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Sex Trafficking in Reno, Nevada

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COUN 6785: Social Change in Action:
Prevention, Consultation, and Advocacy

Social Change Portfolio

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Contents

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Scope and Consequences](#)

[Social-ecological Model](#)

[Theories of Prevention](#)

[Diversity and Ethical Considerations](#)

[Advocacy](#)

[References](#)

[ScholarWorks Contributor Agreement](#)

OVERVIEW

Keywords: Sex Trafficking in Reno, Nevada

Sex trafficking

Goal Statement: The aim of this social change is to prevent the frequency of sex trafficking in the Reno/Sparks area through strengthened awareness and advocacy.

Significant Findings:

Sex trafficking is defined by forced labor of sexual acts, and is typically done through force, fraud, and coercion (Harmon, 2022). The victims of this crime are often vulnerable populations like children and young women. It is estimated that 25 million people in the world were victims of human trafficking (Harmon, 2022). In Reno, Nevada it is a huge hub for sex trafficking. This can change with more border controls and awareness throughout the community.

Objectives/Strategies/Interventions/Next Steps:

Moving forward to end sex trafficking is a huge accomplishment, however, starting off small can still be impactful. Looking at the media and its influence on society can help bring awareness. In addition to bringing awareness, we can incorporate more protective programs. Child FIRST is a program that does home visits with low economic families with children that are already at risk for emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems, or child maltreatment (Social Programs, 2018). Another program to partner with is AWAKEN, the local nonprofit group helping to fight sex-trafficking. Information presented to each college student can be a way to bring awareness to the community of young women. Finally, looking at the local brothels and the patterns of abuse that are correlated with them can help bring evidence to light.

INTRODUCTION

Human Trafficking

Sex Trafficking is a huge problem in many cities, including my hometown Reno, Nevada. This Portfolio outlines the need for a social change in human trafficking. According to Harmon, sex trafficking is a form of slavery involving people who are forced to have sex for little or no money (2022). This form of slavery is rapid with young women and children. In 2021 the United States Department of Homeland Security estimated that 25 million people in the world were victims of human trafficking (Harmon, 2022). The victims are often taken and held hostage. They are either scared of staying because them or their family's safety is being threatened or they are being drugged. Human trafficking is highly detrimental to our society and is demanding to be stopped.

PART 1: SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is when someone is exploited or forced labor of sexual acts, and is typically done through force, fraud, and coercion (Harmond, 2022). Here in Nevada prostitution is legal and the brothel is only thirty minutes from my home. In my community girls go missing swiftly. Reno is a great hub for Traffickers because there is no border control to leave the state and we have an international airport. This all makes the smuggling of women and children easier for the pimps. In my community Awaken is a nonprofit group that's goal is to bring awareness of this issue to our community members. According to Awaken, 81% of the girls in our brothels

want to escape, and 300,000 children are exploited through prostitution yearly (2021). In 2016 136 sex trafficking cases were reported in Nevada (Awaken, 2021).

Human trafficking impacts my community on a deeper level because there is an increased fear in women for being alone and feeling safe. Sex trafficking affects women's mental and physical health, socially, educationally, economically, and even with their families. Women who have gone through this often struggle with trust issues which can make it hard to become vulnerable and connect with their families. It is also a trauma event that can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If the women are able to escape the trafficking they go through a wide range of emotions when reentering society. Their bodies may experience difficulties regarding the female health. As well as the possibility that they cannot bear children. Some women may have even been forced to have abortions or unhealthy deliveries of unplanned pregnancies. Both options without proper care can have terrible side effects on the mother.

Our state relies heavily on the income prostitution provides and because of that the government will not revoke its legalization. The increase of promoting sex has negative effects on our mental health as well as our physical health and safety. The aim of this social change is to prevent the frequency of sex trafficking in the Reno/Sparks area through strengthened awareness and advocacy.

PART 2: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Human Trafficking

The women and children who are entered into human trafficking are a part of a vulnerable population. There are many factors that influence these individuals' lives. Risk factors are aspects that have correlation with higher negative outcomes in a person's biological,

psychological, family, community, or cultural level (SAMHSA). In addition to risk factors there are also protective factors; these include positive encounters that reduce the risk of negative outcomes.

When looking at these individuals who are a part of the human trafficking it is important to look at what factors play an effect on their lives. According to Kenny, Staniforth, and Vernal's traffickers' prey on those who are most vulnerable which are often in poverty (2023). Some risk factors may include that they are in poverty or have a grave need to gain financial support. Additionally, gaining self-esteem and self-competence in oneself could be a protective factor. If these women and children were confident in themselves and their abilities, they would have less of a chance of being a victim and an easy target for traffickers.

Another aspect to consider of the trafficking victims' lives is their relationships. A risk factor would be that the individual does not have a good family support system or healthy relationships to communicate with. There might even be abuse already. When a victim is abused, it is normal to find someone who is also an abuser because the dysfunction feels normal, even if the abuse looks different. Since a main population of human trafficking is children, a protective factor may include positive family relationships and involved parental figures.

Finally, the last two areas to consider factors for, are community and societal levels. Risk factors in our community include the lack of border control and easy transportation as well as increase of poverty. A community protective factor would be more promotion of resources available. It may also look like more involvement from healthier individuals. One example of this is the Big Brothers and Big Sister club. They can offer great mentors to those who may not have the healthy family role models that were discussed previously. Societal risk factors include legalized prostitution. Societal protective factors include the state law NRS 201.354, which

makes prostitution illegal except in brothels which is a misdemeanor for first offenders and a felony if children are involved (A.A, 2022).

