be occurring.

Davina [00:20:06] All of this to say though is that there is a huge spectrum of labor exploitation everywhere. So one of the things that I would recommend that you do if you see anything suspicious or anyone that you're concerned about and you don't quite feel like it rises to a level of calling 911 is to call the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Davina [00:20:22] And that you can reach that by dialing 888-373-7888. Or you can also text them. They have a text line so I think they're available in multiple different languages and it's a great way to talk to experts on modern slavery.

Davina [00:20:37] I actually used to work on the hotline myself and it's a good opportunity to just talk through your concerns with someone who's there to listen to you. They're open 24/7 and to basically give them the information you have and they can kind of give you some more questions to ask if it's a restaurant that you like or a massage parlor you've been to before they can kind of help you walk through what follow up questions you might need to ask or even just at that point you may just report it to them and then they have the right contacts to follow up on that.

Megan [00:21:03] Great. So that number again is 1- 888-373-7888 and we'll also have that linked in our show notes.

Megan [00:21:13] As I was doing my research and I wasn't quite clear on, what's the difference between slavery and human trafficking? Are they two separate things?

Davina [00:21:22] That's a really good question and actually people in the field really struggle with this because it sometimes has become ingrained that human trafficking was traditionally what the United States called modern slavery. So some people will use human trafficking and modern slavery interchangeably.

Davina [00:21:34] I also direct research for all of the Americas and in Latin America it's very common to use this term human trafficking to cover all types of slavery.

Davina [00:21:41] However at the UN level I think the argument would be more that there are certain things that wouldn't quite be considered human trafficking but would be considered modern slavery and forced marriage is a pretty good example.

Davina [00:21:51] The United States has one of the first national legislations against human trafficking but actually that does not include forced marriage whereas a lot of modern slavery practices would include things that are like organ trafficking, forced marriage things that are corollary to this core issue of forced labor and forced sex.

Megan [00:22:07] Where is human trafficking and slavery happening the most?

Davina [00:22:11] Yeah. So you know it is a good question and of course the Global Slavery Index does look at prevalence in terms of like where is this happening.

Davina [00:22:18] Traditionally, what we would say is anywhere that you have a very large population that's also quite at risk.

Davina [00:22:23] So places like China or India will have just many more victims because they have just an enormously large population. That being said, we also really consider countries like North Korea where a state imposed forced labor is a huge problem, where political dissidents are put into forced labor camps and we started counting that.

Davina [00:22:41] So it's an interesting thing I think as you look at this question of where are people's rights not protected? Where are victims made more vulnerable? Where do cultural practices disempower key groups of the population? And then also where are their economic incentives for companies to exploit cheap labor?

Davina [00:22:58] So that's kind of the question when we start looking also at you know the Vietnamese apparel industry, the Bangladeshi apparel industry, chocolate from Cote d'Ivoire in West Africa you're really looking at a confluence of a lot of those factors.

Megan [00:23:11] For those interested in you know digging further into the Global Slavery Index report we'll have that in our show notes.

Megan [00:23:17] I think this would be a great time to pause and ask, tell us about your work specifically. I mean what is it about what you're doing in your role that's new and transformative and how is that making an impact across the field?

Davina [00:23:31] Yes of course. So one of the really exciting things about working for Walk Free, is that we actually have one of the biggest research budgets for modern slavery in the world. And that's given us so much flexibility.

Davina [00:23:41] So we have a global survey research program of over 48 countries where we actually have the opportunity to work with Gallup World Poll and ask questions on nationally representative surveys about modern slavery.

Davina [00:23:52] This has never been done before at this scale. So we're really fortunate to have that. I also managed this project with the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Organization for Migration where we're actually working with governments in Europe to use administrative data that they have in lists to use statistical methods to estimate slavery.

Davina [00:24:10] Because typically surveys will only work in developing countries. So for developed countries like the United States and most of Western Europe it's very difficult to find slaves. So in order to do this we're using lists of victims that they've identified to figure out how many we may be missing.

