2022

The Postintervention Return to Traffickers by Minor Victims of Domestic Sex Trafficking

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Abstract

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by

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MPA, Strayer University, 2011

BS, Georgia Southern University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy Administration

Walden University

February 2022

Abstract

Domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) is a human rights problem that plagues all sizes of U.S. communities. The phenomenon of young sex trafficking victims returning to their trafficker after intervention by law enforcement and social services professionals exacerbates the DMST problem. The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn the perceptions of professionals who work with DMST youths to help understand (a) The reasons DMST victims return to their traffickers after intervention and (b) strategies that might reduce the likelihood of such returns. The study had three conceptual frameworks: social learning theory, routine activities theory, and anomie theory. Data were collected from online interviews with 13 law enforcement, social services, and child advocate professionals who had worked at least five years with domestically sex-trafficked minors. Participants were asked six open-ended questions about their perceptions and beliefs about DMST youth returning to their trafficker. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively analyzed to determine common themes in interview responses. Analysis determined five main themes along with subthemes in the professionals' answers to interview questions. The themes of Attitudes Toward DMST Youths, Grooming, and the four subthemes of Other Return Reasons indicated answers to the first research question. The themes of Intervention Strategies, with its five subthemes, and Need for Resources addressed the second research question. Interpretations of the results, limitations, and recommendations were provided. The study's implications for positive social change included its potential contribution to law enforcement and social service providers developing programming they could utilize to reduce the number of domestic minor sex trafficking victims returning to their traffickers after intervention.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the men and women in law enforcement, social work, and child advocacy who continue to Fight the Good the Fight. You all continue to navigate the changing trends and obstacles involved with sex trafficking, and your commitment does not falter. Your tireless dedication to working to save the lives of victims of domestic minor sex trafficking is incomparable.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this time to thank my family and friends for your steadfast encouragement and support. There were a few times where I did not believe that I could finish this process and it was your reassurance, care, and prayers that pushed me through. To my advisor thank you for being a wealth of knowledge and a source of support. To my entire committee thank you for your guidance during this entire process. I would not have been able to accomplish completion of my dissertation without you. To all the interview participants thank you for taking time away from your lives to assist me with completing my research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) is a serious ongoing problem in the United States. Also called "child sex trafficking," DMST is defined by the U.S. Department of Justice (2020, para. 1) as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a minor for the purpose of a commercial sex act." Sex traffickers who trade the sexual services of minors for money often use various forms of manipulation to lure vulnerable children into their enterprise. They may offer food, clothes, or lodging to the minor or entice the child by generating the appearance that they will provide attention, friendship, or even love. Typically, after creating a sense of trust in the child, traffickers will begin engaging the minor in prostitution or other sexual activities such as appearing in pornographic videos. They may then use various coercive methods to keep the child doing what they want. These methods may include physical, psychological, and emotional abuse (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020).

Sex traffickers may be professional pimps or belong to an organized crime network; however, they can also be family members, the youth's friends or peers, or an intimate partner (Fedina et al., 2019; Hardy et al., 2013). Although most victims of DMST are girls, they may be of either sex. The average age at which girls are trafficked is between 12 and 14 years, while the average age for boys is between 11 and 13 years. However, a child may be younger, and there is evidence that in recent years, the average age of being trafficked for both girls and boys has been getting younger (Clawson et al.,

2009). It has been estimated by the U.S. Department of State (2010) that in the United States, 100,000 to 300,000 children each year are drawn into domestic commercial sex trafficking (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017).

Various risk factors make a youth more susceptible to DMST. One risk factor is simply their young age and relative lack of life experience, which results in the minor being more susceptible to the manipulative methods of traffickers (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). Another risk factor is having been a victim of abuse in the past. Abuse in childhood is associated with minors running away from home, with running away being a strong risk factor for youths to become involved in DMST. Children in foster care are also more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers as they need family relationships and have histories of experiencing trauma and inadequate parental supervision (Landers et al., 2017). Victims of DMST are more likely from socioeconomically deprived families (Fedina et al., 2019).

As a result, these minors are more susceptible to acquiring the HIV virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. Girls may be at high risk for pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and gynecological infections (Twigg, 2017). These victims may need medical care for physical injuries they have suffered at the hands of their traffickers, health-related provisions including food and shelter, and treatment for substance abuse (Clawson et al., 2009). In a sample of 87 commercially sexually exploited youths, about 30% were found to have a medical need that required attention, with some of those having a chronic condition needing ongoing treatment or having a physical condition that interfered with their activities (Landers et al., 2017).

The most adverse effects for victims of human trafficking may be the mental and emotional repercussions and distress they experience as a result of the physical, emotional, and sexual violence perpetrated on them. Studies have found increased rates of depression, suicidality, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The psychological and behavioral effects of being trafficked also include increased anxiety, lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem, panic attacks, hopelessness, attachment disorder, developmental delays, and poor academic performance (Twigg, 2017). One study of sexually trafficked women and girls found that physical injuries and sexual violence that occurred while these individuals were being trafficked were related to experiencing higher levels of emotional and mental distress, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The researchers also found that an increase in the time these women and girls had spent being trafficked was associated with higher depression and anxiety levels. More time that had elapsed since being trafficked was associated with reduced depression and anxiety, but not with reduced PTSD (Hossain et al., 2010).

Youths who have experienced trauma from their trafficking experiences are susceptible to developing strong bonds with traffickers who exploit them. These minors may have family relationship needs that the traffickers can exploit by appearing to be someone who can help fulfill those needs. Sexually trafficked minors may develop strong bonds with their traffickers, making it difficult for them to realize that they are being exploited. Nearly half of the 87 children in the Landers et al. (2017) sample of trafficked youths did not view themselves as being exploited and over half did not perceive themselves as being in a dangerous situation. Over two-thirds of those in the sample

revealed some signs of trauma bonding with their exploiters, with these signs including defending and justifying the activities of the trafficker. This behavior indicated that to some extent, they believed that their exploiter was acting in their best interest.

It may be partly due to disbelieving that their trafficker is exploiting them that a substantial number of sexually trafficked youths return to their trafficker after being rescued by authorities and counseled by social welfare professionals. These returns may happen several times after interventions, displaying that DMST may have a cyclical nature for a particular victim. By returning to their trafficker, the youths are putting themselves into danger again and opening themselves to the possibility of experiencing further trauma. These traumatic experiences may then result in the exploiter having even greater control of the youths, who may have been initially drawn to the trafficker by having experienced trauma in the past (Landers et al., 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Victims of DMST sometimes return to their traffickers after they have been detained and counseled. Interviews with 34 individuals representative of law enforcement, prosecution, judiciary/public defenders, juvenile justice, child protective services, and non-governmental organizations found that interviewees spoke widely of the psychological hold that traffickers had on their victims, victims not believing that they had been victimized, and the high likelihood of victims returning to their trafficker (Reid, 2010). By returning to their traffickers, these youths perpetuate their own victimization at the hands of the traffickers. In another study of 13 survivors of DMST,

most of the interviewees reported that after intervention, the pull to return to their profession was strong (O'Brien, 2018).

To help victims of human trafficking, it is important to understand the reasons why DMST victims often return to their trafficker after intervention; however, these reasons are not well understood. It appears that to date, no research studies have specifically focused on the reasons for DMST victims to return to their traffickers and what strategies might help prevent victims from returning to their traffickers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand why some DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention through the perceptions of professionals who have worked with DMST victims. The study explored these professionals' perceptions and beliefs about why some DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention and how any tendency to return to their trafficker can be counteracted.

Research Questions

The study had two research questions:

Research Question 1: Why do DMST victims return to sex traffickers after intervention, from the perspective of law enforcement and human service professionals?

Research Question 2: What intervention strategies do law enforcement and human service professionals believe would reduce the likelihood of DMST victims returning to their traffickers?

Conceptual Framework

Three conceptual frameworks were used for this study. The first conceptual framework was social learning theory, which was put forward by Akers (1973). Social learning theory accounts for criminal and deviant behavior as being the result of individuals' social relations with others. Social learning theory is based on four main ideas for explaining people's deviant behavior: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation. Differential association concerns the primary and secondary groups of people that individuals associate with. By associating with these people, individuals learn what behaviors are considered acceptable and which are not. When individuals associate with people who believe that deviant behaviors are acceptable, they may begin to form similar attitudes toward those behaviors and imitate the deviant behavior. This acceptance may be aided by differential reinforcement. If the deviant behaviors are observed to provide positive consequences or to reduce adverse consequences, then they are more likely to be repeated in the future.

The second conceptual framework was routine activities theory, which was first proposed by Cohen and Felson (1979). Routine activities theory focuses on the circumstances that enable offenders to conduct their criminal activities. According to the theory, direct-contact, predatory crime can be understood as being the result of three main variables: the presence of a motivated offender, a suitable target for the criminal act, and the absence of a guardian who can protect against the crime occurring. Cohen and Felson argued that structural changes in the routine activities of a neighborhood or an entire society that lead to an increase in these three variables help to explain increases in

predatory crime rates. The routine activities theory has been extended to apply to all criminal activity and to recognize that criminal activity may be more likely in locations that make it easier for a motivated offender to prey upon a victim (Eck, 2003; Tillyer & Eck, 2011). A main reason a particular location may be more likely to encourage criminal activity is the absence of capable guardians.

The third conceptual framework for the study was anomie theory. This theory was first put forward by the nineteenth century French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1982), who defined *anomie* as a condition in which social norms for conduct were weak, absent, or in conflict due to social conditions and changes. One result of anomie is a higher probability of criminal and deviant behavior. Robert Merton (1938) expanded on Durkheim's views by claiming that an emphasis on monetary success in the United States leads to subverting society's rules for acceptable behavior, especially among people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Due to the cultural importance of monetary success and a relative lack of legitimate opportunities to achieve success, disadvantaged individuals have a higher likelihood of engaging in illegitimate ways of earning money.

Anomie theory, as explained by Merton (1938), can be viewed as related to the perspective of classic strain theory (Bernburg, 2019). According to classic strain theory, a society's emphasis on the cultural value of monetary success produces a strain on disadvantaged people, whose pathways to success may be relatively few or blocked. To relieve the strain, these individuals may turn to criminal activities that they believe increase the possibility of economic success (Agnew et al., 1996).

Nature of the Study

The study collected qualitative data from interviews with selected professionals who were experienced in the area of DMST. A qualitative methodology was chosen because it allowed data to be explored more deeply than quantitative methods (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Qualitative research is appropriate when little research has been conducted about a phenomenon, as was the case for this study, and greater understanding may be gained by learning the views of individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In this study, an effective way to learn those views was through administering open-ended questions to professionals to determine their perceptions and beliefs about DMST youths returning to their trafficker. A quantitative study, in contrast, would limit the amount of information the professionals could provide.

The key phenomenon that was of concern in the study is the return of DMST victims to their trafficker after intervention. The study investigated this phenomenon by conducting interviews with professionals who were familiar with the phenomenon. In the interviews, participants were asked to report their beliefs and perceptions about what factors lead to the phenomenon and what intervention strategies they believed could reduce the likelihood of the phenomenon occurring.

Thirteen professionals who had dealt with DMST victims were interviewed. Six were from law enforcement, five from social services, and three from child advocate organizations. The interview consisted of six open-ended questions. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before conducting the interview. Video responses to the interview questions were transcribed into computer files and analyzed using

qualitative methods. The purpose of the analysis was to identify common themes in the participants' responses to the questions during the interview. The analysis was done according to the steps for inductive generic qualitative analysis (Percy et al., 2015). The qualitative analysis was assisted by using the qualitative analysis program at https://www.dedoose.com.

Learning the views of these three types of professionals about the phenomenon of DMST victims returning to their traffickers was expected to provide valuable insights about the phenomenon. Law enforcement officers and human service professionals were well positioned to provide valuable information for the study. Due to their involvement in detainment and intervention processes focused on trafficked youths, law enforcement officers and human service professionals play a vital role in keeping victims of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) from returning to their traffickers. The way in which DMST victims are detained by law enforcement may play a significant role in whether the victim later returns to her or his trafficker. For instance, it may be critical to the criminal justice system that officers are trained to recognize the physical, social, and psychological effects DMST and to respond appropriately.

Social workers and other human service professionals often encounter victims of DMST after they have been involved with the criminal justice system. These professionals have an opportunity to engage victims during and after their involvement with the criminal justice system. Social service professionals can assist with creating a safety plan, mental health services, crisis intervention, educational support, employment services, and possibly residential placement. These professionals may also be well

positioned to collaborate with law enforcement agencies in the design of interventions to mitigate DMST and the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and to reduce the probability that DMST victims will return to their traffickers after intervention.

Definitions

Anomie theory: A theory that explains criminality as being the result of a society's emphasis on monetary success combined with some people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage (Merton, 1938).

Domestic minor sex trafficking: "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a minor for the purpose of a commercial sex act" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020, para. 1).

Intervention: In this study, the counseling or treatment by law enforcement, child welfare, or other authorities of minors who are believed to be victims of DMST.

Minor: In the United States, a person who has not reached her or his 18th birthday (*Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/minor).

Trafficker: In this study, a person who commits the crime of domestic minor sex trafficking (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020, para. 1).

Trafficking of Victims Protection Act of 2000: A law passed by Congress and signed by the president to outlaw the obtaining, recruiting, harboring, transporting, or providing a person of less than 18 years of age for engagement in a commercial sex act (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017).

Assumptions

Several philosophical assumptions are made in regard to using qualitative research, which is a type of research that is appropriate for dealing with social experience (Cypress, 2017). These include assumptions about the nature of reality, how knowledge is gained, and which methodology and methods to use to gain knowledge (Scotland, 2012). Qualitative research is interpretive research, which typically uses social constructivism as its worldview. According to the social constructivist paradigm, reality is constructed by each individual's consciousness of the world. Based on this paradigm, knowledge of reality is gained by understanding how people construct reality. This philosophical assumption about how knowledge is gained leads to the further view that in order to learn about a social phenomenon, we must learn what individuals believe is true about that phenomenon (Scotland, 2012). One main way of doing this is to conduct interviews with individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon to learn their beliefs and perceptions about the phenomenon.

This study assumed a social constructivist view of the nature of reality and how knowledge is gained. The phenomenon to be investigated was the return of trafficked youths to their traffickers after intervention. This is a social phenomenon, and individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon are the best sources for providing knowledge about the phenomenon, including what factors may affect why it occurs. For that reason, individuals who were familiar with the phenomenon were asked to provide their perceptions and beliefs about it. The various views of these participants were examined to determine what information and common themes might be revealed in their responses to

interview questions that could help in understanding the nature of the phenomenon, why it arises, and how it might be alleviated.

Scope and Delimitations

Some important concerns about sexually trafficked minors were not within the scope of this study. These concerns included the physical and mental health of these youths, the factors that led to their becoming victims of DMST, and the conditions in which they were forced to live while being trafficked. The scope of this study concerned only the phenomenon of sexually trafficked minors returning to their trafficker after intervention as viewed from the perspective of professionals who dealt with these youths. This focus was chosen because returning to their trafficker is something that occurs for some trafficked minors, yet no prior studies have apparently been done to investigate professionals' views about why the phenomenon occurs and how it can be reduced.

Several conceptual frameworks for trying to understand the phenomenon were used. One framework was social learning theory (Akers, 1973), which explains the victimization of youths in terms of social relationships. Another framework was the routine activities model (Cohen & Felson, 1979), in which three variables help to explain predatory crime: presence of a motivated offender, a suitable target for the criminal act, and absence of a guardian who can protect against the crime occurring. The study also used the anomie theory in combination with classical strain theory as a conceptual framework. Anomie theory helps explain the widespread existence of DMST, and classical strain theory helps explain why youths can be lured or coerced into DMST and may help explain why they return to traffickers after intervention.

The qualitative nature of the study did not allow for strict transferability of the findings. However, the findings were expected to provide valuable information from the perspectives of professionals who have dealt with DMST youths. This information included their beliefs about the reasons for DMST youths returning to their traffickers after intervention and strategies for reducing that phenomenon.

Limitations

This study was limited by being a qualitative study with a sample of participants who were not randomly selected. The results of such studies are not transferable to other samples. The study adhered to quality criteria of qualitative research, and the results were valuable by providing expert opinions about the reasons DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention and how that phenomenon can be counteracted. The quality criteria were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Chapter 3 includes a discussion of how the study met these quality criteria.

The study was also limited by not obtaining information on why DMST youths return to their trafficker directly from trafficked youths. Youths who have returned to their traffickers after intervention might provide useful information; however, the youths might not understand the factors that led to their returning. Professionals who deal with such youths were expected to provide an objective evaluation of the factors that lead DMST youths to return to their traffickers and how that likelihood can be reduced.

The study was also limited by the participants coming from only one large urban area. Professionals working in other cities, towns, or rural areas might have viewpoints on why DMST survivors return to their trafficker that were not represented in this study.

Another limitation was that no information was gathered on the percentage of survivors the participants had encountered or worked with that returned to their trafficker. Also, no information was gathered on the financial resources for treating DMST youths in the participants' various agencies.

Significance

This study is significant because it provides new information from several kinds of experts about the factors that lead domestically sex trafficked minors to return to their traffickers after intervention. Too little is understood about this phenomenon. The study added to the knowledge base about why DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention and how the likelihood of this phenomenon occurring might be reduced.

The study is also significant because of the importance of making intervention strategies more effective. In particular, intervention needs to be more effective in reducing the likelihood of post-intervention returns of DMST youths to their trafficker. The study may provide information that will help in the design of such strategies.

Finally, the study is significant because it has implications for positive social change. The study provided information that can be used to help prevent sexually trafficked youths who have been rescued from their trafficker from returning to the kind of physical, emotional, and sexual violence that they were rescued from. Adolescents and children who are commercially sex trafficked are starting their lives in a terrible way, being severely exploited and abused, unable to attend school, and forced to deal with situations that may lead to lifetime mental health problems. Once out of that situation, they are safer. However, if they return to their trafficker, they are again putting

themselves in danger of abuse and violence. It is important to learn as much as possible about the factors that lead DMST youths to return to their traffickers after intervention so that strategies for reducing that possibility can be developed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study. The problem of minors in the United States being commercially sexually trafficked was described. The specific problem of there being insufficient understanding of why DMST youths sometimes return to their trafficker after intervention was also explained. There is a need for a study that investigates the factors that lead to DMST victims to return to their trafficker after intervention.

