

2022

## Barriers and the Prevention of Human Trafficking Child Exploitation

Earl Wilson Laws  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Earl Wilson Laws, Jr.

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Barriers and the Prevention of Human Trafficking Child Exploitation

by

Earl Wilson Laws, Jr.

MA, Walden University, 2020

BS, North Carolina Central University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2022

## Abstract

Human trafficking is a global phenomenon encompassing areas of sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and indentured servitude. Human trafficking is an exceptionally under-researched and growing phenomenon. Texas ranks as the state with the second-largest human trafficking population in the United States. The current qualitative research study sought to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within human trafficking child exploitation prevention of children aged 5–17. The study utilized Senge’s systems theory as a framework to understand the barriers confronting a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, using a case study approach for data analysis. The study utilized a Qualtrics active link email survey, developed by the researcher and distributed by the police department’s Planning and Data Governance, Research and Special Projects Unit, to collect and lay out the data collection processes and procedures. Respondents to the survey were 7 voluntary participants within a police department Planning and Data Governance, Research and Special Projects Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The collected data were analyzed by coding, categorizing, and theming via NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The study found that law enforcement policies and procedures present barriers to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. This study can impact positive social change by educating, unveiling current prevalent barriers, and identifying where further research needs to be conducted.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Donna H. Laws, for all of your support and dedication throughout my academic endeavors, and my closest friends, Madison Gambino, as she works toward combatting the global phenomenon of human trafficking within the state of North Carolina, and Gerzayn Hernandez-Hernandez, who has continued to grant inspiration. This dissertation is also dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Pearl Fayetine Moore Cannon, who continuously granted inspiration throughout her life, and three individuals who passed during the development of this study: my grandfather, Ivey Gene Cannon, my father, Earl W. Laws, Sr., and my former colleague and dearest friend Briana Everette, who granted inspiration to pursue the degree of Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Slavery continues to be a global phenomenon, destroying individuals' homes, local communities, states, nation-states, and society. Slavery is considered and acknowledged as a heinous act from psychological and sociological perspectives. Slavery is commonly affiliated with an individual's race through racial profiling and systemic racism. The type of slavery still in existence is significantly larger in scope than has been historically prescribed and does not target any specific race, region of the globe, specific population, or group of people, individually or collectively. A recent statement by the State News Service within the U.S. Department of State (DOS) established educational information surrounding the current type of slavery as a global phenomenon. The worldwide phenomenon and type of slavery still in existence is human trafficking.

When speaking about the issue of human trafficking, former United States President Barack Obama declared, "I am talking about the injustice, the outrage of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name – modern slavery" (Dahlstrom, 2020). Former Acting U.S. Attorney Nicholas J. Ganjei for Texas's Eastern District repeated the notion that human trafficking is modern-day slavery (State News Service, 2021). Human trafficking, over time, has been growing in scope as society fully grasps the complexity of the phenomenon of human trafficking. The commonly acknowledged type of human trafficking existing is sex trafficking. Other types of human trafficking include labor trafficking and indentured servitude (State News Service, 2021). Worldwide, several governments, including the United States, have acknowledged the phenomenon of human

trafficking as a global crisis and have not yet tackled the issue comprehensively but consistently worked in order to combat the global phenomenon.

Human trafficking continues to be defined and broadened as individuals continuously expand upon the definition and learn about the evolving issues. Today, human trafficking is defined by using a multitude of different perspectives. From human trafficking's early foundation in the early 20th century as being coined as "white slavery," which encompassed the forced prostitution of European women, to focus on the term *trafficking*, which broadened the scope to include the "coerced movement of women and girls for abroad for prostitution" (Dahlstrom, 2020). The continued development of and discussions surrounding prostitution, sex trafficking, and feminism, the global phenomenon, has led to the development of the Trafficking Protocol.

The DOS (2020) states, "the United States considers trafficking in persons, human trafficking, and modern slavery to be interchangeable umbrella terms that refer to sex and labor trafficking." The United Nations Palermo Protocol went a step further to define child trafficking within human trafficking as being "when a person recruits transports, transfers, harbors or receives a child less than 18 years of age for sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (Albright et al., 2019). In 2000, the 106<sup>th</sup> session of Congress in the United States passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). The TVPA established the first federal law that encompassed protecting those identified as sex and labor trafficking victims, prosecuting victims' traffickers, and preventing and deterring human trafficking domestically within the United States and internationally.

No significant changes have been reflected as the numbers continue to grow and time continues to pass. The magnitude and scope of human trafficking establish the possibility of creating positive social change by making an impact on the lives of those who work towards resolving the problem of human trafficking, the lives of those who have already been victims of human trafficking, and the lives of those who are currently being affected by human trafficking, and the lives of those who could become victims of human trafficking. Additionally, positive social change could extend to friends and families who suffer from the catastrophic tragedies, trauma, and psychological impacts of human trafficking.

No matter how painful the subject may be or how tragic the occurrence is, individuals must do their part to continue the conversation, become educated about the phenomenon of human trafficking, and work to bring about a resolution. This chapter will establish the framework and foundation of the study. The study begins with the background and moves into the research problem and purpose. Other information presented in this chapter includes the research question, theoretical framework, and nature of the study. Once these areas have been established, I provide definitions of the concepts and constructs and discuss the study's assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance.