Overall, there are many factors that can impact a person's chance of being trafficked. These factors include self-identity, family relationships, community norms, and societal impacts. Raising awareness and increasing protective factors can save lives of millions.

PART 3: THEORIES OF PREVENTION

Human Trafficking

One theory of prevention is communication theory. This theory takes an ecological standpoint in which our communication messages should be directed at an individual, group, community, policy, and public level. This type of communication can influence perceptions and beliefs, increase knowledge and awareness, and can increase support for services (National Cancer Institute, 2005).

This theory includes media effects. Media effects research investigates how the media influence the knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of audience members (National Cancer Institute, 2005). The way the media portrays certain aspects of society can have a huge impact on social changes. For example, there is a movie called "Sound of Freedom" that is being released July of 2023. The movie is based on a true story and is about two young children who were a part of the sex trafficking. Having a media source like this movie can be impactful because it brings awareness and can strike emotion in people who feel passionate enough to get involved and help.

Not only can the media influence of views of sex trafficking, but another preventative measure is to minimize the opportunity for children to be a victim. One program that does this is called “Child FIRST”. Child FIRST is a program that does home visits with low economic families with children that are already at risk for emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems, or child maltreatment (Social Programs, 2018). The program is educational and brings awareness to the parents on practices that improve child behavior like child-centered play, reading, family routines, and developing effective responses to negative behaviors (Social Programs, 2018). Programs like this one shows success in reduced involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) as well as mental health problems for the mother and children. This is impactful because having healthy bonds and stability with home life can decrease their odds of becoming a victim of sex trafficking.

PART 4: DIVERSITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Human Trafficking

Sex trafficking is the act of recruiting a person for sexual exploitation, and the target victims are minors, girls, persons in poverty, abuse survivors, person in high crime area, involvement in gangs, a part of the LGBTQ community, and ethnically marginalized persons (Bryant-Davis & Gobin, 2018). Data collected for sex trafficking is often difficult to gather. With that in mind, statistics on sex trafficking rarely include racial or ethnical backgrounds of victims; however, data collected from federal sex trafficking cases from 2008 to 2010 reported that 40 % of sex trafficking survivors were black as compared to the 26% of white female survivors (Cook & Garcia, 2022). Although sex trafficking is predominantly women and

children, the number of women who are black is much higher than the white victims. Public health risk factors that influence this problem include an assessment of social deterrents like racism that put certain populations in an increased position to be vulnerable for sex trafficking (Cook & Garcia, 2022).

According to Bryant-Davis and Gobin, some risk factors for African American girls in conjunction for sex trafficking include poverty, being a runaway, severe family violence, and partner violence (2018). One form of prevention for this is to have culturally congruent therapist with African American culture interact with African American women to build up empowerment for African American women and girls. Another area to consider is the impact poverty plays. Interrupting the cycle of poverty with more educational advancements and or opportunities may reduce the risk of sex trafficking for the African American girls.

When working with this population it is important for the counselor to maintain a healthy relationship with the client and maintain ethical. One area that is incredibly important to consider is Code A.7.a: Advocacy, when appropriate the counselor advocates for the client and address societal barriers that may be prohibiting growth (American Counseling Association, 2014). Although it may strike a chord in the counselor and prompt them to be more active in their advocating, they must think of the ramifications it could have to the survivors trying to escape. Another code of ethics to be aware of is E.5.b: Cultural Sensitivity, counselors acknowledge culture plays a role in the client's experiences and are considered when diagnosing (American Counseling Association, 2014). As previously stated, the impact race has on sex trafficking is something to be aware of. An ethical counselor would be aware of the African American population before going into their communities and promoting prevention plans.

PART 5: ADVOCACY

Human Trafficking

This vulnerable population needs someone to advocate for them and their rights. Advocacy can be done on an individual, institutional, community, and, public policy, and a global level. There can be some challenges to face when advocating for human trafficking survivors. Some barriers at the institutional level (schools, churches, and community organizations) are that these institutes hold fear around human trafficking because it is a sensitive topic, their leaders may not feel comfortable opening their facilities to enlighten information to their members.

A community's norms and values either empower or oppose human growth and development (Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling, 2015). A barrier that human trafficking advocates may face at a community level is their desire to participate in qualitative and quantitative studies. Getting data on this topic is difficult because the cyclical pattern of threats to keep their businesses profitable scare victims into speaking up.

Additionally, an obstacle to face during public policy, which include local and state laws, include the legalization of prostitution. Since it is a profitable source for Nevada's income the legislation will have a harder time removing brothels, which would decrease the accessibility for the sex traffickers.

Although there are some barriers to consider there are a lot of interventions and action plans available to advocate for human trafficking. At the institutional level a plan may be to have mandated classes on college campuses about human trafficking and the signs that someone might need assistance. This would be beneficial because the youth would be exposed to this crime and

how it affects their community. It is also something that can then be spread by word of mouth throughout the community.

In addition, one action plan would be to have Awaken, our local nonprofit that fights against sex trafficking hold more information nights throughout the community. They already hold yearly banquets to raise awareness and money to support this cause here in Reno. Incorporating more information-nights as well as training for local counselors would be beneficial to our local community.

Finally, on a public policy level we can promote more research of the brothels and the number of women who are sourced into the sex trafficking rink. Gathering data on their social economic status, race and ethnicity, and other risk factors can provide us with valuable information. It is also an opportunity to hear from these women what emotional and physical traumas they have endured. If enough data is gathered to provide a compelling statement that legalized prostitution creates more harm in our society then could be presented to legislation. Overall, human trafficking needs to be stopped and the best way to begin that process is to support the notion that it needs to be talked about.

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