The purpose of the study was then described. This purpose was to administer questionnaires to 13 professionals who dealt with DMST youths to learn their beliefs about the reasons such youths return to their traffickers after intervention and what intervention strategies might reduce the likelihood of that happening. The research questions were noted, and the nature of the study was briefly explained.

The latter parts of the chapter provided definitions of key terms and explanations of the assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. The next chapter reviews relevant literature about the domestic sex trafficking of minors. The review includes literature about risk factors of youths becoming involved in sex trafficking, the effects of being trafficked on the physical and mental health of victims, and efforts to combat DMST. Based on the review, several factors are identified that may increase the probability of DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore why victims of DMST return to traffickers after intervention by law enforcement and human service professionals. To fulfill this purpose, participants from law enforcement, human service professions, and child advocacy organizations were interviewed to determine their views about the reasons DMST youths sometimes return to their traffickers after intervention. Because of their work with rescued DMST youths, these participants were considered to be experts who might be able to provide enlightening information on factors that affect the phenomenon of detained and counseled youths returning to their traffickers after intervention. Analysis of interview comments enabled identification of significant themes that emerged from the world of professionals who have the most experience in working with DMST youths. The themes that emerged from the experiences of professionals who work with these individuals provided information that may help in the design of interventions to reduce the likelihood of DMST survivors returning to their traffickers.

This chapter provides a review of literature that is relevant to the study. The chapter is divided into four main sections after the Introduction. The first section details the literature research strategy. The second main section highlights literature on the three conceptual frameworks of the study, social relations theory, routine activities theory, and anomie theory. This section includes explanations for why these conceptual frameworks are appropriate for the study.

The third and longest main section reviews the research literature on DMST. This section is divided into several subsections. The first subsection section provides an overview of the problem of commercial sex trafficking of youths in the United States, including information on who are the youths, who are the traffickers, what sustains DMST, and strategies used by traffickers to engage minors in DMST. The second subsection reviews the research literature related to the risk factors of a minor being caught up in DMST. This section also deals with how some risk factors may help explain the phenomenon of trafficked youths returning to their trafficker after intervention. The third subsection reviews literature related to the harm that is done to youths who are commercially sexually exploited. The subsection includes evidence that psychological dependency is instilled by traffickers in youths and how the nature of the intervention carried out with such youths may be related to the likelihood of their returning to their traffickers. The fourth subsection reviews literature on the response of law enforcement and the judicial system to DMST. Evidence is provided that there has been a gradual and substantial change in the approach of authorities over the last few decades from treating DMST youths as criminals to treating them as victims.

The fourth main section provides a summary of the chapter and a synthesis of the reviewed literature in relation to the study purpose. The synthesis focuses on factors identified in the review that may be related to whether a detained minor who has been sexually trafficked returns to her or his trafficker after intervention. The section also provides a transition to the next chapter.

Literature Review Strategy

The Walden University library database served as the primary resource for identifying research articles related to the research topic. In conducting a review of the literature addressing relevant documents and research related to DMST, I have attempted to provide context that would aid in understanding the stated problem. This comprehensive analysis of the existing knowledge base provides a solid foundation for developing a valuable contribution to the research literature.

My search for literature included use of the following search engines: ProQuest, Sage, Thoreau, and Google Scholar. I used the Walden University library to acquire articles for research. In addition, current materials were gathered from human trafficking conferences and trainings in Atlanta, Georgia. Key terms for searching databases included the following: *human trafficking*; *child trafficking, sex trafficking, domestic minor sex trafficking, sex workers, traffickers, child abuse, child sexual abuse, sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, sexual assault, sex abuse victims, child maltreatment, modern day slavery, commercial sex exploitation, prostitution, teenage prostitution, juvenile prostitution, sex work, captivity narratives, victims of trafficking, victims, victimization, sex offenders, johns, pimp, pimps, pimping social network analysis, conversation analysis, anti-trafficking, trauma, law enforcement, police, police officers, policing child protection, police decision making, police attitudes, police discretion, computer child protection, police personality, stereotypes, victim blame, juvenile justice system,* and *criminal justice system.*

Theory and Conceptual Framework

The topic of this study was the phenomenon of DMST victims often returning to their trafficker after intervention by law enforcement and/or social services professionals. The reasons for this phenomenon are not well understood, and it appears that no studies have been conducted that focus on the reasons for the phenomenon and what intervention strategies might counteract any tendency among DMST victims to return to their trafficker. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to learn what professionals who have dealt with DMST minors believed are the reasons why some of these youths return to their traffickers after intervention and their views of strategies to reduce the likelihood of their returning. The conceptual frameworks for the study are social learning theory, routine activities theory, and anomie theory.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory, first proposed by Akers (1973), explains individuals' deviant behavior as being the result of their social relations with others. Social learning theory has four basic principles in terms of which it explains people's behavior. These are differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation.

Differential association refers to the social groups that individuals associate with. Primary relationships are those with family and close friends. Secondary relationships include those with other individuals, such as teachers, casual acquaintances, and neighbors. Through individuals' associations with others, they learn what various others consider to be acceptable or unacceptable behavior. The effects of associations are determined by how close the relationship is, how early it forms, and for how long and

how frequently the relationship occurs. Individuals may come to model their own behaviors on those of others they are associated with (Akers & Sellers, 2004).

Definitions are the attitudes that individuals have toward which behaviors are morally acceptable and which are not. An individual may learn these attitudes by way of differential association with others. The definitions learned may agree with what is normally considered to be acceptable behaviors in society. However, the definitions learned may be a favorable attitude toward certain deviant behaviors or a neutral attitude toward such behaviors. The neutral attitude does not favor the behavior but is one that considers the behavior to be morally acceptable (Akers & Sellers, 2004).

Differential reinforcement consists of the positive or negative reinforcing of behaviors. Positive reinforcement consists of positive consequences of the behavior. Negative reinforcement consists of the behavior's removal of adverse effects. These reinforcements increase the likelihood of the person engaging in the behavior in the future. The strength of this effect tends to increase depending on the value the person puts on the reinforcement and how frequently the reinforcement occurs as a result of the behavior (Akers & Sellers, 2004).

The principle of imitation refers to individuals tending to imitate the behavior that they observe in others. The strength of the likelihood of their imitating depends on how close they are to the others, the nature of the behavior observed, and the consequences of the behavior that they observe. If individuals observe deviant behavior in others they are close to, or deviant behavior that has favorable consequences, they are more likely to imitate that behavior in the future.

The theory of social learning developed by Akers (1973) may help explain the phenomenon of DMST victims returning to their traffickers after apprehension and counseling. Victims' association with their trafficker may lead them to see that the trafficker, customers, and other victims accept prostitution and other sexual activities for money as morally acceptable behaviors. As a result, they may develop attitudes toward such behaviors that are morally in favor of them or at least morally accept them. They may also be reinforced both positively and negatively to engage in a behavior. The positive reinforcement may be in the form of monetary rewards or favors granted by the trafficker. The negative reinforcement may come from escaping punishment from the trafficker by performing the behavior the trafficker wants them to perform. Negative reinforcement may also occur if they believe that staying with the trafficker is a way to avoid whatever adversities that they had to deal with before they met the trafficker.

Routine Activities Theory

Routine activities theory, which was proposed by Cohen and Felson (1979), is an attempt to explain the factors that lead to criminal activity. This theory puts an emphasis on understanding certain conditions and situations that create opportunities for offenders to commit crimes. According to routine activities theory, the convergence of three factors helps explain why a person may become a victim of predatory criminal activity. The first factor is the presence of a potential offender who is motivated to commit the crime. The second factor is the presence of a target for the crime. The third factor is the absence of someone who can guard against the offender committing a crime against the target. Such a guardian might be a police officer, a friend of the target, or someone else who can

prevent the criminal activity. In the case where a juvenile is the target, the guardian might be a parent or other responsible adult who is not present.

According to Cohen and Felson (1979), changes in the routine activities that occur in a certain location or in the society as a whole may lead to an increase in the three factors, causing the crime rate to increase. For example, if a particular neighborhood or other location includes the presence of potential offenders who are motivated to take advantage of other people who live in or visit the area, crimes will more likely be committed if there is no one at the location who can function as a guardian against the crimes occurring (Eck, 2003; Tillyer & Eck, 2011). The idea of a guardian extends beyond someone who has the responsibility of guarding the potential target from being taken advantage of. The concept of a guardian also includes people who have a supervisory relationship to the potential offender such as parents or school personnel, and to people who are responsible for overseeing a particular location, such as a facilities manager or a security guard (Miller, 2013).

Routine activities theory applied to the study because the victims that the study was concerned with are juveniles whose involvement with sex trafficking operations may be partly due to the absence of a capable guardian. Some of these juveniles are street children or foster children who have no parents present to prevent predators from taking advantage of them when they are on the street (Agnew, 2001). As a result, the juvenile may be more susceptible to being recruited into a DMST operation. If the juvenile is later detained by authorities and given counseling, he or she may be more likely to return to

the trafficker after intervention if there is still no parent or other guardian present who can protect the juvenile from being further exploited.

Anomie Theory

Anomie refers to a societal condition and was first put forward in the work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1982). He defined the concept of *anomie* as a condition that occurs when social norms for conduct are absent or weak, or where they are conflicting. Anomie occurs when society undergoes rapid changes that weaken social norms. Such social conditions may include the existence of different socioeconomic levels among the population, with some people living in impoverished conditions while others have much greater economic success. When a weakening of social norms occurs, the likelihood of people engaging in criminal, delinquent, and deviant behavior increases. In the case of the criminal behavior of commercially sex trafficking youths, the social norm of protecting the well-being of children until they reach the age of maturity is ignored and undermined. According to the views of Durkheim, the criminal practice of DMST reflects the weakening of the social norm of protecting youths.

Durkheim's (1982) views were expanded by the American sociologist Robert Merton (1938), who maintained that social norms for acceptable behavior in the United States were being subverted by the powerful emphasis in this country on achieving monetary success. Merton held that the weakening of social norms was especially a problem among those citizens who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and have a reduced opportunity for achieving success in ways that are legally acceptable. Given the cultural importance of financial well-being, these disadvantaged individuals are more

likely to violate norms of acceptable behavior by engaging in illegitimate ways to gain a greater portion of monetary success.

Anomie theory was a precursor of strain theory (Bernburg, 2019), a theory that provides further details about how society's emphasis on monetary success affects disadvantaged individuals. Supporters of classic strain theory hold that reduced legitimate opportunities for monetary success produces a psychological and emotional strain on disadvantaged people, creating negative emotional reactions such as anger and frustration. To relieve the strain and attempt to increase their financial status, these individuals have an increased likelihood of engaging in illegitimate activities (Agnew et al., 1996). In addition, general strain theory, as set forward by Agnew (2001), holds that other conditions that cause strain in individuals' lives may lead to illegal or delinquent behavior. Other strains may include experiencing physical violence, verbal insults, or other negative psychological or emotional stimuli. Negative stimuli include a minor experiencing emotional, physical, or sexual abuse from a household member or experiencing parental neglect or rejection. Agnew (2001) identifies four characteristics of strains that may increase the likelihood of criminal or delinquent behavior. These are that the situation causing the strain is viewed as unjust by the individual affected, the strain is of a high degree, the situation is associated with low social control, and the situation creates pressure or motivation for the individual to behave criminally.

Anomie theory and its extension into strain theory pertained to the study in several ways. First, domestic traffickers who coerce or lure minors into engaging in the commercial sex trade have likely been influenced by the strong emphasis in U.S. culture

to make money. These traffickers may or may not come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but they have decided to oppose society's norms of protecting children and instead violate those norms by engaging in the criminal act of exploiting youths for the sake of financial rewards.

A second way anomie theory pertained to the study was that many of the victims of DMST come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and there is evidence that maltreatment of children occurs at a higher rate among economically disadvantaged families (Dettlaff et al., 2011). Such an increased rate of family abuse may be related to the strain that disadvantaged families experience from being less able than others to gain economic success in legitimate ways. At the same time, the increased rate of abuse increases children's likelihood of running away from home, which makes them more susceptible to domestic minor sex traffickers, as explained in the previous section. In some cases, a family member may even demand that a child engages in sex to earn money as a way for the family to deal with strain and try to improve the family's impoverished situation.

A third way anomie theory and its extension into strain theory pertained to the study was by highlighting the strains that many of the young people who are most susceptible to DMST have undergone. The kinds of psychological and emotional strains that many of these youths have experienced create negative emotional reactions such as anger and frustration and may lead them to run away from home and become street children, where they are vulnerable to the manipulations and pressures of commercial sex traffickers who target them. These young people are victims and not criminals. However,

the likelihood of their becoming coerced or lured into being trafficked may increase if the youth views what happened in the home as being unjust; in that case, she or he may be more willing to consider the trafficker as a friend or protector (Agnew, 2001). Also, for children who have run away from home and foster children, control by parents or foster parents may be low or nonexistent. In addition, the juvenile may experience pressure or motivation to behave in a way that is considered illegitimate (Agnew, 2001). The situation of being on the street with few resources puts a strain on youths, making them more susceptible to seeing DMST as a way of relieving that strain. The trafficker may exert further pressure by coercing the youth into the sex trade or may motivate her or him by manipulative tactics.

Anomie theory is also appropriate for this study because it may be related to the phenomenon of DMST victims returning to their trafficker after intervention. In particular, minors who were homeless due to the strain of being abused or neglected in the home and who then became trafficked may feel distrustful of adults and authorities who represent society because these representatives failed to protect them when they were in the home. They may be angry and frustrated at society itself. Also, such youths may feel that if they return to the home, they will again experience abuse. These may be motivations for youths to return to their trafficker.

Research Literature

DMST Victims and Traffickers

Because of the clandestine nature of sex trafficking, there are no precise statistics on domestic minor sex trafficking in the United States. However, DMST is believed to be

widespread in the country. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that out of 2,515 suspected human trafficking cases that were investigated from 2008 to 2010, 1,106 (40.3%) of the cases involved the prostitution or other sexual exploitation of a minor (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011). It is estimated that as many as 300,000 U.S. children are at risk of being sexually trafficked (Birckhead, 2011). Accurate measurements of the number of youths subject to DMST are impeded by the illegality of trafficking minors. Measurements are also hindered by the lack of a central database to keep track of trafficked victims, the failure to recognize DMST youths, and victims' reluctance to report their situation due to shame, fear, or other reasons (Greenbaum et al., 2018). Adding to the difficulty of determining who is a minor victim of commercial sex trafficking, traffickers provide many of these underaged youths with false identification cards indicating that they are at least 18 years old (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017).

The sexual trafficking of youths takes place because of the demand by purchasers for minors to engage with in sexual activities (Smith & Vardaman, 2010-2011). This demand results in traffickers gaining sizable financial rewards for DMST. It is estimated that globally, commercial sex trafficking of children and adults results in $33.9 billion in profits annually (Belser, 2005). Further, the sexual trafficking of minors may be more profitable than trafficking adults because the prices paid by customers to traffickers for the opportunity to engage in sexual activities with a young person may be higher due to a higher customer demand. Also, minors may be more easily controlled than adults due to their youth and relative lack of experience. Kotrla (2011) maintained that minors are the most vulnerable group of people in the United States for becoming sex trafficking victims

and that the majority of the women who are prostitutes as adults entered the profession as minors. Young people who are caught up in DMST may not realize they are being exploited due to their age, learning disabilities and limitations, or poor judgment (Gragg et al., 2007). These youths may also crave for attention and have a need to be loved due to past adverse experiences (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017).

Commercial sex traffickers of children in the United States are frequently pimps working on their own or may be members of criminal syndicates (Bernat & Zhilina, 2010). Recruitment sites are often locations where traffickers may find runaway or homeless youth or those who are involved in the legal system. Such sites include bus stations, courthouses, and near jails (Davis, 2006). Traffickers may also recruit minors in various ways, including on social media, through phone messages or text messaging, and in person at transport centers such as train stations and airports and at malls or other shopping centers (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016). In the United States, some cities are considered to be recruitment cities, where youths are manipulated or coerced into the commercial sex trade, while some cities are destination locations where the youths are sent to work in the sex trade. Some cities are both recruitment and destination cities (Williamson & Prior, 2009). Smaller cities in the Midwest, such as Toledo and Cleveland, Ohio, are main recruitment areas. From there, DMST victims may be transported to work in destination cities such as Chicago and Las Vegas (Williamson & Prior, 2009). However, trafficked minors may not be transported anywhere else and may be sexually exploited in the same city or area in which they were recruited (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016). In addition, some minors who become

engaged in commercial sex work have been encouraged to do so by intimate partners, such as boyfriends, or by peers (Fedina et al., 2019), and some have been trafficked by family members (Cole, 2018).

DMST minors are recruited to perform sexual activities for money, much or all of which goes to the trafficker. Traffickers may require minors to engage in diverse types of sexual activity, including creating pornography, working on Internet sex sites, and working in massage parlors (Cole et al., 2016). Many of the youths enlisted into commercial sex activities by traffickers are caused to engage in prostitution. This may occur on the streets, in brothels, massage parlors, night clubs, sex parties, motel and hotel rooms, truck stops and highway rest areas, vehicles, and at major events such as the Superbowl (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016). Border crossings are another location where DMST youths may be required to work as prostitutes (Pardee et al., 2016). DMST activities may tend to proliferate in areas where there is a market for adult prostitution and where there tend to be a large number of men who are staying in the area only temporarily, such as convention attendees, tourists, military personnel, or truckers (Estes & Weiner, 2002). Traffickers often isolate their youthful victims by transporting them away from their family and friends and/or moving them from location to location (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020).