### **Background**

The literature establishes the scope of human trafficking, extending through the foundation of numerous definitions continuing to develop and evolve, the identification of barriers currently known within the area of law enforcement policies and procedures to



the prevention of human trafficking, the individuals targeted by human trafficking, and those who are currently or have been victimized by human trafficking. The literature demonstrates how significant the issue is worldwide and how complex the global phenomenon of human trafficking is. From sex trafficking to labor trafficking and indentured servitude, the phenomenon continues to expand, and the numbers continue to increase, demonstrating and reflecting minimal progress towards ending these practices. These factors present the establishment of law enforcement barriers within law enforcement policies and procedures that could prevent human trafficking and child exploitation (HTCE).

The scope and magnitude must first be established by painting a broad portrait and understanding the extent of the continual impact of human trafficking. 150 million children have been subjected to labor trafficking, and HTCE has been reported to generate approximately 39 billion dollars annually (How to help stop child trafficking, 2021). The *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* broke down the current data between boys and girls within human trafficking from one hundred and six countries worldwide. These numbers statistically represent 4,863 victims reported with data inclusive of age, sex, and form of exploitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). For girls, 72% were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 21% were trafficked for forced labor, and 7% were trafficked for other forms of exploitation. Among boys, 23% were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 66% for forced labor, and 11% for other forms of exploitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). As of 2018, boys made up 15% of the human trafficking victim population, whereas girls made up 19%, meaning

that roughly one out of every three victims of human trafficking is a child (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). Three percent of boys and 25% of girls were trafficked for sexual exploitation of 14,022 victims. Twenty-one percent of boys and 15% of girls were trafficked for forced labor out of 6,530 victims (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020).

The number of cases of HTCE per year continues to grow globally, nationally, and within the state of Texas. On a national scale, according to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH), the number of child trafficking cases reported within the United States totaled 1,663 in 2015, 2,436 in 2016, 2,541 in 2017, 2,371 in 2018, and 2,582 in 2019. Texas has ranked second in the number of human trafficking cases reported since 2007 and has not changed position to the current date. The NHTH stated the number of reported child trafficking cases in Texas as 155 in 2015, 230 in 2016, 250 in 2017, 224 in 2018, and 261 in 2019 (NHTH, 2020).

The gap in knowledge within the discipline of public policy and administration addressed within the study related to law enforcement policies and procedures presenting barriers to law enforcement officials in preventing the trafficking of children between the ages of 5 to 17, specifically HTCE. Almost all of the knowledge ascertained comprises after-the-fact instances where the child has already been victimized (Albright, 2019; Alizada & Wildman, 2019; Brandt et al., 2018; Farrell et al., 2020; Fedina et al., 2019; Greenbaum, 2017; Hampton & Lieggi, 2020; Lavoie et al., 2020; Middleton et al., 2019; Mostajabian et al., 2019; O'brien & Li, 2020; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019; van der Watt & van der Westhuizen, 2017; Walts, 2017; Zejneli, 2021). There has been little to

no revelation within the knowledge on what barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures that could contribute to the prevention of children between the ages of 5 to 17, specifically within the area of HTCE. The study sought to address the issue of exploring whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children aged 5–17. The study’s findings can be utilized further in additional local police departments, state-wide, nationally, and globally, working towards the further prevention of human trafficking.

### **Problem Statement**

Human trafficking continues to be a growing phenomenon worldwide (Walts, 2017). Texas ranks as the second-highest human trafficking population in the United States (Mostajabian et al., 2019). The research gap explored is to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within the area of HTCE prevention of children between the ages of 5 to 17. As Farrell et al. (2020) indicated, one of the evolving issues is that those police officers serving on the front lines of human trafficking lack training in human trafficking crimes. This lack of training is partly due to the primary focus of human trafficking by police officials being placed on the issue of sex trafficking. The number of cases per year continues to grow. According to the NHTH (2020), the number of child trafficking cases reported within Texas totaled 155 in 2015, 230 in 2016, 250 in 2017, 224 in 2018, and 261 in 2019.

As child trafficking occurs in all 50 states within the United States, disturbing statistics outlined by UNICEF detailed, “77 percent of human trafficking victims were exploited within their county of residence, ... Of the more than 23,500 runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in 2018, 1 in 7 were victims of child sex trafficking” (UNICEF USA, 2021). As of 2021, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) has received 17,000 reports of possible child sex trafficking cases; 1 in 6 of more than 26,500 children missing cases were victims of child sex trafficking, and 7% of all child sex trafficking cases reported to NCMEC in 2020 were boys (NCMEC, 2021).

The human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas conducts investigations surrounding and combating human trafficking within the greater metropolitan area and surrounding areas. These types of human trafficking include both sex trafficking and labor trafficking, both within the United States and internationally. According to the city’s website, the greater metropolitan area in Texas’ human trafficking unit works collaboratively with federal task forces, city and county legal departments, the county’s district attorney’s office, and other local law enforcement agencies to prevent, deter, and solve human trafficking. In 2013, the state of Texas accounted for 10% of the total number of human trafficking tips received by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center. Of these tips, 957 were suspected victims of human trafficking, and a total of 1,057 were alleged to be human trafficking incidents (Texas Department of Public Safety, 2014). According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, approximately 100,000 children are expected to become victims of sex trafficking in the United States.