Davina [00:24:25] We've also innovated in understanding government responses in terms of what can governments do specifically to address this crime. And of course, we are developing every day this vulnerability model that looks at what risk factors lead to slavery.

Megan [00:24:40] The subject itself is such a delicate situation. Does this rely on on also self-reporting? Because I can imagine that that you know not a lot of people, if they are held against their will, how would they self-report? And then to maybe some of the ones that managed to escape their situation, there are probably risks around self-reporting so how about that. How is that managed?

Davina [00:25:02] Right. So getting data on modern slavery is one of the most difficult things. Typically the survey programs we do our household based surveys.

Davina [00:25:08] So often we'll find people that either they themselves or someone in their network are currently experiencing slavery. But that's typically post experience and that also presumes that they can identify as a victim, which many times people have difficulty doing that.

Davina [00:25:23] So we do a long process of cognitive testing and we ask about conditions of former work or labor situations to try to understand if we would define it as modern slavery even if they may not necessarily use that label.

Davina [00:25:35] But it is, it is very difficult and actually we're running into a similar challenge in Arab states in the Gulf, the Gulf countries. Because getting survey research done there is very challenging. So we're actually working with returned migrants in sending states. So states that commonly send workers to the Gulf region to try to understand more about what their experiences were like.

Megan [00:25:57] As I began looking into some of the statistics on human trafficking it's quite astonishing what I found. According to the United Nations International Labor Organization, there are about 40 million people living in slavery worldwide. Which is an estimated one in 200 people.

Megan [00:26:13] With everything that you know about and around the subject, what is it that you're finding that surprises people the most around human trafficking and slavery statistics?

Davina [00:26:25] I think the thing that surprises people the most is is not just the sheer scale because I think a lot of times we lose perspective when we think about a number that's quite that big.

Davina [00:26:33] What is 40.3 million people mean to us really? But when we look at things like the Global Slavery Index that breaks that same number down into these regions and by country it gives you a sense of scale.

Davina [00:26:44] The issue is much worse in this country than it is in this country based on all the available information we have and I think that gives us more ability to kind of make sense of that information and advocate for policy to change it.

Davina [00:26:56] I do think people struggle with understanding what slavery looks like today. I think they really have a tough time understanding how supply chains for businesses are implicated in this and specifically our role as consumers.

Davina [00:27:08] I think a lot of people really struggle to understand that when we look for the cheapest items, candy, chocolate, clothing. Anything that at some point in that production chain that cost savings is coming possibly from the exploitation of labor particularly when we know things are just far too cheap to be sustainable.

Megan [00:27:27] I think that's a great opening for us to talk about how can we as consumers, as just normal people going about our normal day to day activities, how can we be empowered to to make a change? What can we do?

Megan [00:27:40] So you mentioned cocoa is that chocolate, right?

Davina [00:27:41] Yes. Chocolate's a big offender. That's a tough industry. I mean a lot of the chocolate comes from the west coast of Africa and there also is that confluence of factors we talked about before. Large vulnerable populations a lack of labor regulations that protect them, lack of oversight.

Davina [00:27:58] So often a lot of major producers will be implicated in some way. That being said there's some really good examples like Tony's Chocolonely.

Davina [00:28:06] They sell their chocolate bars at REI and other places like that. Very good chocolate. It's a Dutch company. We work with them actually to make sure that there isn't trafficking in their supply chain and specifically what they do is they actually build the price of their chocolate starting with what a living wage for the worker and producer would look like.

Megan [00:28:23] I see it is really fascinating.

Davina [00:28:25] So I think when we look at good examples of companies like that and support them with purchasing chocolate that might be a little bit more expensive but is also very high quality and still meets these social justice concerns we have. I think we're in a really good place.

Davina [00:28:39] The other good news on that is that the U.S. actually has some really amazing importation laws where we prohibit the importation of goods that are known to be produced with child and forced labor.