Both girls and boys can be trafficked, but the proportions of each sex may vary in different locations. A study by Gragg et al. (2004) found that 8% of sexually trafficked youths in New York City were male, while 22% of DMST youths in seven upstate New York counties were male. The average age of being a victim of DMST is from 12 to 14

(Hardy et al., 2013). However, in the New York State study conducted by Gragg et al. (2004), it was found that in the seven upstate counties, 8% of girls trafficked were under the age of 10, while 6% of the boys trafficked were under the age of 10 years. Many DMST victims are young people who have left home for various reasons and have been living on the street. Being homeless with few resources may lead youths to sell sexual favors in order to meet basic needs such as for food and shelter (O'Brien et al., 2017). Traffickers view these children as vulnerable due to their past and present circumstances. However, sexually trafficked youths may also come from noncity street settings, including suburban or rural neighborhoods, and may come from any socioeconomic level (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020).

Trafficked minors may be of any race and ethnicity and may still reside with their family (Gibbs et al., 2015). In some areas, the percentage of minority children who have been manipulated or coerced into DMST is higher than that of white youths; however, one study found that the majority of minors who were trafficked for sexual purposes were Caucasian (64%) as opposed to 36% who were members of a minority group (Estes & Weiner, 2002). The researchers also found that the majority of the youths who were assessed in their study (76%) were from working class or middle-class families rather than from poor families (24%). Estes and Weiner (2002) made clear that the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic histories of DMST victims vary with different cities and other locations in the United States where they are trafficked.

Young people who are caught up in sex trafficking may be forced to do what they do by violence or threats from their trafficker (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). One study that

included interviews of case workers from three organizations that served DMST youths found that violence was frequently used by traffickers who threatened or physically assaulted trafficked youths to maintain control of them. Over time, control techniques used included tattooing the youth with the trafficker's name, shaving her or his head, and increasing the rate of physical assaults (Gibbs et al., 2015). Psychological and emotional tactics may also be used to control youths. Often, the youths may be psychologically manipulated to such a degree that they do not believe that they are being exploited by the trafficker but that they are freely choosing to do what their trafficker tells them to do (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017).

What can be termed "coercive control" by traffickers consists of coercive and controlling strategies including threats and verbal manipulation, limiting movement, creating or exploiting substance dependence, and creating debt (Raphael et al., 2010, p. 91). Traffickers may use drugs or alcohol to control victims or may perpetrate physical and/or sexual violence in the form of beatings and rape to oversee them (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). Stalans and Finn (2016) investigated the methods to control their sex workers used by traffickers who managed prostitutes via the Internet. The sample of interviewees included traffickers who recruited underaged individuals to get involved in their commercial sex operations. The researchers found that the traffickers used six types of control method. The first four types were classified under the heading of indirect coercion and included psychological exploitation strategies, such as using verbal means to manipulate and belittle trafficked victims. Indirect coercion included economic exploitation such as allowing the trafficked girls and women to keep only a small

percentage or even none of what they earned for engaging in sexual activities. Indirect coercion also included indirect sexual coercion and providing sex workers with drugs. Other methods used by traffickers were direct coercion, including physical and sexual aggression, and possessive ownership coercion such as insisting that the person gain permission before speaking to others and surveilling workers to detect any behaviors that are in opposition to the trafficker's wishes (Stalans & Finn, 2016).

Risk Factors for Minors Being Sexually Trafficked

A number of risk factors have been found to make a young person more susceptible to DMST. The victim's youth and the prospect of earning money off that youth is what may make trafficker to approach the child, but the minor's lack of real-world experience may also make it more likely that she or he will not understand a trafficker's manipulative tactics (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). Other risk factors that may lead minors to become involved in commercial sex include having friends who sell sexual favors, being subject to other peer influences, and coming from a socioeconomically disadvantage family (Fedina et al., 2019).

The strongest risk factor for a youth to be recruited into DMST may be having a childhood that was not secure emotionally. Bowlby (1969) stressed the importance of secure attachment to caregivers during childhood. This secure attachment is the bond of emotional closeness that binds family members together and is essential for children's healthy psychological and emotional growth. Secure attachment serves as a secure emotional base from which the child can explore the world as she or he matures. When a child's attachment is not secure, the result can be various dysfunctional emotions and

behaviors. It has been found that a substantial percentage of DMST victims have come from environments that jeopardize secure emotional attachments with their caregivers. These include family environments in which the child witnessed violence between her or his caregivers or experienced physical abuse themselves (Hardy et al., 2013). A substantial percentage of DMST youths have reported experiencing sexual abuse from relatives or others (Boxill & Richardson, 2007). A report by a juvenile facility in Texas indicated that 90% of DMST victims had been physically or sexually abused in the past, while a Nevada juvenile facility reported that 71% of victims had been sexually abused (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017).

Coming from a home environment that is deficient in the behaviors that promote emotional closeness or that included behaviors that sabotage emotional closeness is a main reason so many DMST victims are runaways from home (Reid, 2011). Running away from home has been found to be a strong risk factor for youths to become involved in DMST (Fedina et al., 2019). One reason running away from home is associated with DMST is that running away and being homeless increase the likelihood of the individual engaging in survival sex, which is sex traded for money needed to live on or for items needed for survival. Franchino-Olsen (2019) noted that studies have found that survival sex practiced by youths is associated with their later being exploited through DMST. Because they lack resources, runaway children are more susceptible to the manipulations of a trafficker who may offer the youths necessities such as food and shelter. Also, runaway youths are often in need of a secure emotional attachment. Understanding this, traffickers may psychologically and emotionally manipulate the child to believe that with

them, she or he can have the attention and emotional security that was lacking within the child's family. A minor may perceive a trafficker as fulfilling his or her need for affection and may be see him as a friend, protector, or even a kind of parental substitute rather than an exploiter Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). DMST youths' disbelief that a trafficker has been exploiting them and belief that the trafficker is providing them with attention and affection they did not receive in the home are possible factors that may affect the likelihood that the youths will return to the trafficker after intervention.

For some of the same reasons that runaway youths are more susceptible to traffickers, children in foster care are also more vulnerable to exploitation. This may be due to the foster youths' often being placed with different foster care providers over time and having little time to establish secure bonds with any of the providers. Being a foster child placed with different families may result in these youths feeling deficient in permanent caring family relationships. These youths, like those who run away from home, may also have a history of experiencing traumatic events and inadequate parental supervision (Landers et al., 2017).

One study of 27 minor females who presented at medical facilities and were suspected of being trafficked for commercial sex compared these female youths to an age- and gender-matched group of 57 minors (94.6% were girls) who alleged that they had been sexually molested or sexually assaulted but were not believed to have been sexually trafficked. The purpose of the study was to determine any differences between the two groups. The researchers found that the minors who were suspected of having been trafficked were significantly more likely to have experienced violence, substance

use, and involvement with law enforcement authorities or child protective services than the other group. The girls in the suspected sexually trafficked group were also significantly more likely to have run away from home and to have a longer history of sexual activity (Varma et al., 2015).

Fedina et al. (2019) investigated the risk factors that were present for minors who had been sexually trafficked in comparison to adult sex workers who had not been trafficked. A total of 115 present and former child trafficking victims in five cities in one midwestern state were surveyed, as were 158 nontrafficked adult workers in the sex trade. Females in the trafficked group numbered 89, with 25 males (missing data on one participant). Females in the nontrafficked group numbered 109, with 46 males and 2 transgender individuals (missing data on one participant). Results of the analysis of survey results indicated that being sexually trafficked as a minor was significantly associated with having experienced emotional and sexual abuse, having been raped, ever having ran away from home, having one or more family members who were sex workers, and having friends who had purchased sex. The researchers noted that the strongest predictor for youths to become involved in DMST was having run away from home. Participants who were trafficked had over five times the odds of having run away from home before being trafficked after the researchers controlled for other risk factors and demographics. Results also indicated that racial and ethnic minority youths had over two times the odds of being trafficked as non-Hispanic white youths and that a number of the trafficked minors (27%) identified as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender before being involved in the commercial sex trade.

A study to determine the relationship of a minor being sexually trafficked with her or his experience of childhood adversity was conducted with 913 juveniles in Florida who had been reported as being sexually trafficked (Reid et al., 2017). These youths were compared to a matching sample of youths who had been involved in the criminal justice system but not reported as trafficked. Using bivariate analysis, the researchers found that childhood adversity in the forms of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, and family violence were all related to being trafficked. In multivariate analysis, the study found that among boys, sexual abuse and emotional abuse were related to trafficking. For boys who were emotionally abused, the odds of having been trafficked were 2.55 greater. For boys who had been sexually abused, the odds of trafficking were 8.21 times greater. For girls, the multivariate analysis showed that sexual abuse was the strongest predictor of trafficking, making the odds of being trafficked 2.33 greater.

Damage Done to DMST Youths

Physical injuries. Minors who are sexually trafficked are at risk of various adverse consequences. These harmful effects may include physical injuries suffered at the hands of the trafficker. They may also include sex-related ailments such as HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, other medical conditions that have been inadequately treated, and drug dependency (Clawson et al., 2009; Twigg, 2017).

Psychological injuries. Youths who have been caught up in DMST are also at risk of psychological and emotional distress that arises because of their experiences. Among trafficked youths, these consequences include increased likelihoods of depression,

suicidality, PTSD, anxiety, panic attacks, and attachment disorder. The youths may also have low self-esteem and suffer from hopelessness (Hossain et al., 2010; Twigg, 2017).

Having experienced complex trauma is a characteristic that applies to many victims of DMST. Complex trauma is defined as two or more interpersonal trauma events that were related to someone who was a caregiver of the young person. These events include traumatic experiences of physical or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or family violence. In the study by Landers et al. (2017), 97.9% of the youths in their sample had experienced two or more such events before being sexually trafficked. Having previously experienced sexual abuse was reported by 86% of the sample. The researchers compared these results to those of a study on youths entering the Illinois foster system, which showed that 34.5% had experienced complex trauma (Kisiel, Fehrenbach, Small, & Lyons, 2009). As a result of this comparison, Landers et al. (2017) suggested that having an increased likelihood of experiencing complex trauma may be a way in which DMST youths differ from other youths in the child welfare population. The researchers also suggested that the degree of mental and emotional distress experienced by trafficked youths and their behavioral health symptoms such as delinquency, intentional misbehavior, and defiant behaviors may be greater than the distress experienced by the general child welfare population.

A trafficker's psychological and emotional manipulation of a DMST youths may create a kind of trauma bond that serves to bind the young person to the trafficker (Hardy et al., 2017; Kalergis, 2009). One technique that traffickers use to influence a youth who is being exploited is to provide her or him with intermittent rewards, such as allowing the

young person to have a bath or a special meal, which is an allowance that the youth may view as disproving the idea that the trafficker is harming her or him (Palmer, 2010). Such psychological and emotional binding of the youth to the trafficker, even though she or he is actually being exploited, may serve as a factor affecting the likelihood that DMST survivors will return to their trafficker after intervention.

Youths who have been sexually trafficked need after services that address their medical, psychosocial, legal, and basic needs (Muraya & Fry, 2016). A study in which five representatives of service agencies that dealt exclusively with and housed DMST survivors was conducted to determine the needs of these youths when they enter the agency. The representatives were either founders, program managers, or program directors at the agencies (Twigg, 2017). The researcher found that the immediate needs of DMST youths included safety, emergency medical care, shelter services, necessities, and case management. In addition, survivors needed emergency substance abuse and mental health services and family reunification. Long-term needs of the youths included long-term housing, life skills training such as grocery shopping and building a healthcare support network, and job skills training such as creating a resume and interviewing for a job. In the study by Gibbs et al. (2015) of interviewed case workers from three organizations that dealt with DMST youths, the case workers emphasized the importance of establishing an atmosphere of trust and respect to engage and continue to engage the youth. Even when a youth initially disclosed that she or he had been trafficked, this approach was recommended. The workers at one of the organizations stated that it was important to address needs such as food and shelter rather than trafficking to preserve the

youth's engagement. This result of the research by Gibbs et al. (2015) suggests that the way in which social service agency personnel address DMST youths is a factor in their continued engagement with the agency and may reduce the likelihood of their returning to their trafficker.

The Legal System Response to DMST

There has been an increasing recognition by the U.S. government of the widespread nature of human trafficking, the fact that many minors are domestically sexually trafficked, and the damage that these youths may experience as a result. A federal government response to this problem was the passage by the U.S. Congress of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000. This law defined human trafficking and categorized it into two types, sex and labor trafficking. Sex trafficking of adults was held to occur when the adult was enlisted in commercial sexual activity through force, fraud, or coercion (McMahon-Howard, 2017). However, the law specified that the sex trafficking of minors was illegal no matter what method traffickers used to enlist the minor in commercial sexual activities. Sex traffickers of minors were defined in the TVPA law as any individuals who recruit, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain a minor for engaging in a sex act (Hardy et al., 2013; Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). This specification made trafficking of youths illegal for both traffickers, anybody who aided traffickers, and customers.

The TVPA has been reauthorized by Congress in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2013, and 2017 (Farrell & Cronin, 2015; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). The 2017 reauthorization of the TVPA had several new provisions. These included

awarding grants to educational agencies to educate school staff to recognize and respond to suspected signs of sex or labor trafficking. Also, domestic air carriers were required to provide annual reports on their training of airline personnel to detect and report trafficking and to report how many notifications there were on possible trafficking victims. The reauthorization also included new provisions intended to help ensure that government spending does not support traffickers, and it provides funds for the Health and Human Services Department to administer services to trafficking victims and funds for the National Human Trafficking Hotline (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019).

Despite passage of the TVPA by the federal government, state governments have lagged behind in laws criminalizing human trafficking. The first state to make human trafficking a crime was Washington, which passed such a law in 2003. It has taken time for many states to pass similar laws. Birckhead (2011) maintains that at the time of her writing, the laws of most states still allowed commercially sexually exploited minors involved in prostitution to be arrested, detained, and prosecuted as criminals despite their immature age and the circumstances of their exploitation. Only the discretion of law enforcement authorities modified this treatment.

Over the past two decades, the laws of every state have evolved to address the issue of the sexual trafficking of minors. These laws vary regarding their definition of the term *trafficker*, the requirements to prove trafficking, and the penalties for being convicted of trafficking (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020); however, they all criminalize the sexual trafficking of minors. A number of states have also passed safe

harbor laws. These are laws that are intended to change the punitive approach to minors who are found to have been commercially sexually trafficked. Safe harbor laws change the legal status of trafficked minors from criminals to victims. By the end of 2017, such laws had been enacted by 35 states (Green et al., 2019).

The purpose of all safe harbor laws is to direct sexually trafficked youths away from a state's justice system. One way of doing so is to provide trafficked minors with immunity from prosecution. A main rationale for providing immunity is that criminally prosecuting youths who are apprehended for prostitution is a further victimization of them and makes it more difficult for them to be restored to a more normal, socially accepted life. Also, proponents of immunity hold that treating such youths as criminals impedes activities that should be focused on apprehending the real criminals, who are the traffickers, those who aid them, and the customers who purchase sex with minors (Green et al., 2018).

The safe harbor laws in 12 states can be classified as diversion laws. In these cases, the prosecution of youths who have been apprehended for prostitution is delayed, and they are regarded as children who need services and are required to enroll in treatment services or are taken into temporary custody to prevent their returning to prostitution. If the youth cooperates with this judgment, she or he is not charged with a crime. Proponents of the diversion strategy argue that it keeps trafficked youths from returning to their trafficker. Some states have laws mandating that detained sexually trafficked youths be referred to an agency that serves young people. In four states, mandated referral laws do not also include a provision for youths being immune from

prosecution. In 16 states, however, mandated referral and immunity are both included in their safe harbor laws (Green et al., 2019).

To the extent that in many jurisdictions, the legal status of sexually trafficked minors has changed from being criminals to victims, this change has altered the way these youths are treated or at least are supposed to be treated. Historically, a common approach of law enforcement officers and the legal system toward young people who were domestically sexually trafficked was to treat them as lawbreakers rather than victims of a crime (Birckhead, 2011). The TVPA, state laws against human trafficking, and safe harbor laws have helped change the law enforcement and legal system mentality that viewed juveniles involved in prostitution as being criminal offenders.

To change the traditional mindset of law enforcement toward trafficked minors is important because law enforcement officers are usually the first to encounter a minor who has been caught up in DMST. During their initial encounter with a minor who is apprehended for prostitution or other commercial sexual activity, officers may not readily identify the signs of a youth who is being trafficked and may unintentionally re-victimize the youth by taking her or him to jail. According to Farrell and Cronin (2015, p. 212), "local police agencies have dual and sometimes contradictory responsibilities of identifying and rescuing sex trafficking victims who are involved in prostitution." Having this dual responsibility may be confusing in cases when officers are trying to maintain the law but are also expected to assist victims of crime. One study of police response to minors who were being sexually trafficked found that officers were often confused about the criteria for making an arrest for prostitution on the one hand or to recognize that a

minor had been trafficked (Farrell & Reichert, 2017). In the same study, the researchers found there was deficient instruction of law enforcement personnel on how to recognize and deal with trafficked youths. However, if officers have been trained how to identify a minor being commercially sexually exploited and how to respond to suspected cases, they are more likely to deal with the case according to state and federal laws and less likely to re-victimize juveniles by sending them to jail.

The importance of proper training in how to deal with cases in which minors are suspected of being sexually trafficked is shown by the results of a study attempting to determine how well victims of trafficking are being treated by police (Farrell et al., 2019). In the study, which was conducted in three cities in the northeast, west, and south regions of the United States, Universal Crime Report data were analyzed, and trafficking victims, police, and service providers were interviewed. The researchers found that human trafficking victims often mistrust the police and do not seek the assistance of law enforcement. These responses to law enforcement were partly the result of victims believing that law enforcement officers hold stereotypes about them and are biased toward them. Rescued DMST youths' beliefs about law enforcement biases and stereotypes were reasons the victims often did not report all of the details about the situations they were in. The study also found that those who are caught up in trafficking are not mainly interested in seeking retribution against their traffickers but want to be recognized as having been trafficked, want to be protected against further victimization, and want to be able to progress beyond the trauma they have experienced. This finding helps to highlight a difficulty that law enforcement officers often face in dealing with

young people who have been sexually trafficked, which is to gain the trust of the youth enough to be able to proceed successfully in their investigation of the trafficking incident and make a case against the trafficker. Issues such as distrust of the police, the desire of the young person to remain safe, and the need to obtain life necessities may cause her or him to be hesitant to provide information to officers that could be used to detect the identity of and prosecute the trafficker (Bergquist, 2015; Farrell et al., 2020). Adverse experiences that DMST survivors may have with law enforcement officers may breed distrust of law enforcement and may be a factor that affects the probability that a DMST youth will return to her or his trafficker after intervention.