The Polaris Project National Human Trafficking Resource Center received 2,236 incoming tips and calls from the state of Texas.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study explored whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17. The study looked at the perceptions of law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Currently, federal, state, local, and law enforcement policies and procedures have been implemented and governed over the greater metropolitan area within Texas’s police department’s human trafficking unit. However, there has been little to no improvement in the trajectory of this phenomenon. Even with all the knowledge gained surrounding the phenomenon of human trafficking, knowledge is still being obtained, and the phenomenon is still growing. Even though the study explicitly targets a greater metropolitan area within Texas, the study sought to extend beyond those limitations and permit future research to be conducted by catapulting discoveries in identifying barriers and establishing ways to overcome law enforcement policies and procedures currently affecting the prevention of human trafficking, specifically the human trafficking of children ages 5–17.

The study conducted was a qualitative, exploratory case study. A Qualtrics active link email survey was conducted utilizing 10 law enforcement officials’ perspectives within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Due to the current

global pandemic of COVID-19, each email survey was conducted through an active link containing the survey questions, in part following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines; adhering to social distancing measures and masking protocols to ensure the researcher's safety and that of the survey participant, and in part to meet the guidelines of the Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research and Special Projects Unit of the police department that was the focus of this study. The Qualtrics active link email survey specifically focused on the perceptions of the 10 law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit. It offered inside perspectives and insight on what actions need to be taken to address specific barriers identified as being faced by law enforcement officials to tackle within a more extensive scope the barriers within law enforcement policies and procedures being faced within a human trafficking unit on the phenomenon of the prevention of human trafficking of children ages 5–17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The study raises awareness, creates and establishes a rise to action, and contributes to the prevention of human trafficking of not only children ages 5–17 but of any age group, race, gender, religious group, locale, or region of the world.

### **Research Question**

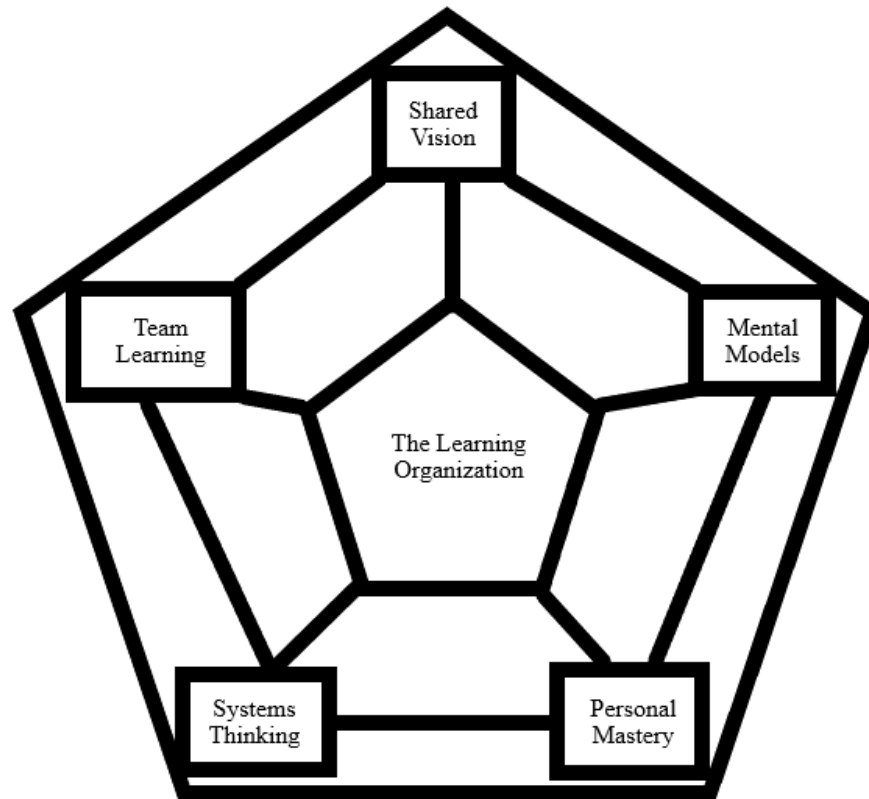
This study addresses the following research question: What existing law enforcement policies and procedures does a human trafficking unit's law enforcement officials perceive as barriers to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilized Senge's systems theory (ST) as a theoretical framework to explore whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17. Systems theory is derived from the five disciplines of the learning organization: personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking (see Figure 1). No studies to date have utilized the theoretical framework of Systems theory within the global phenomenon of human trafficking or explicitly looked at the perceptions of law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit's perceptions of law enforcement policies and procedures within a greater metropolitan area within Texas on the area of prevention with children ages of 5–17.