Davina [00:28:48] That said we still import a lot of goods with that have been produced this way but a lot of things like tevia other things have been subject to what we call withhold release orders which means that they are stopped at the ports of entry before they can enter our markets.

Megan [00:29:05] Stevia is the sugar, right?

Davina [00:29:05] Yes.

Megan [00:29:06] So is sugar one of the categories?

Davina [00:29:07] It can be. It just depends on the labor conditions and typically the countries that they come from. But there are some industries that are quite high risk.

Davina [00:29:13] So Vietnamese apparel, Bangladeshi apparel, Chinese electronics. Timber actually from Peru and Brazil is part of a logging industry that's often done illegally and not sustainably.

Davina [00:29:25] So when you're talking about timber from those countries, you're often talking about illegally logged areas of the Amazon that are actually protected and are completely deforested and destroying ecosystems and habitats.

Megan [00:29:37] So as a consumer if I see a label that says, made in Vietnam and it's you know a piece of clothing should I be questioning?

Davina [00:29:45] The best the best way to do this actually would be to look at the company itself.

Davina [00:29:49] So depending on what company is producing it there's now in the United Kingdom and in France and some other countries, legislation that requires all major companies to report on what they're doing for modern slavery.

Davina [00:29:59] So you can actually find it on their website. Lululemon has a little tick on their website that lets you see kind of like what their statement is. It doesn't mean that

they'll prove that there's no trafficking or slavery. But what they will do is say these are the steps we're taking to make sure that this isn't a problem.

Davina [00:30:16] If you have brand loyalty which some of us do at this point and there are places that we like things that we like. Just ask those questions of those companies and just try to make an informed decision when possible.

Davina [00:30:25] That information is becoming more available to consumers now so it's not as difficult as it once was. And as consumers we have the most power.

Davina [00:30:32] So this also happens in the local economy. Typically when you buy local or fair trade free trade that's a pretty good assumption that the supply chains control because it's coming from some place that's understood and there's a smaller supply chain.

Davina [00:30:44] But also you know your favorite restaurants. It's not unreasonable to ask questions if you notice that the short order cook seem to be working all hours or in your nail salon. If the women that you're working with seem to not have their certificates pasted on the wall, they're just small laws like that that we could easily check up on to just see if everyone's being treated okay.

Megan [00:31:05] Probably the best and most easiest thing to do is just feel empowered and as consumers.

Davina [00:31:10] Yeah. Ask the questions.

Megan [00:31:11] You know I wanted to touch on the career path you've chosen.

Megan [00:31:15] And it's a subject matter that's not an easy one.

Megan [00:31:19] What keeps you moving forward especially on the tougher days?

Davina [00:31:22] Thank you for asking that.

Davina [00:31:23] You know burnout is a real problem and especially with all the grad students, Ph.D. students that I mentor and something I think about a lot is, you know, I could not stay in direct victim service provision forever.

Davina [00:31:34] It was not making me happy in the long term and I knew that eventually I would burn out to a point that I wouldn't even stay in the field.

Davina [00:31:40] And I think a lot of our colleagues get to that point because they don't necessarily think there's another way to be involved.

Davina [00:31:45] For me, using statistics working on policy and still getting into the fields, but not quite as much in it or as intensely as I had been, was a really good way for me to stay in the field long term and build a career here.

Davina [00:31:57] I think, we should be less apologetic about what our needs and happiness requires. And I think there's a lot of ways to contribute to these fields.

Davina [00:32:07] Also personally, you know, I think it's important to try to keep a very full life. So it's very easy to get sucked into the very demanding work that we're all doing and

the traveling. But everywhere I go I still work out. I try to make it a point to keep up with my crossfit schedule wherever I am.

Davina [00:32:24] And actually by September I should have cross fitted in 50 different countries.

Megan [00:32:28] What a bucket list!

Davina [00:32:31] I have photos of me with all of the gyms. And usually, I try to pick up the coach if they're not too big, you know.

Davina [00:32:39] So it's kind of fun. And, of course having dogs helps a lot.