Because it is important that officers who deal with trafficked youths be qualified to do so, some law enforcement agencies have special units with personnel who are trained to deal with child trafficking. However, even if there is such a special unit in an agency, one problem related to the law enforcement response to DMST is that the first law enforcement encounter with a trafficked youth is often by officers who respond to all types of crime and who are not in the departmental sex trafficking unit (Farrell et al., 2019). Also, some departments may lack a special unit to deal with trafficking cases. In that case, it is important that the agency reach out as needed to other law enforcement agencies that may have experts in youth sex trafficking (Nietzel, 2020).

No matter how much their training may be, law enforcement officers who first encounter a trafficked youth are typically not equipped to address common issues that the youth have, including their needs for food and shelter and to be treated for any trauma they may have experienced (Farrell et al., 2019). At the time of apprehension, a trafficked

youth has been in a situation where her or his needs for food, shelter, and clothing have typically been met by the trafficker. After apprehension, it is important that those needs continue to be met to reduce the likelihood of the youth returning to the trafficker. Since law enforcement agencies are not prepared to provide for such needs, it is crucial that they collaborate with social service agencies who can provide the kind of services and care that trafficked youths often need (Nietzel, 2020). The number of agencies that provide direct services to youths who have been commercially sexually exploited has increased over the past two decades. Before 2000, there were four such organizations in the United States. By 2012, there were 41 such organizations (McMahon-Howard, 2017).

The results of one study suggest that there may be little difference between youths who engaged in prostitution before or after passage of the TVPA in regard to their involvement with law enforcement authorities and social service organizations (McMahon-Howard, 2017). The researcher conducted interviews with 26 individuals (18 females, 7 males, and 1 transgender) who had worked as underaged youths involved in prostitution (YIP). Half of the participants were ages 30 to 53 and had been prostitutes while a minor before the 2000 TVPA law was passed. Individuals in the other half of the sample were ages 19 to 21 and had been prostitutes while a minor after the 2000 TVPA law was passed.

Findings of the McMahon-Howard (2017) study showed that both groups of participants had similar experiences with law enforcement personnel and that both pre-TVPA and post-TVPA participants had had little contact with social services agencies at the time of their being a youth prostitute. Most of both the older and younger

interviewees had been able to avoid police detection, with only five from each group reporting that they had any interaction with law enforcement personnel regarding their work as prostitutes. There was no difference between the older and the younger group in the police interactions, which the researchers noted constituted missed opportunities for police to intervene in the young person's being involved in prostitution. Only one individual in each group reported that police contact led to a referral to specialized youth-directed services to deal with their underage involvement in the commercial sex trade, with both referrals being key incidents that led to the youth exiting their sex trade lifestyle. Only six other participants (two of the older females and four of the younger ones) had interacted with social service representatives as juveniles after their entry into the sex trade, but those interactions had been ineffective in removing the youths from the sex trade because they did not address underlying issues that led to their involvement in the trade. The researcher concluded that the findings suggested that in spite of increased awareness of the commercial sexual trafficking of minors and laws opposing the practice, youths who are involved in prostitution are able to evade detection by law enforcement authorities and social service agencies.

The findings of the McMahon-Howard (2017) study also indicated that most of the participants in each age group denied the idea that they were victims but claimed that their entry into the sex trade was self-chosen, even if their entry was the result of manipulation or recruitment by someone else. The researcher noted that by denying that they were victims, the participants were able to avoid the stigma of being a victim as well as the emotional and cognitive difficulties that can follow from acknowledging being

victimized. Based on these findings, the researcher noted the importance for social service personnel to realize that youths who engage in prostitution reject the label of being a victim and should be careful not to address these youths in ways that are not consistent with their self-image. The researcher recommended that service providers focus on the self-reported needs of youths involved in prostitution before trying to determine information about their exploitation. She also warned against conducting outreach and intervention actions that are based on the idea of rescuing the individual. She noted that otherwise, the young person may refuse the offered services if they do not perceive themselves as needing to be rescued. McMahon stated, "Indeed, such a rejection of services may be part of the reason why some YIP end up running away from residential treatment facilities" (p. 141). This comment is relevant to the study because it suggests the possibility that one reason sexually trafficked youths return to their trafficker after intervention is that they are dealt with as a victim by social service professionals, and the victim label does not agree with how they view themselves.

Chapter Summary and Synthesis

In the research reviewed in this chapter, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods were used. Qualitative studies included those done by Gibbs et al. (2015), Green et al. (2019), McMahon-Howard (2017), O'Brien (2018), Perkins and Ruiz (2017), Raphael et al. (2010), Stalans and Finn (2016), and Twigg (2017). Most of these studies included interviews that were conducted with various participants, including trafficked youths, social service personnel, and traffickers. Quantitative research using surveys or public data included studies by Banks & Kyckelhahn (2011), Cole et al. (2016), Detlaff et

al. (2011), Farrell and Reichert (2017), Farrell et al. (2019), Fedina et al. (2019), Kisiel et al. (2009), Landers et al. (2017), Perkins and Ruiz (2017), Reid et al. (2017), and Varma et al. (2015). Mixed methods studies were performed by Cole (2018), Estes and Weiner (2002), Hossain et al. (2010), and Reid (2010). In the present qualitative study, representatives of several groups were interviewed, including law enforcement officers, social service personnel, and members of child advocate organizations.

The literature cited in this chapter makes clear that the commercial sex trafficking of minors is a serious problem in the United States. The overview showed that what perpetuates DMST is the willingness of some people to pay for the sexual services of a minor and the fact that traffickers can make a financial gain by providing such services. The overview also showed that children and youths from all genders, races, and socioeconomic levels are at risk for being forced or lured into DMST by traffickers.

Minors who are most at risk of DMST are those who have had adverse experiences in the home. These youths are prime targets for being commercially sexually trafficked. Traffickers often offer food, shelter, attention, affection, and protection, leading vulnerable and naïve youths to believe that the trafficker can provide some emotional stability to their troubled lives. Later, traffickers may use emotional manipulation, force, or threats to keep youths under control.

The adverse consequences for minors who are commercially sexually trafficked can be severe. These may include physical and sexual violence and various forms of psychological distress. Social service agencies that deal with rescued DMST youths have found that these youths need safety, basic necessities, and a number of services.

The literature indicates that there has been a substantial change during the past two decades in the legal approach to the problem of minors being commercially sexually trafficked. Changes in legal approaches to DMST have required changes in the way law enforcement officers are supposed to deal with DMST youths, but research suggests that officers may not always treat such youths as victims and may lack adequate training in how to recognize and deal with DMST youths.

The review of literature suggested several possible factors that may affect the phenomenon of DMST survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention. One factor may be that youths have been psychologically and emotionally manipulated to disbelieve that they have been exploited by their trafficker (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). A second factor may be that the trafficker manipulates the youth to the degree that it creates a strong psychological dependency (Hardy et al., 2017; Kalergis, 2009; Palmer, 2010). A third possible factor is that minors who are vulnerable to traffickers have often been physically or sexually abused previously and may be distrustful of adults and authorities who represent society. Such distrust may include skepticism about law enforcement officers, the judicial system, or social service agencies. More research is needed to determine whether and to what degree any of these or other factors influence DMST youths' decisions.

In the next chapter, the methodology used in the study is explained. The chapter includes sections on the research design, selection of participants, interview protocol, and analysis of the data. Issues of trustworthiness, including ethical considerations, are also discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn why detained and counseled DMST victims often return to their traffickers through the eyes of professionals who have worked with these victims for at least five years and to find what strategies the professionals believe might counteract that phenomenon. Thirteen professionals who were familiar with DMST and had worked with DMST victims for at least five years were administered a questionnaire. Several open-ended questions were asked of the participants to explore their views about why some DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention, what are the perceptions and attitudes toward DMST minors of those who work with the youths, and how any tendency of such youths to return to their trafficker can be counteracted.

This chapter presents the methodology that was used in the study and consists of five sections after the introduction. The first section presents a description of the research design and the rationale for the design. The second section identifies the role of the researcher. The third section focuses on the methods that were used to conduct the study. This section provides an explanation of the selection of participants, the instrumentation, the study procedures, and the method that was used to analyze the interview responses. The fourth section of the chapter includes a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study's qualitative methodology and addresses ethical issues that were pertinent to the study. The fifth section provides a summary of the chapter. That section also includes a transition to the next chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The study had two research questions. They were:

Research Question 1: Why do DMST victims return to sex traffickers after intervention, from the perspective of law enforcement and human service professionals?

Research Question 2: What intervention strategies do law enforcement and human service professionals believe would reduce the likelihood of DMST victims returning to their traffickers?

The key phenomenon of concern in the study was DMST survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention. The study investigated this phenomenon by providing a questionnaire to professionals who were familiar with the phenomenon. The questionnaire included questions intended to determine what factors lead to the phenomenon and what intervention strategies could reduce the likelihood of the phenomenon occurring.

The study had a qualitative research design. Quantitative research was not considered to be appropriate for the study because quantitative studies deal with numerical quantities and use statistical analysis to determine whether there are numerical relationships (Black, 1999). Qualitative methods, on the other hand, deal with textual data, including oral or written responses to questions (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative analysis was appropriate for this study because it is used to discover patterns and themes that may be reflected in textual data (Patton, 2002). Employing a qualitative methodology is especially useful for exploratory studies in which relevant variables are not well understood and for dealing with complex human experiences, as is the case with this

study (Runciman, 2002). Qualitative analysis also enables data to be explored at a deeper level than is possible for quantitative analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). A qualitative approach can explore participants' views about a phenomenon without any prior bias regarding what results to expect (Szymanski, 1993). Qualitative research is appropriate when little research has been conducted about the phenomenon, a greater understanding of the phenomenon is needed, and this understanding may be gained by learning the views of individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). For the phenomenon that was the focus of this study, little research has been conducted, and a greater understanding of the factors that pertain to DMST survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention. The objective of this study was to gain that better understanding through questioning 13 professionals who are familiar with the phenomenon.

There are various kinds of qualitative method. These include case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. None of those methods were considered to be appropriate for the study. As the researcher, I considered the qualitative method that best fit the purpose of the study to be generic qualitative research (Percy et al., 2015), with the use of intensive interviewing. This general type of qualitative methodology is appropriate for questioning participants about a phenomenon and then analyzing their responses to determine patterns and themes that may be revealed in their answers. Generic qualitative research is similar to the phenomenological method. However, phenomenology is restricted to questioning participants about their experiences about a phenomenon, and generic qualitative research allows the researcher to also ask

participants about their beliefs and perceptions about the phenomenon (Guest et al., 2012).

Qualitative data were collected from interviewing participants with six open-ended questions. The questions were pertinent to the phenomenon of rescued DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention. The professionals who were interviewed were asked to answer the questions by providing their beliefs and perceptions related to the questions. Participants' responses were qualitatively analyzed to determine patterns and themes that were revealed in the responses.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher of this qualitative study, I have experience working with DMST youths and currently work as a lieutenant for the Fulton County Schools Police. This agency is an affiliate of the Georgia Bureau of Investigations Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. As an affiliate, the Fulton County Schools Police work with the task force and assist them if called upon when crimes of sex trafficking or pornography affect the Fulton County student population. I am currently the Fulton County Schools Police point of contact for the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and have been trained to work on sex trafficking cases when necessary.

Prior to employment with the school system, I worked for Fulton County Police Department. As a patrol officer and investigator, I was assigned to a high-crime area known for drugs and prostitution. There, I encountered youths involved in trafficking and assisted with removing them from the environment and getting them assistance from social services and advocacy groups. I was also a member of the FBI's MATCH (Metro

Atlanta Child Exploitation) Task Force from 2009-2013. While working on the task force, I coordinated and worked in various operations where children involved in the sex industry were recovered. I continued a working relationship with this task force and still work with them when called upon.

My role in the study included preparing the interview questions, contacting and selecting participants, administering the interview questions via video conference, and transcribing the responses. I also qualitatively analyzed the responses to identify patterns that might reveal themes in the responses. My experiences with DMST survivors, including the phenomenon of survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention, has led me to have an intense pursuit of the factors that affect the phenomenon. My work has led me to believe that professionals in law enforcement, social services, and child advocacy who have experience dealing with DMST youths may have key insights about those factors.

I understand the necessity of avoiding any bias in the study. As participants were selected, I guarded against inserting any of my own views about the phenomenon to be studied into any contacts with them. In asking interview questions, I took great care to ensure that the way I asked the questions was unbiased by following the prepared interview format and asking the same questions in the same way for all interviewees. If there were any follow-up questions, I made certain to ask them in a neutral way that did not suggest an expected kind of answer. I used member checking to ensure that the transcripts of the interviews accurately recorded what the participant said. Also, in analyzing interview responses, I carefully guarded against any bias by making sure that

patterns or themes that were identified were supported by the participants' actual recorded words in response to interview questions. The quoted words of participants were reported as evidence for any themes that were revealed to guarantee that the thematic analysis was based only on evidence provided by the data.

Methodology

This section explains the methodology that was used in the study. It consists of four subsections. The first two focus on the selection of participants and the instrument for data collection. The second two explain the procedures and the analysis of results.

Participants

The sample for interviews was purposefully drawn from law enforcement, social service, and child advocate professionals in the United States who work with DMST victims. Selection of participants began with identifying some of my current and former colleagues in law enforcement, social services, and child advocate organizations who were interested in participating in the study when contacted. I followed a snowball sampling strategy to expand the sample by asking early potential participants to indicate other professionals who might be interested in participating in the study. I contacted potential participants in person or electronically to explain the purpose and nature of the study and asked them about their willingness to be interviewed. The participant selection continued until reaching 20 professionals. The email invitation letter for potential individuals to participate can be found in Appendix A.

From those who were interested in participating in the study, I selected the first 13 professionals who responded. I expected the sample of 13 professionals would be

adequate for data saturation. The concept of data saturation refers to the point at which additional participants would be unlikely to reveal new codes or themes. Generally, the more similar the participants are to one another, the fewer are needed to achieve saturation (Guest et al., 2020). Ten or fewer participants may be sufficient in a simple qualitative study (Marshal, 1996). In this study, the similarity of the participants and the limited number of interview questions suggested that the selection of 13 participants was sufficient to ensure that a high degree of data saturation was achieved. All individuals to be interviewed had at least five years of experience dealing with DMST youths. My participants consisted of five law enforcement professionals, five social service professionals, and three individuals from child advocate organizations.

Instrumentation

The instrument for personal interviews was a researcher-developed interview protocol. The interviews were conducted via video conference and included six open-ended questions. Video conferencing served to protect participants and the researcher from exposure to the novel coronavirus during interview sessions.

The interview questions were designed to ask the participants direct questions focused on their beliefs and perceptions about what might be reasons for rescued DMST youths returning to their trafficker after professional intervention and about their views on what strategies law enforcement and social service professionals could use to decrease the likelihood of these youths returning to their trafficker.

The interview questions were the following:

1. What is your experience dealing with survivors of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST)?
2. Why do you think DMST survivors sometimes return to traffickers after intervention?
3. What do you think are the perceptions and attitudes of law enforcement officers and social service providers about juveniles involved in sex trafficking?
4. Why do you think law enforcement officers and social service providers have these perceptions and attitudes?
5. To what extent do you think these perceptions and attitudes influence the decision-making of police officers and/or social service providers in dealing with DMST survivors?
6. Suppose law enforcement officers and social service providers created a collaborative program to prevent DMST survivors from returning to their traffickers. What do you think should be in such a program?

Procedures

After selecting the participants for the study, I e-mailed each participant with an invitation to be in the study. This e-mail repeated the nature and purpose of the study and asked to set up a date and time for the interview. It also included a link to the video conference, which was held on the Zoom website. See Appendix B. I also sent, via email, an informed consent form that further explained the nature of the interview and informed participants that their identity would remain confidential in the study. The informed consent form also informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. I

asked each participant to read the informed consent form, to sign the form if they agreed to be in the study, and to return the form to me via e-mail.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to provide answers to a short demographic form asking for gender, age, and years of experience dealing with DMST youths. Then they were asked the interview questions. At the beginning of the interview, they were asked to answer all six questions in as much detail as they can. When they completed the interview, I closed out the session. The Zoom videoconferencing application provided an audio recording of the interview. I downloaded the completed interviews and examined the responses for completion.

Qualitative Analysis

My data analysis followed the method of generic qualitative research (Percy et al., 2015), which is a kind of thematic analysis. The method involved carefully transcribing all responses on the interview as a first step to get familiar with the response. Second, all responses to each question were examined together to determine similarities in the explicit and implicit ideas that are mentioned in the answers. These similarities were assigned codes. To aid in the analysis, the qualitative analysis program Dedoose was used. The program was used for highlighting passages with their codes and keeping a count of the frequency of each code.

After identifying the codes for responses to each question, I continued the thematic analysis by determining if there were any overarching themes that were revealed in the responses to the question. I examined the frequencies of codes for the responses to all questions to determine if there are any overarching themes that applied to more than

one question. These themes are reported in Chapter 4, along with examples of comments made by participants that reveal each theme. In outline form, the thematic analysis consisted of several basic steps (Liu et al., 2020, p. 71):

- Step 1: Familiarize with the data
- Step 2: Generate initial coding
- Step 3: Search for themes
- Step 4: Review, define, and name themes
- Step 5: Report the findings

This type of thematic analysis is one of the three methods mentioned by Rosala (2019), which are using software, journaling, and affinity diagramming. I chose the use of software as preferable because it is the most thorough of the three methods. According to Rosala, journaling is appropriate for a grounded theory approach, which was not the approach of this study. Also, affinity diagramming makes it more difficult to have multiple codes for a passage and is not as thorough as the use of software.

Issues of Trustworthiness

This section of the chapter provides information on the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and a discussion of ethical issues. The section is divided into five subsections. The first four subsections explain four concepts that are pertinent to the trustworthiness of qualitative studies and how the study addressed each of these trustworthiness issues. The relevant concepts are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Forero et al., 2018). The fifth subsection addressed ethical issues that were pertinent to the study.