**Figure 1**

*Systems Theory Model of Interconnectedness*



Senge (2006) elaborated that the five disciplines cannot work efficiently and effectively in isolation; they must work together to build a sustainable learning organization. Personal mastery, the first discipline, focuses on the individual as the critical piece within the organization. Individuals can continually grow by clarifying and deepening their vision, collecting their thoughts, establishing patience, and seeing reality with an open mindset impartially and accurately (Senge, 2006). Senge illustrated that the only way to achieve the organization's fullest potential is when the organization is committed to and holds the learning capacity. Otherwise, an individual within the



organization lacks the commitment and the learning capacity, as does the organization. Mental models, the second discipline, consist of looking at something from the inside out and unveiling it for analysis (Senge, 2006). The third discipline, building shared vision, is the idea that a vision cannot be one's own but must be shared collectively among the organization and its shareholders to flourish (Senge, 2006). Building shared vision grants individuals the ability to work together, building toward a set of principles and guiding practices to achieve the vision (Senge, 2006). Team learning, the fourth discipline, establishes that communication and thinking as a collective unit are critical to the organization's overall success and the level of achievements being accomplished (Senge, 2006). Even though an individual may not accomplish something by themselves, when working as a team, the individual can accomplish this feat, even with the possibility of something much more significant than initially anticipated (Senge, 2006). As Senge noted, if the team cannot learn, neither can the organization. The fifth discipline, systems thinking, works towards realizing the specific patterns, how those patterns have changed over time, and building what is known into a complete understanding of the entire system (Senge, 2006). Senge alluded that systems thinking brings about the revelation of how to work in order to change the system effectively. The five disciplines work collectively to develop the conceptual framework of systems theory.

The five systems theory disciplines, collectively, unveil the organization's full potential. Building shared vision establishes commitment, mental models unearth shortcomings, team learning develops skillsets, personal mastery brings about an understanding of how actions affect the world, and lastly, systems thinking brings it all

together by establishing the individual's perception of oneself and the individual's perception of the world (Senge, 2006). Systems theory takes mental models, team learning, personal mastery, and systems thinking to build upon the other to reflect the learning organization and how all the pieces come together to create a lasting resolution.

Identifying policies and procedures currently failing by presenting barriers to preventing human trafficking of children from ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas enables positive social change. Positive social change can shine a light on those policies and procedures, presenting barriers and the ideas surrounding what areas could be improved upon and/or better the policies or procedures that could be developed to correct currently established policies and procedures. Systems theory was the appropriate theoretical framework to address the research question to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within the area of HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17 by law enforcement policies and procedures. Systems theory worked to identify why the barriers by law enforcement policies and procedures are being presented and gain additional perspectives on the lived experiences of law enforcement officials serving in a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to bring about a resolution.

### **Nature of the Study**

The type of methodology utilized for this research study is qualitative. Using a qualitative methodology establishes the ability for detailed and in-depth information about events or behaviors (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). The purpose of this qualitative

research study was exploratory. The study explored whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17. New theories can be constructed through qualitative research to overcome the barriers within law enforcement policies and procedures. New law enforcement policies and procedures can potentially target the human trafficking population of child exploitation within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The study participants comprised 10 law enforcement officials from a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan Texas area.

I selected a case study as the research design to conclude the implications of law enforcement policies and procedures that are perceived to present barriers to individuals who work on the front lines of the human trafficking unit to either prevent commercial sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, or indentured servitude of children between the ages of 5 and 17. Due to the current global pandemic of COVID-19, each email survey was conducted through an active link containing the survey questions, in part following the CDC guidelines; adhering to social distancing measures and masking protocols to ensure the researcher's safety and the survey participant, and in part to meet the guidelines of the Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research and Special Projects Unit of the police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The data collected within the study were analyzed and interpreted utilizing NVivo software. I then coded and categorized the data to identify reoccurring themes. Conducting the Qualtrics active link email survey with law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit

within a greater metropolitan area in Texas granted the opportunity to collect empirical knowledge from those who work directly with human trafficking victims, specifically HTCE.

### **Definitions**

*Building shared vision*: “involves the skills of unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance” (Senge, 2006).

*Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)*: a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person. Examples of crimes and acts that constitute CSEC: child sex trafficking/the prostitution of children; child sex tourism involving commercial sexual activity; commercial production of child pornography; online transmission of live video of a child engaged in sexual activity in exchange for anything of value (Department of Justice: Office of Justice Programs, 2021).

*Child trafficking*: “child trafficking occurs when a person recruits, transports, transfers, harbors or receives a child less than 18 years of age for sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (Albright et al., 2019).

*Discipline*: “a body of theory and technique that must be studied and mastered to be put into practice” (Senge, 2006).

*Human trafficking:* “involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some labor or commercial sex act. Every year, millions of men, women, and children are trafficked worldwide – including right here in the United States. It can happen in any community, and victims can be of any age, race, gender, or nationality. Traffickers might use violence, manipulation, or false promises of well-paying jobs or romantic relationships to lure victims into trafficking situations” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2021).

*Indentured servitude:* “a person who signs and is bound by indentures to work for another for a specified time, especially in return for payment of travel expenses and maintenance” (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

*Labor trafficking:* “Labor trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which individuals perform labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Labor trafficking includes debt bondage, forced labor, and involuntary child labor situations. Labor traffickers use violence, threats, lies, and other forms of coercion to force people to work against their will in many industries. Common types of labor trafficking include people forced to work in homes as domestic servants, farmworkers coerced through violence as they harvest crops, or factory workers held in inhumane conditions with little to no pay” (NHTH, 2021).

*Mental models:* “starts with turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny. It also includes the ability to carry on ‘learningful’ conversations that balance

inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others” (Senge, 2006).

*Personal mastery*: “is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively” (Senge, 2006).