Megan [00:32:42] I love all the threads that run in your life. And, one of the threads that I'm most excited about is, you know, your role to young women. Women that are aspiring mathematicians, statisticians. How does that make you feel?

Davina [00:32:57] That's really such an honor.

Davina [00:32:58] I mean that's probably, of all the things that we can do in our in our lives, all the prizes we can win or the recognition we can gain, I think at a certain point you realize that we're just not going to solve the problem ourselves. That we have to bring up other people to help us continue these changes and to really make cross generational changes here.

Davina [00:33:16] So to hear that is really inspiring. And actually I do a lot of work with Girl Scouts of America. I have overseen a few Gold Award projects and in New York my mom's on the board for the Suffolk County Girl Scouts. So it's always been a huge part of it. I'm a Gold Award Girl Scout too.

Davina [00:33:31] I've always loved women. I've always loved supporting other women. I've had some great female mentors that have really looked out for me and I feel an obligation to do that for other women too.

Davina [00:33:40] The other problem is of course unless we model the behavior we want to to be seen by others it becomes more difficult. So when I was doing this work of course a lot of people weren't working in human trafficking and statistics, especially not for a Ph.D.

Davina [00:33:54] And, I think at the time was kind of funny because I had such a great experience. But I know that, you know, sometimes I would walk into a room of statisticians and I would be mistaken for my own intern because you know how could you be so smiley or dressed in bright colors? Or, wearing you know your hair down and curly.

Davina [00:34:11] It's just a funny thing that there is an expectation that women in STEM are just statisticians in general have to look and perform a certain way. And, I really enjoy breaking that mold for not only ourselves but also for the women that are coming up so that that example and that precedent is already set and they don't have to feel uncomfortable being exactly who they are.

Megan [00:34:29] Dr. Davina Durgana, thank you for being on the show. It's been such a pleasure.

Davina [00:34:34] It's such a pleasure for me, Megan. Thank you.

Megan [00:34:36] Dr. Davina Durgana is a Senior Statistician with Walk Free Foundation, an initiative fighting to end modern slavery forced labor and human trafficking. And, is report co-author of The Global Slavery Index, a global study of modern slavery conditions by country. Her current work focuses on constructing modern slavery models and profiling vulnerability to this crime in the United States and around the world.

Davina [00:35:02] Dr. Durgana will be featured in the upcoming 2021 children's book, "Wonder Woman of Science: 12 Amazing Stem Geniuses Who Are Currently Rocking the World," by Candlewick Publishers, highlighting the work of today's most outstanding women scientists.

Megan [00:35:19] Here's a special note to our listeners to make sure to check out our website at adecibel.com that's adecibel.com. There, you'll find extended Interview excerpts that you won't want to miss, behind the scenes photos and some pretty hysterical outtakes.

Megan [00:35:40] ADECIBELvoices is hosted by me Megan Rummler and co-produced and edited by myself and Stacy Yu. All music is sourced royalty-free.

Megan [00:35:50] Next week we get to explore the world of dance with leading American choreographer, dancer and cultural figure, Dana Tai Soon Burgess.

Megan [00:36:00] Dana presently serves as Smithsonian's first ever Choreographer-in-Residence at the National Portrait Gallery.

Megan [00:36:07] Tune in to hear how Dana's childhood influenced him, how he defines dance, what it continues to mean to him and what inspires him today.

Stacy [00:36:18] Hey! It's Stacy here. Since we're brand new podcast we need your help. Send us your feedback.

Stacy [00:36:27] We want this podcast to be listener-centered and we'd love to hear from you. What do you like? Not like? Or, wish you could hear more of. Is there an Asian American trailblazer whom you want us to interview?

Stacy [00:36:39] Tell us what you think. Call or text us at 202-599-3318.

Stacy [00:36:47] Leave your full name, contact info, age and where you're from. Messages are recorded, so who knows, maybe you'll hear yourself on our show.

Stacy [00:36:55] Thanks for listening and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.