Credibility

In qualitative research, it is important to take steps to ensure maximum credibility. To establish credibility, it is crucial to use methods that will provide valuable information about the phenomenon the researcher is attempting to understand (Shenton, 2004). In this study, credibility was increased by the fact of having three distinct kinds of professionals who have dealt with DMST youths, thereby providing a variety of different perspectives. In addition, to help ensure credibility, I took great care to develop questions that were targeted toward understanding the phenomenon being studied. In addition, I analyzed the data gathered with appropriate methods. I also took care to incorporate member checking in an effort to make sure that no prior biases entered into the analysis and that interviews were recorded and transcribed accurately (Birt et al., 2016). For each interview, I sent the transcript to the participant and asked him or her to check it for accuracy and to add any comments that the participant wished to add to the transcript. None of the participants reported any errors or mistakes in their transcript.

Transferability

The 13 participants in the study were selected through purposive sampling, which is a way to help strengthen the transferability of results (Forero et al., 2018). Purposive sampling amounts to choosing participants because of their qualities in relation to the study's objectives (Etikan et al., 2016). In this study, selecting participants based on their substantial experience dealing with DMST youths from different perspectives helped to strengthen transferability. Each participant had numerous experiences with DMST youths. Their beliefs and perceptions that were developed out of their experiences were

expected to be applicable to the phenomenon of DMST survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention.

Dependability

A study's dependability concerns whether the study is reported well so that others can repeat the methods used in a new study (Shenton, 2004). To help ensure dependability for this study, I described the study design and methods in sufficient detail to allow repetition in other contexts. This detailed description of the methods enables other researchers to conduct similar investigations using participants from different regions of the country. I used thick description to report the responses of participants to questions. These thick descriptions provided support for any identified themes.

Confirmability

To help strengthen confirmability of a qualitative study, it is important for the researcher to practice reflexivity throughout the study (Probst, 2015). For this study, I identified any biases I had regarding the phenomenon and took great care to ensure that no biases entered into the questions I asked the participants or in any follow-up questions or conversations I had with the participants. I was also careful to guard against any biases in the qualitative analysis of responses or in the reporting of the responses and the analysis.

Ethical Issues

Details of the study were provided to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The participant selection process and gathering of data begun only after IRB approval.

Participants in the study were provided an informed consent form that stated the nature and purpose of the study and made clear that participation in the study was voluntary and that the participant could withdraw at any time with no repercussions. The consent form explained that participation in the study was confidential and that participants' identities would remain confidential. They were not asked to provide their names and were identified in the study only by a number. The consent form explained that the interview would be audio recorded. The consent form also stated that if the participants had any questions about the study, they could contact the researcher. My contact information was provided.

Participants' responses to the interview questions were carefully guarded. Their responses were kept in a computer to which only I have access. There were no personal identifiers on any of the documents associated with any participant either before or after analysis. All documents related to the participants' interview responses will be kept in a secure computer location for five years after the end of the study. They will then be destroyed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology for the study. It consisted of four sections in addition to the introduction and this summary. In the first section, the qualitative research design was described along with why the design was appropriate for exploring the phenomenon of rescued DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention. The second section provided information on my professional role as the study's researcher, including my efforts to ensure that no bias entered the research.

The third section of the chapter focused on the study's methodology. First, the selection of the study sample of 13 professionals from various kinds of organization that deal with DMST youths was explained. The study instrument, a six-question interview, was identified and the questions were listed. The procedures used to administer the online interview were then explained. Finally, the method to analyze participants' responses to interview questions were identified. This method was generic qualitative research, and its various steps were detailed.

The fourth section dealt with issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations. This section included subsections on how the different components of trustworthiness were addressed. These components are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The fourth section also addressed several ethical issues that are relevant to the study.

The next chapter reports the study's results. Demographic details of the participants are given, and the results of the analysis of interview responses are reported. Themes and subthemes revealed by the analysis are identifies and supported with evidence from interview responses.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST), the trafficking of minors for sexual purposes, is a human rights problem that affects U.S. communities of all sizes. A phenomenon that exacerbates the DMST problem is that even after intervention by law enforcement and social service professionals, youths who have been trafficked for sex often return to their traffickers. In order to deal effectively with the phenomenon of DMST survivors returning to the trafficking situation after intervention, it is important to understand what factors influence these youths to do so. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of why some DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention by interviewing professionals who had worked with DMST victims to determine their perceptions about this phenomenon and how it might be counteracted.

The study had two research questions:

Research Question 1: Why do DMST victims return to sex traffickers after intervention, from the perspective of law enforcement and human service professionals?

Research Question 2: What intervention strategies do law enforcement and human service professionals believe would reduce the likelihood of DMST victims returning to their traffickers?

This chapter reports the results of the study. The chapter is divided into seven main sections following this introduction. The first section describes the setting of the study. The second section reports the demographics of the sample. The third and fourth sections report the data collection and data analysis procedures, and the fifth section

explains the evidence of trustworthiness for the study. The sixth section presents the results of the study. The seventh section provides a summary of the chapter.

Setting

Due to health restrictions that were associated with the COVID-19 pandemic that was occurring at the time of the study, interviews were conducted via the Zoom video conferencing application. Use of the Zoom application enabled interviews to be held without the constraints of social distancing and the need to wear a mask.

Another advantage of using the Zoom application was the convenience it provided the interviewees. They were able to attend the interview by accessing the Zoom application from their own computer. There were no significant problems in communicating using the Zoom application. There were only minor issues concerning volume that were solved quickly at the beginning of a few interviews.

Demographics

The intervieweewere law enforcement and social service professionals who had worked with DMST victims. A purposive sample was obtained through a snowball strategy by inviting early participants to indicate other professionals who they thought might be interested in participating. Following approval of the study by the Walden Institutional Review Board, I began the selection of participants by identifying current and former colleagues from law enforcement, social services, and child advocate organizations who might be interested in participating in the study. I contacted potential participants in person or by e-mail to explain the nature of the study and ask them if they

were interested in participating (see Appendix A for the e-mail inviting professionals to participate).

Of those who were interested in participating in the study, I selected the 13 individuals who were most experienced with DMST youths. The study adequately achieved data saturation (Guest et al., 2020; Marshal, 1996) with this sample. All selected individuals had at least five years of experience dealing with sexually trafficked youths. The sample included five law enforcement professionals, five social service professionals, and three individuals with child advocate organizations. I sent, via e-mail, an invitation for the selected individuals to participate in the study along with an informed consent form that further explained the nature of the study and the interview, and ensured the confidentiality of their identity in the study. The informed consent form also explained that selected participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Each invitee was asked to read the informed consent form and to sign it if they were willing to participate in the study before returning the form to me via email.

The time that participants had worked with sexually trafficked youths varied from five to 17 years. Four participants were males, and nine were females. All four male participants were working in law enforcement. All social service workers and child advocates were females, and one female participant was a law enforcement professional. Table 1 provides a summary of participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Interviewee	Profession	Gender	Years Working With DMST Youths
1	Law enforcement	M	12 years
2	Law enforcement	M	13 years
3	Advocate	F	15 years
4	Law enforcement	M	7 years
5	Advocate	F	10 years
6	Social worker	F	15 years
7	Law enforcement	M	17 years
8	Law enforcement	F	8.5 years
9	Social worker	F	6 years
10	Advocate	F	5 years
11	Social worker	F	9 years
12	Social worker	F	12 years
13	Social worker	F	15 years

Data Collection

The instrument used in the study was a researcher-developed interview protocol consisting of six open-ended questions. The interview questions were developed to determine participants' beliefs and perceptions about (a) factors that may increase the

likelihood of rescued DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention and (b) what strategies law enforcement and social service professionals could use to decrease the likelihood of DMST youths returning to their trafficker. Apart from the six questions, I probed for clarification or further information when appropriate. The time spent for each interview varied, depending on how long it took the interviewee to adequately respond to my questions. Most of the interviews took 30 minutes or less, and none exceeded 45 minutes.

Interviews were audio recorded on the Zoom application and were automatically transcribed using that application. The Zoom transcriptions were then checked for accuracy, and transcribed passages were corrected if necessary. The completed transcriptions were then gathered into one file that was secured on my password-locked computer for later analysis.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using the method of generic qualitative research as explained by Percy et al. (2015). Generic qualitative research is a form of thematic analysis that has five main steps (Liu et al., 2020).

1. Read all transcribed interviews to become familiar with the types of responses that the participants made to interview questions.
2. Examine participants' responses to each question to determine the main implicit and explicit ideas and considerations that they mentioned in their responses to a question. These ideas are assigned codes, which are brief descriptions of the mentioned idea.

3. Examine the responses to each question to determine similarities in the codes that have been assigned to the responses and consolidate codes. Step 3 may be repeated several times as codes are merged and consolidated to finally provide a final list of primary codes that are relevant to answering the study's research questions.
4. Determine themes that the primary codes fall under.
5. Report these themes using evidence from the actual responses of the participants.

I used the Dedoose qualitative research program to aid in analysis. The program was used to help in highlighting coded passages, organizing codes, determining their frequency, and keeping a record of related quotes. Rosala (2019) noted that the use of software for qualitative analysis is more thorough compared to using journaling or affinity diagramming.

As the first step in analysis, I read through the transcribed interviews to become familiar with the responses participants made to the questions I asked them. I then coded the interview responses by reading and coding them several times. The first time through provided a total of 240 codes. After several additional coding passes to merge and consolidate codes, I determined a final list of 47 codes that were relevant to answering the study's research questions. These final codes were categorized under five overarching themes with several subthemes. Table 2 shows the themes and subthemes.

All themes and subthemes were illustrated by numerous comments made by the participants. The theme of *Attitudes toward DMST Youths* was marked by many

Table 2
Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Number of Codes	Subthemes
1. Attitudes Toward DMST Youths	11	Law Enforcement Attitudes Social Service Attitudes Public Attitudes
2. Grooming	9	
3. Other Return Reasons	12	Lack of options Denying being a victim Distrust of interveners Wanting the lifestyle
4. Intervention Strategies	12	Engage with DMST youth Provide options Trauma-informed therapy Remove from environment Agency collaboration
5. Need for Resources	3	

comments about the positive and negative attitudes of law enforcement officers and social service professionals, as well as comments concerning the attitudes in general society toward DMST survivors. This theme is especially relevant to answering the

study's first research question, about the reasons DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention.

The theme of *Grooming* was illustrated by respondents' comments about the practice of traffickers grooming runaway children and other youths to take part in sexual activities for profit. These included comments about how traffickers groom youths to depend on them physically and psychologically and how grooming makes it more likely that rescued DMST youths will return to their trafficker after intervention. This is another theme that is especially relevant to answering the study's first research question.

The theme of *Other Return Reasons* was reflected in comments about DMST survivors' intervention responses and traits other than trauma bonds that make it more likely that they will return to their trafficker after intervention. This theme comprises four subthemes and helps provide answers to the first research question.

Many comments reflected the theme of *Intervention Strategies*. The theme is especially relevant to answering the second research question about how to reduce the likelihood that DMST youths will return to their traffickers after intervention. The theme comprises five subthemes.

The fifth theme, *Need for Resources,* is another theme that is relevant to answering the second research question. This theme was illustrated by participants' comments about the time investment required to work with DMST youths. It was also illustrated by comments about the need for more money and resources to be allocated to services for helping youths who have been sexually trafficked to make a clean break from the trafficking life.

I further discuss the five themes and their subthemes in the section Presentation of Results and present respondents' comments that illustrate the themes and subthemes. I also explain how the themes and subthemes help in answering the study's two research questions. They do so by providing an understanding of what the interviewed professionals believed are the reasons DMST youths return to their trafficker after intervention and what strategies may help reduce the probability of these youths returning to the trafficking environment.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

This section concerns the steps I took to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The four subsections concern the steps taken to guarantee credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four aspects are pertinent to the trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Forero et al., 2018).

Credibility

Establishing credibility in qualitative research concerns using methods that will provide useful information about the researched phenomenon (Shenton, 2004). In this study, the phenomenon being explored was the return of DMST youths to their trafficker after intervention by law enforcement and/or social service professionals. In qualitative research, it is important to take steps to ensure maximum credibility. This can be done by making sure interview sources are individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon being researched. The sources of information I used in this study were law enforcement, social service, and child advocate professionals who had worked with DMST youths for at least five years. Since these individuals had been on the frontline of working with these

youths for years, they were likely to be experts in understanding the reasons such youths return to their trafficker after intervention and what strategies might make it less likely for them to return. Participation of these individuals increased the credibility of the study by being very likely to provide information to help answer the study's research questions.

The credibility of the study was further increased by the participants including three kinds of professional who have dealt with DMST youths for a substantial time. This diversity in kinds of profession provided a variety of different perspectives from the respondents. Credibility was also increased by asking the participants questions that were focused on gathering their perceptions and beliefs about the phenomenon of DMST youths returning to their trafficker and answering the study's two research questions. I also took care to incorporate member checking in an effort to make sure that no prior biases into the analysis and that the interview responses were recorded and transcribed accurately (Birt et al., 2016). For each interview, I sent the transcript to the participant to ask him or her to check it for accuracy and add any further comments. None of the participants suggested any corrections or additions.

Transferability

The transferability of a study is the degree to which the results can be transferred to different settings. Transferability in this study was strengthened by the use of purposive sampling. This sampling method consisted of choosing participants because they had characteristics that were knowledgeable about the study's phenomenon (Etikan et al., 2016).

Although the participants were all from one region in the United States, their experiences with DMST youths were likely to be similar to those of professionals in other regions of the country. Due to this similarity, professionals in other regions of the country are likely to have similar experiences with the phenomenon of DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention. Therefore, the results of this study are likely to be applicable to other regions of the country where the return of DMST youths to their trafficker after intervention is a matter of concern.

Dependability

To strengthen the dependability of a study, it is important to report the procedures clearly. Doing so enables other researchers to repeat those procedures in other similar studies (Shenton, 2004). To help ensure dependability I have described the methods I used in detail. This description of the methods I used will enable other researchers to perform similar investigations in different regions of the country and using different respondents.

Dependability of results is also strengthened by reporting the comments made by participants to support themes and conclusions. In this study, in the section on the presentation of results, I report interviewee comments that illustrate the themes and subthemes that were determined by the analysis. The comments also support the answers to the two research questions.

Confirmability

The confirmability of qualitative research is the degree to which the conclusions are based upon the data gathered and not on researcher biases. Researcher reflexivity is

important to help ensure the confirmability of qualitative research (Probst, 2015). For this study, I was careful not to introduce any personal biases into the gathering of data or the analysis. In the interviews, I asked the same questions of all the participants and focused on not showing any biases by the way I asked questions or in any of my comments.

In the analysis of the data also, I have been guided only by the participants' responses in deciding what overall themes and subthemes were relevant to answering the study's research questions. My objective in reporting the results of the study was also to be guided only by the participants' responses and to avoid introducing any personal biases.

Results

The results are reported in two main subsections. The first focuses on the results that help to answer the first research question. The second subsection reports the results that help to answer the second research question.

First Research Question

The first research question was the following: Why do DMST victims return to sex traffickers after intervention, from the perspective of law enforcement and human service professionals? To answer this question, the study participants were asked why they thought DMST youths return to their trafficker. They were also asked about professional interveners' perceptions and attitudes about DMST youths, why they have those perceptions and attitudes, and how the perceptions and attitudes affect their treatment of DMST youths. The participants' responses to these questions provided insights into the reasons that these youths return to their trafficker after intervention by

law enforcement and social service professionals. These responses revealed the themes *Attitudes toward DMST Youths, Grooming,* and *Other Return Reasons.* These themes are especially relevant to answering the first research question, which asked why DMST survivors often return to their trafficker after intervention.

Theme 1: Attitudes Toward DMST Youths

The theme of *Attitudes Toward DMST Youths* was represented by participants' responses about the perceptions and attitudes of three distinct groups: law enforcement officers, social service professionals, and the general public.

Subtheme: Law Enforcement Attitudes. Responses indicated that for many law enforcement professionals, there has been a considerable change in attitudes and perceptions of DMST youths over recent decades. The key change has been from regarding sexually trafficked youths as criminals to viewing them as victims of traffickers. For instance, Participant 1, a law enforcement professional, stated,

> The perception that we had to overcome was that they were just prostitutes. A lot of people think that the child has chosen to live in that circumstance. So, they deserve whatever kind of treatment or bad treatment or experiences they have within that lifestyle… I think that through training and experience and seeing different facets of sex trafficking minors, the law enforcement officers who were exposed to the extremes of those situations began to see the children as vulnerable victims that were being taken advantage of because of either their diminished mental capacity, their diminished cognitive development, or their home life, or the way they were brought up. (P1)

Participant 9, a social worker, said,

> It's changing a lot. There's been a lot of education being done particularly with law enforcement trying to get them to see them as victims and not as child prostitutes, because for many, many years, kids will get picked up in stings at hotels and stuff at night. They'll be picked up on the street and they'll take them to jail. They saw them as child prostitutes. (P9)

A main reason for this change in the attitude of many law enforcement professionals is training. As a law enforcement officer said,

> After more and more training, I think [the attitude toward DMST youths] is evolving into their being a victim. You're starting to understand what's behind the scenes, and you start to understand why these girls or guys continue to live in that type of lifestyle or continue to deal with that type of abuse. So, I think law enforcement and victim advocates in general have changed their perception of how to handle and the way they treat these girls that are in these situations. (P2)

However, participants' responses also indicated that not all law enforcement professionals always treat DMST youths as victims. Comments indicated that if a detained youth is belligerent and difficult to deal with, officers may be less likely to treat the youth as someone who has been exploited by a trafficker. For instance, Participant 7, a law enforcement officer, spoke of some officers still not seeing DMST youths as victims, commenting, "There are still those that just believe that it's a bunch of bad kids choosing to be involved in certain things… I've heard the comment, will they just go home, listen to their parents, everything will be all right." Participant 8, in law

enforcement, indicated that the difficulty in working with DMST youths affected officers' attitudes toward the victim.