*Sex trafficking*: “sex trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which individuals perform commercial sex through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Minors under the age of eighteen engaging in commercial sex are considered victims of human trafficking, regardless of force, fraud, or coercion. Sex traffickers frequently target victims and then use violence, threats, lies, false promises, debt bondage, or other forms of control and manipulation to keep victims involved in the sex industry for their profit. Sex trafficking exists within diverse and unique sets of venues and businesses, including fake massage businesses, escort services, residential brothels, in public on city streets and truck stops, strip clubs, hostess clubs, hotels and motels, and elsewhere” (NHTH, 2021).

*Systems thinking*: “is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively” (Senge, 2006).

*Team learning*: “teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations” (Senge, 2006).

*Trafficking in Persons*: “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, employing threat or use of force or other forms of coercion of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or

the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for exploitation. (Dahlstrom, 2020).

*Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000*: “established methods of prosecuting traffickers, preventing human trafficking, and protecting victims and survivors of trafficking. The act establishes human trafficking and related offenses as federal crimes. It established the Office to Monitor, and Combat Trafficking in Persons, publishing a Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report each year. The TIP report describes and ranks the efforts of countries to combat human trafficking. The act also established the Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking, which assists in implementing the TVPA. It provides restitution for victims and immigration relief through the T Visa” (American Bar Association, 2021).

*United Nations Palermo Protocol*: “The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of November 15, 2000, is the main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime. It opened for signature by the Member States at a High-level Political Conference convened for that purpose in Palermo, Italy, on 12-15 December 2000 and entered into force on September 29, 2003. The Convention is further supplemented by three Protocols, which target specific areas and manifestations of organized crime: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts, and Components, and Ammunition. Countries must become parties to the Convention itself

before they can become parties to any of the Protocols” (United Nations: Office of Drugs and Crime, 2004).

*White Slavery*: “forced prostitution” (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

### **Assumptions**

An assumption is something one believes to be true without any facts or precedent, such as questioning or proof (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Assumptions partially control the researcher’s ability to guide their beliefs and avoid preconceived notions of biases by conducting the necessary research to ground an individual’s assumptions on precedent. The assumptions researched on this topic established an outline to guide the study through different areas of human trafficking. The outlined areas include law enforcement officials continuing to struggle with the current state of human trafficking by being unable to fully integrate labor trafficking enforcement with pre-established traditional police routines and roles, such as human trafficking currently only focusing on sex trafficking (Farrell et al., 2020). Another assumption is that legislation plays a critical role in the prevention of human trafficking, especially the role of national and international legislation harmonization, and the requiring of cooperation from local, state, federal, and international levels of government must be present in the fight for human trafficking (Zejneli, 2021). An additional assumption is that the financial aspects of funding human trafficking at the local level of government are not considered a priority (Middleton et al., 2019).



### **Scope and Delimitations**

Delimitations are the limitations personally placed by the researcher on the study within the researcher's control to set specific boundaries to achieve the research's overall objective (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The scope of the study investigated the subject matter of human trafficking and established boundaries within the age group, the location, and the specific area of human trafficking analyzed. Due to the study being conducted within a greater metropolitan area in Texas and the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, the study participants were limited to this specific region and a specific group of officers serving within a human trafficking unit within a metropolitan area in Texas. The population surveyed consisted of 10 participants who were law enforcement officials randomly selected within a human trafficking unit in Texas's greater metropolitan area. The population identified and selected were participants who currently hold direct experience in working towards the prevention of human trafficking, specifically with children ages 5–17 who are either being targeted, who are currently victims of, or who have been victims of human trafficking within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

The scope of the study explored was to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17. Due to the nature of working towards preventing human trafficking by law enforcement officials within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, the study protected and kept identities from being

disclosed through anonymity and confidentiality by utilizing an active link email survey. This case study focused on policies and procedures governing law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The direct experiences of law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas demonstrated specific barriers to this phenomenon. Law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas' perceptions granted enough data to establish results for the research question of what existing law enforcement policies and procedures does a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas perceive as barriers to prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are the present weaknesses, also known as restrictions, within the study outside the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Limitations could ultimately affect the research design, results, or conclusions presented within the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The information disclosed during the email survey may have exposed law enforcement officials' identities throughout the study. Locations where the human trafficking of children is explicitly taking place, may have been declared. Locations of potential human trafficking targets of children may have been declared. Numerous ethical problems could have arisen, but how I managed these ethical problems was vital for the protection and safety of all individuals involved. These individuals' lives could be in danger by exposing their location and being at risk of

commercial sexual exploitation of children. It could also have placed the families of individuals at risk of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Limitations were encountered due to the nature of the study on human trafficking. Law enforcement officers cannot disclose information that would place an individual in jeopardy of being victimized or potentially hinder a case. Therefore, certain pieces of information were not disclosed. Meetings with the human trafficking unit and law enforcement officials selected for participation in the study were not permitted due to following the guidelines provided by the Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research and Special Projects Unit of the police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Additionally, limitations were placed due to the current global pandemic of COVID-19. Each email survey was conducted through an active link to the survey questionnaire, in part following the CDC guidelines; social distancing measures and masking protocols were followed to ensure my safety and that of the survey participant, and in part to meet the guidelines of the Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research and Special Projects Unit of the police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. This limitation was partly due to keeping the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identities as each law enforcement official works towards preventing human trafficking and keeping the location of these law enforcement officials safe. The choice of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas could have presented limitations, as it could have interfered with due to time constraints. Due to the expansive nature of human trafficking and the sought-after solution to bring about some resolution to the issue of human trafficking, a human

trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in the state of Texas' law enforcement officials provided in detail within the scope of what information could be disclosed while I worked towards the resolution. Ensuring the elimination of any biases within the study from the Qualtrics email survey that was conducted using an active link, I read each answer objectively with no preconceived notions from prior knowledge or assumptions to establish the lived experiences and perceptions of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in the state of Texas' law enforcement officials.

