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Professional Impressions and Experiences of the Complex Needs of Human Trafficking Survivors

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Professional Impressions and Experiences of the Complex Needs of Human Trafficking Survivors

Jackie Klock & Kelsey Hayes (MSW)

Abstract

Human trafficking is a monumental and pervasive human rights issue, and one that carries immense physical, psychological, and psychosocial repercussions to its survivors. This project explores the complex needs and service gaps that exist for survivors of human trafficking. Through a qualitative study, with six in-person interviews of professional providers in Maine, we gain access to important information regarding complex needs of human trafficking survivors. Using thematic analysis we analyze common themes throughout the interviews in relation to previous literature. Recommendations for practice are also presented.

Keywords Human trafficking - Trafficking - Survivor - Victim - Systems Theory - Barriers - Complex Needs

Introduction

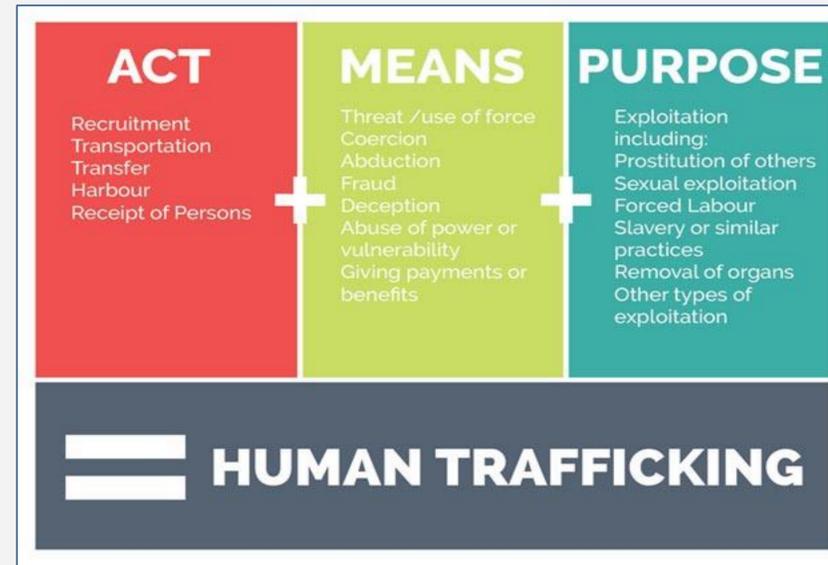
Trafficking involves, “the recruitment and at times transportation of people - often by the use of force, fraud, deception or coercion - for the purposes of exploitation” (Hemmings, Jakobowitz, Abas, 2016). Several factors leading to higher levels of vulnerability pose a major risk for trafficking survivors. These factors which are often sought out by traffickers may include recent migration/relocation, substance use, runaway/homeless youth, mental health concern, and involvement in the child welfare system (Polaris, 2017). Given both the physical and psychological harms resulting from the experience of trafficking, studies have found that survivors demonstrate a wide range of mental health distress and tendencies (Cerny, 2016). These include depression, anxiety, loneliness, chronic fear, suicidal ideation, memory loss, social withdrawal, and loss of personal initiative and autonomy (2016). In addition to the mental health consequences that survivors of trafficking may experience, there are other complex needs which the literature has shown to be of great significance. These include: housing, food and clothing, medical and dental care, legal and/or immigration services, protection by justice system, educational and vocational learning opportunities, independent living skills, job placement, economic assistance, transportation, and reunification (Johnson, 2012).

Objective

The intended significance of this study is to understand the complex needs of human trafficking survivors, and how those directly immersed in the field feel that needs are met or unmet.

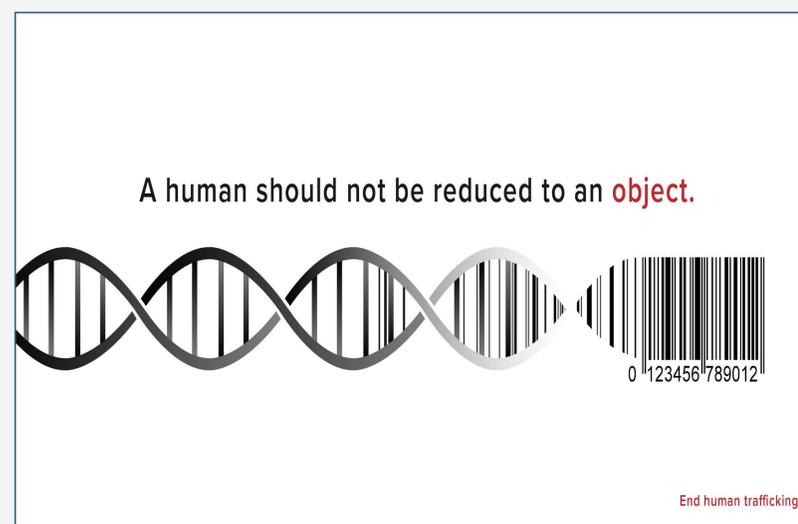
Methods

- Qualitative research project
- Snowball sampling & convenience sampling
- Six participants, each researcher interviewed three participants
- Semi-structured interviews lasting no more than one hour
- Thematic analysis
- Theoretical Framework: Systems Theory



“In Maine, one of the greatest vulnerabilities that people are facing is opioid dependence and access to treatment. With that said, there is absolutely an intersection, because it is an opportunity for a trafficker to recruit someone, control someone, and ultimately make money. And it all comes back to that economic crisis and making money, right? We have seen over 50% of our clients here identify as struggling with a substance use disorder, and of that 50% - 90% report an opioid use disorder. It’s very high. It’s very real.”

- Interview Participant



Results

Emerging Themes:

- Misconception of Federal Definition: “The attention is really given to those who are experiencing sex trafficking, and separating sex from labor in the definition is purposeful. Many agencies, people in power, and culturally in general we really feel that sex trafficking is more aggressive and worse than labor trafficking, therefore more deserving of services, and that just isn’t the case.” - Participant 3
- Intersection of opioid use disorder and human trafficking: “I have not met anyone that hasn’t had some sort of substance use disorder and some sort of substance given to them by the person controlling them.” - Participant 4
- Disparity of resources for men and labor trafficking survivors: There are no emergency shelters or housing complexes for men or labor trafficking survivors in Maine, and that is a major barrier to care. Also, identification of male victims of sex trafficking is minimal, which “speaks directly to our cultural ideas around men and sexuality or men being victims - particularly in a sex crime.” Participant 2
- Complex health needs:
 - Lack of access prior to entering trafficking situation due to poverty and less access to health care once trafficked
 - Dental needs
 - Mental health & trauma treatment
 - Substance use treatment
 - Women’s health needs
 - General physical health needs
- “So many people in trafficking are now environmentally isolated and all they have is their trafficker. And even if you escape the trafficking what other resources do you possibly have to go back to, I don’t think most people do have any. So I would imagine it’s, to me it’s the complexity of what is happening in the specific trauma as well as the environmental trauma of a complete lack of support system.” Participant 5

Discussion

- The literature clearly displays a lack of general consensus on the definition of human trafficking which may lead to difficulty in creating policy and programs to support survivors of trafficking.
- Our goal in gathering this information was to explore and better understand themes shared by experts working directly in the field of human trafficking in hopes of broadening the overall understanding of complex needs in order to provide better support to this vulnerable population.
- After conducting our six, semi-structured interviews we discovered numerous connections to the literature that was previously reviewed.

Acknowledgements

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