> I think these cases are very difficult to work because you have a victim or a survivor that doesn't want to cooperate, generally doesn't want you to be working the case in the first place, constantly is running back to their trafficker …. So, I think the perception is that they're very difficult to work with. And oftentimes you feel like this is a waste of my time because the victim doesn't want my help…. You have a hard time putting your heart and soul into these cases if they don't want to be a cooperating victim. (P8)

According to Participant 5, a child advocate, DMST youths are difficult to work with "because trafficking survivors have almost always experienced complex and multiple traumas." She further stated that of nearly 4,500 victims in Georgia over the last 10 years, "most of them were abused prior to being trafficked. These are the hardest ones for law enforcement to deal with."

Participant 7 indicated that how a DMST youth is treated by law enforcement depends on the situation and any biases the officer may have.

> I can have the same set of circumstances, but something will be different, and the same officer will do one thing for one child who won't go out of the way for another. And I think that and the bias that the officers bring to the job dictates how and what steps they go about in helping a child. (P7)

Participant 5 noted that viewing a youth involved in sex trafficking as a "bad kid" can keep DMST youths from being identified.

> I think a lot of times the attitudes just keep us from identifying DMST survivors. If we're thinking of this as a bad kid who made a choice versus recognizing that this is a child that isn't developmentally able to make this choice, then it really changes whether we see this child as somebody who's being exploited as they are, or if we see this person as a perpetrator. (P5)

The above comments suggest that in some situations, law enforcement officers may have a negative attitude toward DMST youths. Such attitudes may result in the youths not being referred to appropriate social services or even taken to jail. This, in turn, may increase the distrust of DMST survivors toward authority and may result in an increased likelihood of youths returning to their trafficker after intervention.

Subtheme: Social Service Attitudes. Concerning the attitude of social service professionals toward DMST youths, participants' responses indicated that the vast majority of these individuals are dedicated to providing services for the youths that will help her or him to permanently escape the trafficking environment. Participant 6, a social work professional, said about social workers that for the most part, "They want to heal and serve. You don't get involved normally with kids like this in a job. This is the ministry. This is you feeling called to this work." One law enforcement professional remarked,

> I've never had an experience where a social worker was like, oh, she's just, you know, she's just "hot in the pants" or something like that…. because for the most part, you're lucky enough to be surrounded by social workers and non-profit organizations that cared for and loved those kids. (P4)

However, there were also comments indicating limitations in social services to help DMST youths escape trafficking. One limitation mentioned was that the attitude of the social service professional may suffer from burnout. For example, Participant 12, a social worker, mentioned that social workers often deal with physical and sexual abuse on a daily basis with their clients.

> I think we get burned out…. Everyone is being abused. And so, you get to this child who is being sex trafficked…. there are so many other kids that have gone through so many other different things … because we're so numb to the abuse that we hear from 8:00 in the morning to evening. (P12)

Another social worker commented,

> I have seen some social services workers who have been burnt out because of workload and low pay and lack of support and funding that gets cut, that are so burnt out that by the time they are working with these kids, they're kind of transferring work stressors onto the kids and don't have the best tolerance. (P6)

Later in the interview, this participant remarked that she thought that most social service professionals "try to push through it" because they are called to the work, "But I do think at some point you just become indifferent or numb. You become numb to what's going on and you just kind of throw your hands up."

One law enforcement professional indicated that social services can sometimes be limited by quick turnover and the lack of specialized skills/knowledge of the professionals working with DMST youths.

> I see it more as the very quick turnover in employment. They don't really get to specialize in one set area. They don't get to say, well, I really want to work with sex trafficking victims to really make a difference. It is they are forced to handle everything, and they don't have the manpower or the hours in the day to really be able to have trauma-informed care for those children. (P1)

This participant added that some social workers "are just so overwhelmed, they can't be involved in those cases as much as needed," and he remarked, "if upon their recovery they're driving them to a safe facility and the child runs out of the door, they just say kind of, 'Oh well, tomorrow's another day.'"

The comments above suggest that due to heavy caseloads, lack of time, the difficulty of working with defiant DMST survivors, and burnout, social service professionals are sometimes limited in their treatment of the youths. This limitation may result in there being a higher likelihood of the youths returning to their trafficker.

Subtheme: Public Attitudes. The third type of attitude the respondents talked about was the attitude of the public toward DMST youths. Comments reflected the view that many in society do not consider DMST a serious problem or they misunderstand the nature of DMST. Participant 12, a social worker, mentioned that in this society, if a young child goes missing, "everyone is concerned," but when a child who is 12 or 13 disappears, "it's not such a big concern." This reaction occurs even though children who are 12 or 13 are at prime ages for being sexually trafficked. This participant continued, "If you're a parent, you can't picture your child doing something like that, or maybe you don't know a child who has been in that lifestyle." She suggested that it is the lack of

exposure to child sex trafficking that leads people to misunderstand the problem: "… because you're not accustomed to it or you're not a witness to it or you're not exposed to it, you just don't understand it."

Another social worker talked about society's "hypersexualized imagery" of girls and young women as contributing to misunderstandings of DMST by leading to "this perception of that child not being a victim, but being someone who's making a conscious choice," choosing the lifestyle because it is "glamorous" or "they love sex." This participant added that another image of DMST youths is of someone who looks "strung out." She commented,

> I feel like I've seen those images over and over of what domestic minor sex trafficking looks like. And my gosh, like most of the time, the kids I'm seeing don't look anything like that, don't look anything like the images that we see that we're exposed to regularly. (P11)

Participant 5 talked about the community's unrealistic expectations of interveners' ability to solve the problem of DMST. She referred to the "pressure the community puts on law enforcement and social workers, like, why can't you just poof, make it go away?" She said the public has the "perception of you should just be able to rescue the person." In her remarks, Participant 12 suggested that people do not want to know about DMST. She commented, "Who wants to talk about children who are doing that? Who wants to admit that it's happening in their society?"

Participants' comments about unrealistic perceptions and attitudes among the public suggested that there is a widespread lack of understanding about the realities of

DMST and the difficulties that law enforcement and social service professionals face in dealing with rescued DMST youths. These misunderstandings may result in reduced public support for the financial resources needed to confront the DMST problem effectively. The lack of sufficient financial resources due to public misunderstandings may lead to a greater likelihood of DMST survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention.

In sum, a number of participants' responses reflected the theme of *Attitudes Toward DMST Youths.* Some of these comments indicated that professionals' and the public's attitudes toward trafficked youths may sometimes increase the likelihood of the youths returning to their trafficker after intervention. These attitudes included negative attitudes of some law enforcement officers, resigned attitudes and limitations of some social service professionals, and misperceptions of the general public about DMST.

Theme 2: Grooming

The theme of *Grooming* was reflected in the interview responses of the majority of the respondents. Grooming is an ongoing process that traffickers use to establish physical and psychological dependency among sexually trafficked youths. The process often results in the victim having a trauma bond with the trafficker. Comments by 11 of the participants indicated their belief that grooming is a main cause of DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention.

Participants' responses revealed that grooming creates two kinds of dependence in DMST youths: physical and psychological. Participant 7 commented on traffickers creating physical dependence in the youths, saying, "They make sure they got clothes.

They make sure they know someone's fed enough. Part of the grooming process." Participant 13, a social worker, talked about how the trafficker builds physical dependence. "Once the traffickers get the girls into the life, especially the younger girls, they depend on them for where they live … [and] to get them things they can't get for themselves." This social work professional went on to point out how this physical dependence can lead to DMST victims returning to their trafficker, commenting,

> And so, a lot of them, once they get help, they might find that it's hard to get a job or, if they quit school, to go back to school and stuff like that. And it's just hard for them. It's just easier to go back because they feel like all their needs are being met with that person. (P13)

Participant 11 was another who spoke of how traffickers establish physical dependency that leads DMST youths to return, sharing, "It has become part of their survival, if this is what allows them to have a place to stay or have food on a regular basis, to feel protected in some way, even if that protection comes in the form of sometimes violence."

Participants' comments indicated that traffickers use physical dependence and other techniques to create psychological dependence in the youths. According to Participant 8, "They groom them to believe that they can't survive without them…. to believe they will not be able to make money or do anything on their own without consulting with or going through their trafficker."

Participants' remarks also indicated that traffickers establish psychological dependency by leading DMST girls to believe that they care for them. Participant 8 explained, "They are groomed to believe that their trafficker is the love of their life, their

‘daddy.’” Participant 9 shared that DMST girls had told her that the trafficker “was my boyfriend.” She remarked that their belief that the trafficker cares for them is a strong motivation to return.

> Even after intervention, even while in intervention, they continue to romanticize because they were pretty much brainwashed to believe that this person genuinely cared about them. This person loved them. And many of them don't see themselves as victims. They see themselves as this was my choice. I was doing this because this person is my boyfriend. He asked me to do it. And so, there's this constant need to return to this person because they truly feel like this person loves them. (P9)

Several respondents noted that traffickers target vulnerable youths with a troubled background. Participant 7 commented, “Generally, our victims come from some very hostile backgrounds.” Participant 5 shared that traffickers prey on runaway children who are “somebody who is already being sexually abused every night.” After they have met the trafficker, these youths “don't know something better to go back to. And it's part of the tactics of trafficking, going after the vulnerable who are most likely to stay with you and then building up trauma bonds.” Another of the professionals participant shared the same point.

> That's when they're most vulnerable to the possibility of being exploited, because they don’t know how to meet their basic needs. They thought their friends would let them stay there. And their friends’ mommas are like, ‘no, you cannot be here.’

> And they end up at five points in Atlanta, just sitting, waiting, and that's when they get picked up. (P3)

Participant 9 reported that between 80 and 90% of DMST youths are sexually abused in some way before they were trafficked. “And so, the fact that their barriers had already been broken down, they don't feel safe at home.” This is how they find a connection with the trafficker: “And so many of them are trying to return to that because of that loyalty and that bond that they created.” This participant added that victims return because they believe they “just don't have anywhere else to go. So, they feel as if I'm better off going back to what I know.”

Several of the professionals’ comments indicated that grooming creates a trauma bond—a strong emotional bond—with the trafficker that leads sexually trafficked youths to return to their trafficker after intervention. Participant 11 commented that DMST youths may return to their trafficker “because they genuinely have some sort of trauma bond or connection with a trafficker who they refer to as their boyfriend.” Participant 5 shared this view.

> Children who are trafficked very often form trauma bonds with those who are trafficking them. Traffickers are very methodical and purposeful about controlling those they're exploiting, figuring out what that need is—the need may be a boyfriend figure or father figure, love, safety, security, basic needs—and meeting that need. (P5)

This participant added that a trauma bond may become stronger if the trafficker sometimes treats a DMST youth violently.

> But he is the one that beat you. He's the one that kept you from eating until you earned your quota. He's also the one who then fed you and didn't kill you. And that builds a bond that so often can be very, very difficult for somebody who's experienced the trauma of DMST to escape. (P5)

Participant 3 further explained the difficulty that these youths have in returning to a normal after traumatic experiences and why they want to go back to what they know with the trafficker.

> They have been often on the street surviving, taking care of themselves, and have experienced an incredible amount of trauma that makes it difficult to just sort of go back to normal, what we and society think normal would be. And so, I think that that can cause them to return to what they know. Sometimes I think that the traffickers are the ones who have shown them care and protection when they have not felt that at home. And so, they return to that, to that the one person that seemed to care about them. (P3)

Participating professionals compared the phenomenon of DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention to domestic violence situations in which a woman may return to her abusive partner due to a trauma bond with the abuser. One advocate remarked, for example,

> I think it sometimes looks a bit like we see relationships in domestic violence where there's a cycle where they leave and then they come back; and they leave, and they come back for domestic minor sex trafficking kids as well. (P3)

Participant 7 shared, “I relate it a lot as far as domestic violence situations, where everyone always wants to know why they don't leave or why they stay or why they go back to the situation.” Participant 8 explained, “They're no different than a victim of domestic violence that continues to go back to her husband or boyfriend or whatever.”

Theme 3: Other Return Reasons

Other than the grooming process that results in DMST youths having a physical and emotional dependency on the trafficker, participants mentioned several other reasons why these youths return to their traffickers after intervention. These comments were reflected in the third theme, *Other Return Reasons.*

Subtheme: Lack of Options. One return reason participants mentioned is the youths’ perceived lack of options. For instance, Participant 6 commented, “I think they return because it's all they know. There's some sense of routine, and it's a known and unknown evil and they may not have anywhere else to go.” Participant 5 explained that “very often” DMST youths are “already being sexually abused every night by their father or by their stepfather. So, once they run from that and they've met a trafficker, they don't know something better to go back to” One social worker spoke of DMST victims having few other options for making a living beyond a job paying a minimum wage, which motivates them to return to their trafficker, where they can make more money (P9).

Other respondents expressed that DMST survivors do not feel they have other options to receive care and protection than from their trafficker. One child advocate remarked,

> A lot of our victims mistake what the trafficker has given them as love and protection. And that's something that they might have never experienced in their life before. So, once they're out of it, they feel like that they're trapped. There was the only person that gave them that love. (P10)

According to one of the social work professionals, being trafficked defines victims' perceived future options. These youths sometimes believe, "Now, nobody sees me as anything but—and usually that's followed up by something like—'a whore' or whatever…. This is the only way that people see me anymore." (P11)

Subtheme: Denying Being a Victim. An additional reason DMST youths return to their trafficker according to the participants is that they don't consider themselves a victim of the trafficker. For instance, Participant 3 commented, "The kids don't believe they're victims." Participant 9 said, "Many of them don't see themselves as victims. They see themselves as this was my choice. I was doing this because this person is my boyfriend."

Not seeing themselves as victims makes it difficult for professionals to work with DMST youth.

> Sometimes those who have been victimized by trafficking are the hardest to work with…. They're the ones who are most likely, because of their trauma … to tell law enforcement where they can shove it. And they're the most frustrating because they're the most likely to run away. And so, it can be very hard to build cases around them. And they don't always exhibit the way we think a victim is going to exhibit in our heads. (P5)

Participant 11 noted that the “lack of being able to identify as a victim” is a “huge part” of the tendency for DMST youths to return to their trafficker. This social work professional also offered possible reasons for not identifying as a victim.

> It could be because victimization is part of their normal expectations, especially for youth who have experienced a lifetime of physical and or especially sexual abuse. It sort of is just part of their history, part of their identity. And so being with someone who takes advantage of them or exploits them in some way doesn't necessarily for every kid feel like something different than what they're used to…. It could also be because they genuinely have some sort of trauma bond or connection with a trafficker who they refer to as their boyfriend. It could also be because even if it's an older person, regardless of gender, that person may also be providing for their needs in certain ways. And so, the child is not able to kind of process the fact that that person is potentially unhealthy for them or is taking advantage of them. (P11)

Subtheme: Distrust of Interveners. A third additional reason DMST youths return to their trafficker after intervention according to the respondents is the youths’ difficulty in trusting interveners.

> It is hard for them to trust and it's hard for them to get out of the mentality of somebody's always telling them what to do that they're used to…. They don't know if what you're saying to them is true or false, so they have a lot of trust issues, they have a lot of abandonment issues… it’s hard for them to trust and hard for them to get the services they need because they don't trust. (P13)

Another social work professional talked about the importance of changing youths' perceptions of law enforcement and social service professionals, commenting,

> I don't think there's going to be a program that would be successful in keeping kids from returning to their traffickers unless we can also change the victims' perceptions of us…. I just don't think we'll get to that point of intervention without first doing some sort of repair of the relationships and the perceptions that our kids have of us and our roles. (P11)

One law enforcement professional suggested that distrust among DMST survivors may be promoted by intervention conditions that seem strange to them, saying,

> A lot of the scenarios that we put them in are very foreign to them…. So, there is a lot of culture shock with a lot of the services … And then they start feeling things, 'these are folks judging me. Why are you trying to change me? Before, my lifestyle may not have been great, but everybody treated me as equal and didn't try and make me be something I didn't want to be.' (P7)

Subtheme: Wanting the Lifestyle. A fourth additional reason DMST survivors return to their trafficker that was mentioned by participants is their continuing to want to be in the trafficking lifestyle. Participant 4 commented, "They want to able to live a certain lifestyle, but it's a fallacy because a lot of times they think they're in control because it's their body, but they are not." This law enforcement professional mentioned asking one girl why she continued to return to being trafficked,

> I quite naturally just asked her bluntly, please tell me why you continue to go back to this life? She didn't necessarily go back to the same person. She just

> returned to the life, whether there was that person or someone else. And her response was kind of interesting to me as she said boys can rob or steal. But all I have is my body. (P4)

Another law enforcement professional shared,

> Sometimes it is for just pure financial gain that they want quick and easy money. They don't want to have to work at McDonald's or a Wal-Mart or any other entry-level job. They think that they can get a couple hundred dollars just turning a few tricks. And be able to keep that money, to be able to buy what they want when they want. (P1)

Participant 9 remarked,

> For many of them, they're going to face that challenging time as a young adult where you must pay bills and you have all these responsibilities, and you need to find a job and a lot of what happens in a lot of cases is that they may have that thought: I know how to make money. I've done this before. I know how to make money. (P9)

Second Research Question

The second research question was the following: What intervention strategies do law enforcement and human service professionals believe would reduce the likelihood of DMST victims returning to their traffickers? To answer this question, participants were asked what they thought should be included in a collaborative law enforcement and social service program to prevent DMST survivors from returning to their traffickers. Some of their responses to other interview questions were also relevant to answering the second

research question. The participants' responses provided insights into strategies interveners could use to reduce the likelihood of trafficked minors returning to their trafficker after intervention. These responses revealed the themes *Intervention Strategies* and *Need for Resources,* which helped in answering the second research question.

Theme 4: Intervention Strategies

The theme of *Intervention Strategies* comprises participants' responses concerning actions interveners could take to reduce the probability of DMST survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention. Participants' responses represent five types of intervention. These are the way they engage with the youths, providing options, removing the youths from the trafficking environment, trauma-informed therapy, and agency collaboration.