### **Significance**

Law enforcement officials implement local, state, and federal government policies and procedures to prevent human trafficking. However, there is still a significant issue in preventing human trafficking, especially among children ages 5–17, as the numbers continue to rise. The study worked to identify law enforcement policies and procedures from the perceptions of law enforcement officials working within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas presented with barriers to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17. The law enforcement policies and procedures analyzed range from federal, state, and local policies and procedures and what barriers are presented to those law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Analyzing these law enforcement policies and procedures worked towards more effectively preventing human trafficking of children aged 5–17 before the human trafficking cases happened in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The study worked to potentially grant assistance to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas and work locally, state-wide, nationally,

and globally to combat the global phenomenon of human trafficking within the area of child exploitation. The study contributed to before-the-fact resolutions within the scope of human trafficking. The study worked collectively alongside other measures to stop human trafficking by initially granting the proper law enforcement policies and procedures that will not be considered or presented as barriers to resolving human trafficking of children ages 5–17. The study worked to grant a pathway to continue preventing human trafficking and conduct further research.

### **Summary**

The research question addressed within the study explored what law enforcement policies and procedures within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas perceive as barriers to preventing the human trafficking of children ages 5–17. Human trafficking is growing and increasing in the number of victimized individuals yearly. Thirty-four percent of human trafficking victims are children, meaning one in three human trafficking victims are children. Law enforcement officials continue to work to resolve the global phenomenon; however, no significance has been established in bringing about some resolve or decrease in the numbers of HTCE victims.

The purpose of this study was to explore whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17. Systems theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. A case study approach was taken to complete this study through a Qualtrics active link email survey to gather the lived experiences and perspectives of law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit within a greater

metropolitan area in Texas, looking at law enforcement policies and procedures presenting barriers to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17. The data collected within this study were interpreted and brought to light insights into the barriers being presented, working further towards the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, the United States, and abroad. The current research is analyzed in the next chapter alongside this study’s theoretical framework of systems theory.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Human trafficking is a global phenomenon that seems like an impossible feat to end due to the ever-changing nature and expansion in defining. The literature raises more questions than resolutions and illustrates many barriers identified within various instances. However, although the literature identifies barriers, each is a particular subset of the system, and numbers continue to rise within each system. Progress is being made; however, with the numbers continuing to rise, human trafficking appears to be defeating progress. The literature proposes an investigation of the system rather than a particular instance of human trafficking. Looking at the complete system rather than individual parts works toward identifying the barrier itself, where the barrier originated from, what has been done to resolve the barrier, and what resolution has been reached to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5–17 from happening.

Human trafficking consists of more than solely sex trafficking, though many organizations tackling the global phenomenon have solely placed their focus on sex trafficking. As Farrell et al. (2020) noted, labor trafficking is less identified than sex trafficking because law enforcement officials have tended to focus primarily on sex trafficking. However, as the definition of sex trafficking has continued to expand, the scope and practice of law enforcement officials and the policies and procedures surrounding human trafficking are still limited to the scope of labor trafficking and indentured servitude. Sex trafficking is the most well-known area of human trafficking; however, prevention of sex trafficking still faces barriers within law enforcement officials' implementation and execution of law enforcement policies and procedures,

implying the possibility of the system being at fault. Labor trafficking and indentured servitude still face an uphill battle when it comes to combatting within the area of prevention, as law enforcement officials continue to struggle to grasp what specifically labor trafficking and indentured servitude are within the scope of policy and law.

However, many cases go unreported, so the total number of human trafficking and HTCE cases is unknown. Farrell et al. (2020) indicated that labor trafficking victims are less likely to identify themselves as victims or report victimization due to the lack of knowledge or awareness of being labor trafficked, the victims' fearing law enforcement officials, or the victims fear of extending even so far as the fear of deportation.

The purpose of the study was to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to prevent the human trafficking of children between the ages of 5 to 17. Law enforcement policies and procedures have been implemented and governed over the greater metropolitan area in Texas' police department's human trafficking unit. To fully understand the complex system surrounding the global phenomenon of human trafficking, one must have a well-rounding knowledge of the current policies and procedures.