Subtheme: Engage with DMST Youth. Intervention strategies related to engaging with DMST youth were illustrated by numerous responses. Several responses addressed the issue of the youths not trusting interveners, a problem identified in a previous section. One social work professional emphasized the importance of interveners convincing the youths that they want the best for them, saying,

> Somehow convince kids that we are trying to help, … trying to make sure that they understand we're in their corner and that we want them to be safe and that we want them to be healthy and we want them to live long, productive lives, and we want them to be able to meet their goals and that we don't care if that looks different for every kid…. just whatever feels right for that kid in terms of their goals and their future. We must somehow be able to convince them that we

> support that and are not going to keep sort of holding it over their head that this thing that has happened to them is now defines them, because that's what I hear from a lot of kids as well. (P11)

Participant 2 spoke of the value of having others who have been trafficked speak to the survivors to build trust.

> I think that you're going to have to have somebody that they can relate to, and I know that's kind of hard, but a lot of survivors do come back in. And I think you're going to have to have that because a lot of people feel you have not walked in my shoes, and you can't tell me what to do. But listening to somebody that has been in your life, in your situations, you kind of tend to listen to what they're saying because they're speaking on your level, your language, or they know you know what you're talking about. (P2)

Another participant agreed that it is important to enlist former trafficking survivors to engage with current DMST youths, commenting,

> You've got to have success stories and people who have gone who have survived and they have overcome and can say, 'I was this, now this.' I think especially when you're dealing with kids, kids learn better from other kids. Kids teach other kids to read, write, and tie their shoes, ride their bikes, and pick it up like this. So, because they're so impressionable for each other, adults talking to them about what's right, what's wrong, what's not love, what is love, I think is very hard. So, getting kids and telling stories, storytelling is a powerful tool. I think that would be helpful. (P6)

Participants also remarked on the importance of learning about and treating each DMST youth as an individual.

> You meet them where they are as far as what they're going through and remember every victim is different. Every single victim is different, there is not a model for this. If you meet every person where they are, you are pretty much going to get them in. (P13)

Participant 3 spoke of the value of understanding a youth from her or his perspective, saying, “Finding ways for law enforcement and service providers to engage with survivors, to understand from their perspective what we need, I think could be really very helpful.” One social worker suggested that interveners could learn about individual youth from their perspective by asking them to talk about who they are, sharing,

> Even before you get to the sex trafficking piece, you've got to figure out who they are and who they were. ‘Tell me who you were before this happened. What did you like to do? What were you good at?’ And reconnecting them with those things and helping them find new things that they can identify with versus this life. (P6)

This social worker also believed that the youths should be part of the intervention program, commenting,

> So, being able to get a baseline assessment from the kids in this program to say, you know, ‘where are you? What do you think you need?’ I think sometimes we try to think for kids, and they’ve got brains and sometimes they can tell us more than we think we know about them. So, engaging them in their treatment is

> powerful. Lectures don't work with kids and teenagers. It's got to be interactive. (P6)

Remarks by Participant 7 suggested that the individual situations and needs of DMST youths are not always taken into account by interveners due to departmental policies.

> Reunification with the family is first and foremost and is not always the best course of action with our victims. So now I think a lot of departments, of course law enforcement included, we have a lot of policies and rules that dictate a lot of what we do that does not fit the model of our victims that we're working with. (P7)

Subtheme: Provide Options. A second engagement strategy mentioned by the interviewed professionals is the importance of interveners helping rescued DMST youths perceive options for their future other than returning to their trafficker. Participant 5 said that interveners need to "first help the person have some picture of a better life." She continued that if they don't have some idea where they could move to, "then they're not going to move towards it."

A social work professional spoke of providing new options by teaching DMST youths money-making skills, saying, "We want to give them more hard skills that are making money so that they don't feel like they must go back into the life." This social worker described a project she was managing to provide re-entry skills to DMST survivors.

> What my project aims to do is to provide them with tools and skills to be able to have choices once they leave whatever facility they may be in while they are minors. We want them to go back into the community, and we must make these decisions. We want them to know, hey, you have other choices. You know how to write your résumé. You know how to apply for a job. You know how to do an interview. You know how when you get a job, how to keep that job giving you coping skills, we've given you skills to start your own business, all these things. (P9)

Comments revealed that it is important to learn from the youths what they believe they need to move forward with more options.

> Choice is such a thing that most of these kids never have a choice or anything. So really offering a lot of choice as much as possible. So maybe that's part of what that intervention could look like…. one of the trauma informed principles is offering voice and choice. So, 'What do you need from us? Like, how can we help you? What are the things that you feel like you need to succeed?' (P11)

For Participant 1, a key to providing more options to DMST youths is to teach them to be more autonomous. "In my opinion, the one thing that is missing is teaching them autonomy, what it means to be able to live off your own abilities, off your own decisions." He went on to emphasize that it was important for the youths to understand the financial consequences of their decisions, "so that they don't have to rely on any other individual for their livelihood, for their safety, for their protection, for their basic needs."

Subtheme: Trauma-informed Therapy. A third intervention strategy that participants spoke of is providing trauma-informed therapy to survivors. A purpose of such therapy is to help overcome the trauma bond that was developed by the trafficker and to address other traumas the youths may have experienced such as physical or sexual abuse in the home.

> What we do in trauma therapy is to try to reach that individual, understanding the trauma that they have gone on, to have more patience with them, to get them to understand that they are a victim, they have been victimized, but also that they are survivor to try to empower them. (P1)

A social worker commented that because many DMST youths have gone through complex trauma, "They need to get specialized, not just any therapy, but they need to get trauma-focused therapy" (P9). She explained that in the program she works with, "we were trauma informed and we understand that coming in, these kids come with their own disadvantages that are very different from other kids."

One child advocate shared,

> My number one thing would be trauma-focused therapy. I think that's very important to get victims in as soon as possible to really understand what they're going through…. I think to break that trauma bond I was speaking about, that therapy is a huge aspect of that, to really dig down to the trauma of what happens, as well as the red flags that might have been present prior to the child getting into the lifestyle, whether that's family sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, things like that, that played a part in them entering the lifestyle. (P10)

She added that practicing trauma-informed therapy requires special training.

> The number one thing with trauma therapy would be to have providers that are trained in what trauma is and how specifically DMST trauma … can look like in a group setting as well as individualized therapy, to really focus in on the trauma piece of what they have experienced, more so than just like a generalized therapy treatment that might deal with all sorts of issues, not just the trauma piece. (P10)

Subtheme: Remove from Environment. A fourth intervention strategy that respondents mentioned is removing DMST youths far from the trafficking environment. One child advocate referred to the success of placing youths in a facility far from where they were trafficked, saying,

> We have some of these group homes right now that are in the middle of downtown XX County, and the girls walk. The traffickers pull right up front. They walk outside the door and get back in and they run. Multiple people run away again. There are others that are in more lockdown spaces in more rural Georgia, one that we haven't even had a run from in a year…. So, I do think being able to physically protect someone while they're healing from their trauma and getting a picture of the possibilities in life, it's important—in a way that we aren't criminalizing their victimization. (P5)

A law enforcement professional was another who recommended placing rescued DMST youths in a location far away from the trafficking environment they were in. She said,

> I almost think that you must get the victim or survivor completely away from that kind of world that they were in… We have these placements for DMST survivors. But the problem is they're 10 minutes from where they were trafficked, they're 20 minutes from where all their friends … They're going to run on you. You kept them in that same world that they've been in. I have found in a couple of cases that my victims have been able to go to the placement in XX, and that's four or five hours from Atlanta. And they've done much better because they have completely been removed from their world and they're having to start over and make new friends. (P8)

The intervention strategy of placing youths in a rural location distant from the trafficking environment was also offered by a social work professional who remarked,

> Another thing that I have seen that works is isolation … if they come from the city, and put them out in rural areas or put them in an area they don't know anything about. So, Georgia has safe houses in different areas of Georgia … where they may not have a bus line or if somebody calls a cab, they don't know this place…. So just having things like that in a place where they are isolated in a good way, to help them so they can bring them back to a normal environment, is key when you're dealing with these individuals. (P13)

Subtheme: Agency Collaboration. A fifth type of intervention strategy participants mentioned is agency collaboration. Responses mainly concerned how such collaborations should be conducted.

> I don't think any of us can do this work by ourselves. I think we must have law enforcement. We must have our DAs [district attorneys] offices. We must have our medical providers. We must have our social service providers across the board. We all must be working together.… There would have to be a unified front from all parties. (P11)

Participant 9 commented on the need for agencies to take a holistic approach.

> A collaborative program would include a holistic approach. So, there must be the mental health aspect of trauma-focused mental health. And there would also need to be trauma informed services that surrounds these kids, because many of them come in with complex needs like everything from housing, where they stay, their safety, their education, because many of them are behind, because they've missed a lot of school, even recognizing just regular independent living skills…. and there needs to be a full wraparound of services for these kids. (P9)

This participant also remarked that there "would also need to be services for non-offending caregivers, because a lot of the times parents have no clue how to deal with this situation." For parents who are trying to help the youths, "there's a secondary trauma that comes from being the caregiver of a kid who has experienced severe trauma. And we need to be able to treat that also because the kid must go home at some point."

One law enforcement professional stressed the importance of not trying to "reinvent the wheel."

> You just need to go to the people that have done the work. I see a lot of times that new organizations of this nature try to pop up and do things and try to reinvent the

> wheel and make all the same mistakes other people have made already who are in the business of saving these kids. I think that that's what they need, to collaborate with the people that have done the work instead of waking up one day and deciding to form organizations. P4)

A social work professional pointed out that it is important that programs to help DMST survivors are measurable.

> You have to have measures of success, ways to show that this program is doing what you needed to do so that if you're not meeting those measures, you can tweak it and make the change instead of just doing a program that may look good on paper, but it's not changing anybody's life. (P6)

Theme 5: Need for Resources

Another theme that is relevant to answering the second research question is *Need for Resources.* Participants emphasized that a much-needed resource in working with rescued DMST youths is enough time to deal with their trauma and get them on a new path. Participant 12 commented, “I just wish that we can invest more time and energy into meeting those needs because I don't think we're doing that at all.” Another respondent remarked, “If we can't put in the same amount of time, effort, longevity, commitment that an exploiter will put into a recruit, then that's why we see a lot of going back to the exploiter” (P7). A law enforcement professional shared,

> Overall, I'd say long term. I don't think in two months, three months they’re suddenly going to be like, oh, you're right, I was trafficked, groomed, and now I'm not…. Grooming takes longer to implement, and it probably takes twice, if not

> three times as long to get someone to understand that they were groomed and they are a victim of a crime. So I think almost like a year-long program at a minimum, just to give them the resources they need to get out of their situation. (P8)

Another law enforcement professional also mentioned the need for long-term programs.

> Law enforcement and social service providers are going to have to realize that these girls have been groomed for a certain lifestyle… You just can't say, oh, you've been in my program for three months or two months and now go live your life…. I know that's time consuming, but they're going to have to have that person that … checks in on these girls regularly to try to get them back in society and living the life that they're supposed to live. (P2)

Participant 5, an advocate, agreed.

> I think one of the biggest things to make it successful would be to be willing to work with a child long term, no matter how many times they ran. How many different things they got arrested for. And just that continual recognition that this trauma is going to take a long time to recover from. (P5)

Several respondents spoke about the need for money and support for programs directed toward DMST survivors. When asked what would be needed for a collaborative program, Participant 4 replied, "A lot of money, because you've got to meet the needs of the child. They need the necessities of life…. So, we just can't talk to the child, we have to be a part of the child's life." Participant 7 agreed on the need for a long-term investment.

> I would like to see money funding, like real true funding, because when you're talking about housing someone … we'll house a girl for 90 days, that's great. But if I'm dealing with a child that has been involved in human trafficking for the past six or seven years, and you tell me I've got 90 days to try to work with this person when the exploiter had years with this person. But then we want to know why. Why didn't it work? (P7)

Participant 6 remarked that programs need leadership support in the form of money and other resources.

> This program must have support. If you don't have support from leadership on the law enforcement and on the social service side, you're going to get some people who are excited about the program. And if it doesn't go anywhere, again, some disgruntled people and then some disappointed kids … prior to implementing it, you've got to have leadership on board and willing to put up not just money, but time and other in-kind type resources. (P6)

The comments above indicate that the participants believed that greater investments of time and money are needed for professionals to have success in dealing with the trauma that DMST youths have experienced and decrease the likelihood that they will return to their trafficker. Dedicating more time and money to the effort is an overall intervention strategy that can help more specific strategies to be implemented.

Summary

This chapter reported the results of the study. The first two sections described the study setting and the demographics of the sample. The next three sections explained the

data collection and analysis procedures and evidence of the study's trustworthiness. The sixth section presented the study results and was divided into two main sections, one for each research question. Subsections reported the five themes and subthemes that resulted from the analysis and participant comments to support the themes and subthemes.

Results showed that all of the interview questions were answered by all of the participants. Responses were pertinent to the questions and provided considerable detail and insights into the problem of DMST youth returning to their trafficker after intervention and how that problem might be counteracted.

Comments by participants that were classified under the first three themes helped answer the study's first research question. The theme of *Attitudes Toward DMST Youths* indicated that law enforcement attitudes, social service limitations, and public misperceptions can all contribute to making it more likely for DMST survivors to return to their trafficker after intervention. The participants' many responses reflecting the theme of *Grooming* showed that having been groomed is a main reason that many DMST youths return to their trafficker after intervention. They return because they become dependent on the trafficker for physical necessities and the traffickers psychologically manipulate them, often creating a strong emotional bond that the youths have with the trafficker. For the theme of *Other Return Reasons,* there are four main additional reasons why youths return to their trafficker after intervention. These are, youths perceiving a lack of options to returning to the trafficker, not regarding themselves as victims, not trusting interveners, and wanting to remain in the lifestyle.

Comments that reflect the fourth and fifth themes provided answers to the second research question. The theme of *Intervention Strategies* includes five subthemes that are relevant to decreasing the likelihood of survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention. These are, engage with DMST youth, provide options to the youths, conduct trauma-informed therapy, remove youths from the trafficking environment, and agency collaboration. The theme *Need for Resources* also is relevant to the issue of youths returning to their trafficker. According to the participants, more resources in the form of additional time, money, and support are needed to successfully treat DMST youths, which would help decrease the likelihood of their returning to their trafficker. The following chapter is a discussion of the study's results. The chapter includes interpretation of the results, study limitations, implications for positive social change and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The frequent return of DMST survivors to their trafficker after intervention is a nationwide problem that undermines the efforts of the law enforcement and social service professionals who work these youths. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of why DMST youths often return to their trafficker after intervention and how to counteract that phenomenon.

To fulfill the study's purpose, a qualitative research methodology was chosen. Thirteen law enforcement, social service, and child advocate professionals who had worked for at least five years with DMST youths were interviewed. The participants responded to six interview questions to determine their perceptions about why rescued DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention and what strategies might reduce the likelihood of such returns occurring. Participants' responses to interview questions were recorded and transcribed. They were then analyzed using qualitative analysis methods to determine patterns and themes in the responses that help us understand why DMST youths return to their traffickers after intervention and what strategies might decrease the likelihood of such returns.

Qualitative analysis of the participants' responses to interview questions revealed five themes. Three of the themes helped to answer the study's first research question, which asked why DMST victims return to sex traffickers after intervention from the perspective of law enforcement and human service professionals. These three themes were *Attitudes Toward DMST Youths, Grooming, and Other Return Reasons.* The theme

of *Attitudes Toward DMST Youths* suggested that some law enforcement, social service, and public attitudes increase the likelihood that DMST survivors will return to their trafficker after intervention. *Grooming* to make youths physically and psychologically dependent on the trafficker was also a main reason that many DMST youths return to their trafficker after intervention. The theme of *Other Return Reasons* included four subthemes that helped explain why youths return to their trafficker after intervention. These subthemes were the youths perceiving a lack of options, not viewing themselves as victims, not trusting interveners, and wanting to remain in the lifestyle.

The fourth theme, *Intervention Strategies,* helped answer the second research question, which asked what strategies might reduce the likelihood of rescued DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention. This theme included five subthemes, which were, engage with DMST youth, provide options, conduct trauma-informed therapy, remove youths from the trafficking environment, and agency collaboration. The fifth theme, *Need for Resources,* indicated that providing more resources in the form of time, money, and support could decrease the likelihood of DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's results confirm a number of the findings in the research literature on the domestic sex trafficking of minors. One finding of the present study was that the interviewed professionals perceived that many DMST youths come from a difficult home environment in which they have experienced physical or sexual abuse. This result was in agreement with the conclusions of Boxhill and Richardson (2007), Hardy et al. (2013),

and Perkins and Ruiz (2017), who found that DMST survivors have a high likelihood of having been physically or sexually abused in their home environment. These experiences can lead to complex trauma (Kisiel et al., 2009), which may increase the likelihood of youths entering the trafficking environment (Landers et al., 2017; Reid et al., 2017; Varma et al., 2015). According to the participants in the present study, such traumatic experiences often precede youths running away from home, which is a risk factor for becoming involved in DMST (Fedina et al., 2019). Being homeless and lacking resources may lead minors to sell sexual favors in order to meet basic needs (O'Brien, et al., 2017). Being a runaway puts youths in a vulnerable situation where traffickers may approach them. This study's results indicate that lack of resources such as food and shelter can provide traffickers with an opening to manipulate minors. A trafficker may offer homeless youths physical resources as a way of luring them into the trafficking environment. Because of their age, cognitive limitations, or poor judgment, the youths may not realize they are being exploited (Gragg et al., 2007). The provision of physical needs is one element of the grooming process that many of this study's participants described in their comments.

Participants also spoke of a second main element of the grooming process, which is to psychologically manipulate vulnerable youths. According to Reid (2011), many young people run away from home because their home environment lacks emotional closeness. These youths have a need for such closeness, which traffickers exploit. The professionals in the present study provided evidence for these claims, noting that traffickers take advantage of youths' needs to feel emotionally close to someone by

convincing them that they care about them. Young people may come to view the trafficker as their friend, protector, or parental substitute rather than their exploiter (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). In this study, participants spoke of female DMST survivors sometimes considering their trafficker to be their boyfriend.

The findings of this study thus indicate that there are two aspects of the grooming process, which are the creation of both a physical and a psychological dependence on the trafficker. The qualitative data support the conclusion that the double aspect of the grooming process is a major reason why rescued DMST youths return to their trafficker after intervention by law enforcement and human service professionals. First, many such youths are convinced that they have no other options than to return to the trafficker, who they believe provides needed physical resources such as food and shelter. Second, they believe that the trafficker genuinely cares for their well-being and will provide the emotional support they crave.

Participants in this study explained the psychological relationship between DMST youths and their trafficker as one in which the youths have a trauma bond with the trafficker. Similar to previous research is the finding of this study that a trafficker's psychological and emotional manipulation can create a trauma bond in victims of sex trafficking (Hardy et al., 2017; Kalergis, 2009). My analysis indicates that the existence of a trauma bond with their trafficker is a reason DMST youths return to their trafficker after intervention.

This study also found that interviewed professionals believed that having a trauma bond with the trafficker can result in DMST survivors rejecting the idea that they are

victims, which is another result that agrees with the outcomes of previous research. The findings of Perkins and Ruiz (2017) suggest that DMST youths deny that they are victims because of being unable to recognize the trafficker's manipulative tactics due to their lack of real-world experience. In one previous study of DMST survivors, the researcher found that most of the participants denied that they were victims of the trafficker and claimed that they had entered the trafficking environment out of their own choice, even if their entry was the result of manipulation (McMahon-Howard, 2017). Based on participants' comments in the present study, denying that they are victims was identified as one factor that makes it more likely that rescued DMST youths will return to their trafficker after intervention.

Another finding similar to prior research is the participants' perception that it is important for helping professionals to establish trust in the DMST victims they work with. Participants' responses suggest that DMST youths' distrust of law enforcement and social service professionals is a factor that increases the likelihood that they will return to their trafficker after intervention. In a previous study, Gibbs et al. (2015) found that case workers from three organizations emphasized the importance of establishing an atmosphere of trust and respect when dealing with DMST youths. Responses of participants in the present study suggest that an important engagement strategy for preventing DMST survivors from returning to their trafficker is to establish such an atmosphere. These youths often enter into a relationship with interveners with a distrust of authority figures. What further complicates the relationship is survivors' denying that

they are victims of their trafficker. One participant spoke of the importance of convincing distrustful survivors that social service professionals want the best for them.

Comments by the interviewees suggest additional strategies for social service professionals to use when engaging with DMST youths. One strategy is to treat survivors as individuals, rather than taking a broad-based approach. Also, interveners should attempt to view the survivors' situation from the youths' perspective. They need to engage the youths in the process of determining what services they need and learn from them what each one envisions for herself or himself for a future out of trafficking. As a way of generating trust among rescued DMST youths, respondents also recommended enlisting the assistance of people who have already escaped the trafficking environment to speak to the youths.

Another finding of the present study that confirms previous research is that rescued DMST youths typically do not trust law enforcement officers. Prior research also found such a lack of trust (Farrell et al., 2019; Vries et al., 2019). This lack of trust continues despite a widespread change over the last few decades in the attitude of law enforcement toward DMST youths. In the present study, participants spoke of this change. Before, officers generally viewed trafficked youths as having committed a crime (Birckhead, 2011). The change is that now law enforcement officers often view DMST youths as victims of their trafficker. However, interviewees also pointed out that the change has not been universal. They spoke of how the problem of trafficked minors distrusting and not cooperating with law enforcement professionals leads to frustration among officers. Such distrust of law enforcement may result in DMST youths not

providing information that could help in the identification and prosecution of their trafficker (Bergquist, 2015; Farrell et al., 2020).

Participants commented on how distrust and lack of cooperation can adversely affect the attitude of law enforcement professionals toward DMST youths that have been detained. These minors may deny that they are victims, be uncooperative or even belligerent, and "push the buttons" of officers, in one participant's phrasing. All of these behaviors may contribute to the officers being less likely to view a DMST survivor as a victim. If law enforcement professionals take the attitude that the youth is not a victim but a criminal, this attitude may make it less likely that the youth will get needed social services and counseling. Referring these individuals to social services is critical because law enforcement officials are not prepared to provide for DMST youths' needs such as for food, shelter, and counseling (Farrell et al., 2019; Nietzel, 2020). An outcome of not getting needed services is likely to be an increased probability that detained youths will return to their trafficker after intervention.

There are several results of the present study that were not mentioned in the review of research in Chapter 2. One result was the need for specific trauma-informed therapy for DMST youths. Participants talked of trauma-informed therapy as being necessary for survivors due to the trauma they experienced, the need for them to understand that their trafficker has victimized them, and the need to weaken any trauma bond they may have with their trafficker. One participant clarified that trauma-informed therapy is different from generalized therapy and takes special training. In the reviewed research, studies dealt with the issue of complex trauma, which consists of someone

experiencing two or more traumatic events (Kisiel et al., 2009; Landers et al., 2017). Also, researchers discussed the trauma bond that many DMST youths form with their trafficker (Hardy et al., 2017; Kalergis, 2009). According to participants in the present study, the strategy of conducting trauma-informed therapy can help reduce the likelihood of DMST victims returning to their trafficker.

A second strategy that interviewees commented on but was not mentioned in the review of research was to remove DMST survivors far from the trafficking environment. Participants commented that keeping detained survivors in facilities that were near where they had been trafficked resulted in a higher likelihood that they would return to trafficking. Several participants recommended placing the youths in a location where the trafficker could not reach them and where they would have difficulty returning to the trafficking environment.

The professionals also mentioned the strategy of agency collaboration as a way to reduce the probability of DMST youths returning to their trafficker. Participants commented on the importance of different agencies communicating, sharing information, and working toward the common goal of helping trafficked youths exit the trafficking environment. Collaborators mentioned by participants included law enforcement professionals, social service experts, medical personnel, and parents, in order to provide "wraparound services" to youths who have been trafficked.

The interviewees identified a reason some rescued DMST youths return to their trafficker that might disappoint some who attempt to provide options for such youths. That reason is simply that they want to return to the trafficking environment because that

is what they know how to do to make money. Participants suggested that some survivors feel that they are not able to earn as much money in any other way. This may be because they lack the training and education that would enable them to gain a job that paid much above a minimum wage.

Another finding of this study was the need for increased resources to provide services to DMST survivors. A key needed resource mentioned by participants was adequate time to deal with the trauma DMST youths have experienced, provide them with new options, and help them gain autonomy. Prior research has shown that these youths have important basic short-term needs, such as medical care, housing, food, and clothing, which must be provided by services directed toward helping them escape the trafficking environment (Gibbs et al., 2015; Muraya & Fry, 2016; Twigg, 2017). Long-term needs include long-term housing, life-skills training, and job-skills training (Twigg, 2017). Gibbs et al. (2015) found that providing basic needs to DMST survivors is a key service that may help prevent youths from returning to their trafficker.

Participants in the present study identified increased options as one main need of rescued DMST youths. A factor that motivates DMST youths to return to their trafficker is their perception that they have no other options. Participants spoke of the necessity of changing this perception by convincing the youths that they do have other viable options. To create this change, trafficked minors may need life skills and job skills training as mentioned by Twigg (2017). Interviewees commented on the importance of providing training to help DMST youths gain skills to help them apply for jobs that provide income above minimum wage and achieve greater autonomy.

To furnish such resources to agencies working with DMST youths and to provide sufficient time for treating the youths requires a substantial monetary investment. Interviewees in the present study spoke of the need to increase the money that is allocated to counteract DMST. The allocation of additional money might help mitigate the burnout of social service professionals who work with DMST survivors. Several participants mentioned the heavy caseloads these personnel must often manage and their relatively low pay. These issues, when added to the difficulties of fostering trust among DMST youths, may lead to burnout and leaving the profession. When experienced professionals leave, agencies may have to hire new personnel with little or no experience working with trafficked youths. One result may be an increased likelihood that rescued DMST youths will return to their trafficker.

The three conceptual frameworks of the study all apply to the situation of DMST survivors, including their returning to their trafficker after intervention. The first conceptual framework, social learning theory (Akers, 1973), emphasizes how an individual's social relations can lead to deviant and illegal behavior. In the case of DMST youths, their entry into the trafficking world is typically the result of a trafficker befriending and manipulating them into that world. If minors are homeless and in need of resources such as food and someone who seems to care for them, then the trafficker may quickly become the main person in their life. The trafficker then becomes an undue influence on them, and it may be easy to convince them that trafficking their body is acceptable and expected. If the trafficker already controls other youths, then new ones may learn by imitation. Differential reinforcement may then lead to the trafficking

behavior being repeated many times. This differential reinforcement may also make it more likely for the youth to return to their trafficker after intervention.

The second conceptual framework was routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), which emphasizes circumstances that enable offenders to conduct their criminal activities. Routine activities theory holds that predatory crime results from three variables: a motivated offender, a target for the criminal act, and absence of a guardian. This conceptual framework is especially relevant to the situation of a trafficker identifying and interacting with discontented youths, especially ones that have run away from home. The trafficker finds these youths in places like bus stations and malls (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016; Davis, 2006). They are often alone and without a guardian such as a parent to protect them from the trafficker. This makes it easier for traffickers to approach the youths and lure them into trafficking (Eck, 2003; Tillyer & Eck, 2011).

Anomie theory, which was the third conceptual framework for the study, focuses on situations in which there are weak social norms (Durkheim, 1982; Merton, 1938). Anomie theory applies when disadvantaged people engage in criminal activity in order to make money. This theory applies to the trafficking of minors in two ways. First, the trafficker breaks laws against trafficking youths in order to make money (Agnew et al., 1996). Making money may also be a main motivation for youths who are trafficked, especially for those who are homeless and in need of resources. Making money can also be a main motivation for DMST youths to return to their trafficker after intervention for

those who believe they have limited or no other options for supporting themselves financially.

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations to this study. One limitation was that the participants chosen came from only one large urban area. No participants were from agencies in other urban areas or from small communities or rural settings. It is possible that professionals working in other cities, towns, or rural areas have viewpoints on why rescued DMST youths return to their trafficker that were not represented in this study.

A second limitation of the study was that no information was gathered from the agencies employing the participants about what percentage of DMST survivors the agencies encounter or work with that returned to their trafficker. Also, it would have been informative to know the details of financial resources that are dedicated to treating DMST youths in the various agencies represented by the participants, including having a breakdown of how those resources are spent.

A third limitation is that no information about why DMST victims return to their trafficker was obtained directly by interviewing trafficked youths. Obtaining such information could have provided another perspective on the problem of DMST survivors returning to their trafficker after intervention. Finding out what strategies the youths believe agencies should use to instill trust and prevent return to the trafficker might have been valuable.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for further study can be made on the basis of this study's results. The first recommendation is to conduct similar studies in which interviews are conducted with law enforcement, social service, and child advocate professionals who work with agencies in other urban areas, smaller communities, and rural areas. Such studies could help to determine if professionals working in these other communities and areas have similar views about the problem of DMST youths returning to their trafficker after intervention. Such studies might reveal new insights about the reasons these youths return to their trafficker and what strategies might decrease the likelihood of that occurring.

A second recommendation for further study is to conduct research to compare the success rate of placing rescued DMST youths in settings that are close to the area in which they were trafficked to the success rate of placing them in distant settings. The purpose of the study could be to determine what percentage of DMST survivors leave each kind of setting to return to the trafficking environment. The results of the study could be valuable by either supporting or not supporting the strategy of removing DMST youths to a location distant from the area where they were trafficked. The study could also include information about other features of the settings that might be associated with their rates of success.

A third recommendation for further study is to perform research on how much money is allocated to social service agencies in different communities for the purpose of intervening with DMST youths. The study could include determining how the allocations

are used for particular services such as housing the youths, performing therapy, and educational needs. The study could also include determining whether there is a correlation between the amount of money allocated to each service and the programs' effectiveness in keeping the youths out of the trafficking environment.

Implications

The study has positive implications for social change at several distinct levels. At the individual level, the study has implications for the DMST victims that interveners work with. By increasing understanding of why survivors return to their trafficker and how to prevent that from occurring, the study may help interveners to be more successful in guiding the youths out of the trafficking world. The study also has implications for positive social change at the family level. By helping reduce the likelihood of DMST survivors returning to their trafficker, the study has the potential of increasing the likelihood of the youths being able to return to their families in cases where the family situation is not a toxic one.

At the organizational level, the study has potential for positive social change by providing information that may help agencies dealing with DMST minors to better engage with the youths. For instance, the study highlights participants' comments about the importance of establishing trust among the youths and treating them as individuals who have their own ideas about what they need. The results also suggest the value of placing youths in locations far removed from the trafficking environment that came from. Use of these strategies may help increase agencies' successes in working with rescued DMST youths.

At the policy level, the study has the potential for positive social change by reporting participants' views on the need to allocate increased money, resources, and time to agencies that work with DMST survivors. Based on participants' responses, the study identifies lack of sufficient resources and time as factors that increase the likelihood of these youths returning to their trafficker and not being able to exit the circle of exploitation. Thus, the research provides reasons for finding ways to increase funding for agencies working with DMST survivors so they can have more resources and time to work with the youths.

Another implication of the study follows from the finding that the grooming process is one of the strongest factors leading to DMST youths returning to their trafficker. The fact that the grooming process often creates a trauma bond with the trafficker implies the importance of conducting trauma-informed therapy to loosen the trauma bond. A recommendation for practice is that professionals who counsel the youths be trained in conducting trauma-informed therapy.

Another recommendation for practice is based on the finding that though progress has been made by law enforcement agencies in how to deal with DMST youths, there are still situations in which officers find it difficult to view the youths as victims. Because of this, it is important for law enforcement agencies to train officers to understand how traffickers psychologically manipulate minors through grooming and how to remain emotionally unaffected by detained youths' lack of cooperation. It is crucial to ensure that detained DMST victims are quickly placed with social service agencies that can attempt to counteract the grooming.

A final recommendation for practice is for local, state, and national governments to take steps to increase funding for agencies working with DMST youths. Participants noted that traffickers often have months or years to psychologically condition DMST youths to serve their needs. To counteract this grooming, professionals need abundant time to work with these victims. Interveners also need physical resources such as housing and food that may be needed for months or longer while the youths are in their care. These resources require substantial financial investment. Without greater investment, many DMST survivors will return to their trafficker or the trafficking environment after intervention, making efforts to get them out of the trafficking life unproductive.

Conclusion

This study dealt with a major recurring problem that plagues professionals who work with DMST youths. This problem is that after intervention, many of these youths return to their trafficker. Such returns occur despite professionals urging the youths to leave the trafficking life behind and rejoin mainstream society. A strength of the study is that its participants were professionals who had worked with such youths for years and were intimately familiar with the problem of DMST youths returning to their trafficker. These participants were considered to be experts on the reasons the youths return to their trafficker and what strategies might help reduce the likelihood of their doing so.

The participants did not disappoint. They provided insights into reasons for the phenomenon of rescued DMST youths returning to their trafficker. The most repeated reason offered was that traffickers create a psychological dependency in the youths. This trauma bond is probably strengthened by the circumstance that many DMST youths have

run away from a hostile home environment and crave someone they believe cares for them. Traffickers convince the youths that they care about them. The trauma bond enables traffickers to have a continuing hold on youths' thoughts and emotions after law enforcement officers have detained them and sent them to social service professionals. Intervening professionals work to weaken the trauma bond, but the youths often perceive that they have no other options and distrust the interveners, motivating them to return to their trafficker and the trafficking environment.

The most valuable part of the study may be that the participants suggested several strategies to reduce the likelihood of youths returning to the trafficking life after intervention. These included advice on how to engage with trafficked youths, the importance of providing options to trafficking, conducting trauma-informed therapy, and placing the youths in a location distant from the trafficking environment. All of these strategies are ways of weakening the hold that traffickers have on DMST youths.

To enact these strategies effectively, it is crucial to provide agencies with sufficient funding. Funding is required to provide resources to enable professionals to work with DMST survivors long enough to counteract the powerful grooming that has imprisoned them in the trafficking life. One participant, commenting on the limited amount of time that is often allotted to working with DMST survivors and the need for more time, made the point in the following way: "… I'm dealing with a child that has been involved in human trafficking for the past six or seven years, and you tell me I've got 90 days to try to work with this person when the exploiter had years…. But then we want to know why. Why didn't it work?"

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Appendix A: E-mail Inviting Professionals to Participate in the Study

Hello All,

I am sending this email with hopes that you all can assist me by participating in an interview for my dissertation that I am currently working on.

My study is titled: Why Do Victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Return to Traffickers After Intervention by Law Enforcement and Human Service Professionals?

You are receiving this email because we have either worked together over the past 13 years or you were referred to me by a colleague. I am in search of law enforcement officers, social workers, and child advocates with 5-10 years' experience working with victims of domestic sex trafficking.

The purpose of the interview is to gain insight from law enforcement professionals, social service workers, and child advocates about why they believe victims of domestic minor sex trafficking return to traffickers after they have received intervention.

The goal of the study is to develop programming that can assist in preventing victims from returning to their traffickers.

Due to COVID-19, all interviews will be conducted via Zoom. Your participation will be kept confidential. Interview time length is expected to be 30 to 45 minutes.

After all the interviews are transcribed, the results will be sent back to you to review for the accuracy of your responses. Interview results will be qualitatively analyzed to determine patterns and themes in participants' responses.

If you are interested in participating or know of someone with the same experience that would be interested in participating, please send an email.

Appendix B: Email to Set Interview Time and Provide a Link to Zoom Interview

Thank you for your interest in participating in an interview for my study titled: Why Do Victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Return to Traffickers After Intervention by Law Enforcement and Human Service Professionals?

The purpose of the interviews is to gain insight from law enforcement professionals, social service workers, and child advocates about why they believe victims of domestic minor sex trafficking return to traffickers after they have received intervention. The goal of the study is to develop programming that can assist in preventing victims from returning to their traffickers.

I would like to set up a date and time for our interview. Three suggestions for a date and time are the following:

Suggestion 1

Suggestion 2

Suggestion 3

Please email me to tell me which of these occasions would work best for you. If some other date and time would be more convenient for you, please let me know.

Also, here is a link to the Zoom interview: LINK. In the event that after following this link, you are asked to provide an ID and password, please use the following ID and password: ID, PASSWORD.

Please note that I am also sending you an informed consent form in another email. Please read the informed consent form, sign it, and email it back to me if you agree to be in the study.

Thank you again so much for your interest and participation.