The current literature explored barriers, policy barriers, education, knowledge, understanding, ambiguity barriers, risk factors and experiences, identification challenges, the role of the internet, strategies, and systematic gaps. Chapter 2 consists of four main sections. The literature search strategy is established in the first section by studying the current literature on human trafficking, law enforcement policies and procedures,



officials, and the presented barriers. The second section establishes the theoretical foundation of the study. The third section distinguishes current federal, state, and local laws related to human trafficking and the literature related to the global phenomenon of human trafficking as it relates to the critical variables of the study. The chapter closes with a summary and conclusions, including a transition to Chapter 3.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Throughout the discovery process, explicitly searching for literature relating to human trafficking, law enforcement, policies, procedures, barriers, a greater metropolitan area within Texas' human trafficking unit, child trafficking, prevention, a greater metropolitan area within the state of Texas, and ST, little to no literature embraced all 10 of the specified areas. All the literature identified only embraced two to three areas, and most of the literature was significantly based on the psychological impacts human trafficking had on the victims. One of the significant advantages of conducting this study was to add to the literature and look at the phenomenon of human trafficking from a systems standpoint in order to improve the area of prevention by identifying policies and procedures that implicated barriers to law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The study adds to the literature by focusing on children ages 5–17, further identifying barriers and ways to improve the system to overcome the phenomenon of human trafficking, and granting the pathway for future researchers to continue taking steps towards identifying other gaps to stop the global phenomenon of human trafficking altogether.

My literature search strategy incorporated several databases and the selection and use of keywords to identify articles related to the global phenomenon of human trafficking, specifically HTCE, and the barriers a human trafficking unit faces within a greater metropolitan area in Texas working to prevent human trafficking. The databases used included the Criminal Justice Database, EBSCO Host, Emerald Insight, International Security and Counter-Terrorism Reference Center, Military and Government Collection, Nexis Uni, Political Science Complete, Political Science Complete & Business Source Complete Combined Search, Gale OneFile: LegalTrac, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, SocIndex, United Nations Public Administration Network. Peer-reviewed journal articles, laws, policies, procedures, Congressional reports, and Houston Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit's LEO's perceptions within the study compiling all literature and research. Subject-based vital words applied within the study include law enforcement, policies, procedures, barriers, Houston Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit, child trafficking, prevention, A greater metropolitan area within Texas, and systems theory. The keywords identifying those areas are *human trafficking, children, child trafficking, child exploitation, prevention, law enforcement, law, policies, procedures, barriers, risk factors, challenges, ambiguities, systematic gaps, Texas, and systems theory.*

Little research has focused on the barriers presented to law enforcement officials in human trafficking children ages 5–17 or applying the systems theory theoretical framework to human trafficking. The keywords identified were used interchangeably to pull as much information about the research topic as possible. The interchanging of

which keywords are used together grants the ability to look at the issue of human trafficking from a broader scope and analyze all the literature collected to identify barriers, potential barriers, the numbers, the impact, and the magnitude of human trafficking.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical framework used in the study was systems theory. As previously established, this theory consists of the five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking, which work together to build the learning organization of Systems theory. Systems theory is taking a closer look at the whole to implement long-term permanent resolutions to a complex phenomenon. Systems theory derives from 11 laws in Senge's (2006) book, *The Fifth Discipline*.

The first law of systems theory deems that "today's problems come from yesterday's 'solutions'" (Senge, 2006). The problem cannot be solution-focused but ultimately must bring about a resolution that will bring about the final resolution to the issue at hand. However, this task is not an easy one to complete in any form. The resolution may take several steps building upon one another before a resolution can be established. One example Senge (2006) presented to illustrate this fact was that "police enforcement officials will recognize their version of this law; arresting narcotics dealers on 30<sup>th</sup> Street, they find that they have simply transferred the crime center to 40<sup>th</sup> Street"(pg. 58). Senge stated, "or, even more insidiously, they learn that a new citywide outbreak of drug-related crime is the result of federal officials intercepting, a large

shipment of narcotics – which reduced the drug supply, drove up the price, and caused more crime by addicts desperate to maintain their habit” (pg. 58). Just because a solution has been created and put into place does not mean the problem has been resolved. The resolution must look at all the implications of implementing one solution, then put together multiple solutions, creating a system to bring about the ultimate resolution.

The second law deems that “the harder you push, the harder the system pushes back,” also coined by Senge within systems theory as “compensating feedback” (Senge, 2006). Compensating feedback entails when one’s actions contribute to the ongoing problem itself. For example, when one tackles an obstacle and, in turn, creates another obstacle resulting from the original obstacle being solved. An individual can bring about a solution to an obstacle being faced and realize the obstacle requires continuous work to keep the solution implemented. However, the obstacle continues as the obstacle is never removed because the obstacle is contributing to another obstacle, and the work being put into solving the obstacle becomes increasingly burdensome. At the end of the day, no resolution is brought about. Obstacles continue to happen when one has not brought about any resolution to the problem but contributes. As Senge (2006) indicated, “When our initial efforts fail to produce lasting improvements, we push harder – faithful, to the creed that hard work will overcome all obstacles, all the while blinding ourselves to how we are contributing to the obstacles ourselves” (pgs. 59-60).

The third law deems that “behavior grows better before it grows worse” stems from the prior law of compensating feedback. To further elaborate, creating a short-term intervention, which creates a short-term benefit, creates a long-term disbenefit to the

problem (Senge, 2006). It is only human nature to seek a solution to the problem to help others; however, human nature fails when the solution is not carefully and thoroughly thought out, understanding the implications of a short-term intervention/benefit. The short-term intervention will create a short-term solution; things may get better. However, the compensating feedback will create an even more significant problem, worsening things—the calm before the storm. Senge (2006) elaborated, “a typical solution feels wonderful when it first cures the symptoms. There is an improvement, or even the problem has gone away. It may be two, three, or four years before the problem returns or some new, worse problem arrives. By that time, given how rapidly most people move from job to job, someone new is sitting in the chair” (pg. 60).

The fourth law deems that “the easy way out usually leads back in” (Senge, 2006). Human society has often relied on what is known, applying what is familiar to the individual rather than grasping for the unknown or the complex answers. If resolving a problem were easily applied, the problem would have already been resolved, deeming no need to address it. One cannot persist on what is already known, for it is already known. To find the resolution, one must reach for the unthinkable, the unimaginable. As indicated by Senge (2006), “pushing harder and harder on familiar solutions, while fundamental problems persist or worsen, is a reliable indicator of non-systemic thinking – what we often call the ‘what we need here is a bigger hammer’ syndrome” (pg. 61).

The fifth law deems “the cure can be worse than the disease” (Senge, 2006). Consistency is not always the key, nor is consistency always the best. As Senge (2006) noted, “the long-term, most insidious consequence of applying non-systemic solutions is

an increased need for more and more of the solution” (pg. 61). Instead of shifting the burden, one must take accountability. Senge (2006) illustrated, “this is why ill-conceived government interventions are not just ineffective, they are ‘addictive’ in the sense of fostering increased dependency and lessened abilities of local people to solve their problems” (pg. 61). One must put forth the time and commitment, and effort to ensure the problem is managed for a resolution and not a short-term intervention or a short-term solution.

The sixth law deems “faster is slower” (Senge, 2006). Remembering to take time is critical, especially when formulating solutions and resolving problems. One must not be afraid to tackle what seems like a risk, or even one that might fail, in fear of failing or making something worse. One must take the risk and find a way to bring about the resolution. Senge (2006) deemed, “for real implications of the systems perspective are not inaction, but a new type of action rooted in a new way of thinking – systems thinking is both more challenging and more promising than our standard ways of dealing with problems” (pg. 63).

The seventh law reasons that “cause and effect are not closely related in time and space” roots back to the coined terms epistemological and ontological (Senge, 2006, p. 63). Cause being epistemological, deeming what we know, and effect being how we know what we know. As Senge (2006) stated, “there is a fundamental mismatch between the nature of reality in complex systems and our predominant ways of thinking about that reality” (pg. 63). It takes time to understand a particular problem to bring about a resolve fully. Education plays a critical role, as one must have a full comprehensive foundation of

knowledge, extending to understanding the problem in full scope, to address the issue, and one must take time with the solution, understanding all the implications that can arise from implementing the solution.

The eighth law deems that “small changes can produce big results – but the areas of highest leverage are often the least obvious” (Senge, 2006). The most apparent solutions are usually the costliest; in most cases, they only result in short-term solutions to the issue. Short-term solutions commonly only contribute to a more significant problem in the end. However, the solution can be small if the solution is narrowly focused and grasps a complete understanding of the entire system being focused on and the forces within the system. As Senge (2006) indicated, “thinking in terms of change processes rather than snapshots is another” (pg. 65).

The ninth law deems that “you can have your cake and eat it too – but not at once” (Senge, 2006). One cannot focus solely on one area of the system, as the system works together. When working on one area of the system, one must consider how another part could be affected. Another scope of this concept of having your cake and eating it is implementing one part of the system while improving upon another element. By implementing and working on another part of the system, one can continually make lasting contributions to the system and how they can collectively improve over time.

The tenth law deems that “dividing an elephant in half does not produce two small elephants” (Senge, 2006). Everyone will look at a system and see something different than the other. Seeing the system differently does not mean any individuals seeing the system are incorrect. However, each must see how the system works together to

understand the contributions. As Senge (2006) coined, “the key principle, called the ‘principle of the system boundary,’ is that the interactions that must be examined are those most important to the issue at hand, regardless of parochial organizational boundaries” (pg. 66). Everyone must understand each part of the system individually to work towards the collective whole. If everyone only focuses on the part of the system, the system will fail because the individual is not focusing on how the system is affected.

The 11th law deems that “there is no blame,” As a part of innate human nature with everyone, an individual tends to blame someone else instead of taking accountability for the individual’s part of what contributed to the problem. However, the blame should not be placed on that individual for their contribution to the problem. Instead, there is no blame due to all factors; all individuals, and all dynamic systems, have contributed to the problem. Therefore, systems thinking illustrates that “there is no separate ‘other’” (Senge, 2006). Each contributor has taken part in the problem, which deems, as systems theory reflects, that each contributor is a part of a single system. As Senge (2006) went on to indicate, “the cure lies in your relationship with your ‘enemy’” (pg. 67). The enemy is the problem itself, not lying within one individual or system. Therefore, the solution should be problem-focused.

Little to no research has been conducted on the issue of human trafficking utilizing systems theory. Van der Watt and Van der Westhuizen (2017) defined systems theory as

A significant departure from positivist knowledge creation approaches that embrace specialization and compartmentalization. A significant assumption of



positivist knowledge creation approaches is the attempt to understand and manage a complex phenomenon such as human trafficking by reducing it to its simplest parts, a process called ‘reductionism,’ to establish transparent cause-and-effect relationships to formulate solutions. (p. 220)

Systems theory approached the data collected in a systematic and organized approach by putting all the pieces together from a linear perspective to determine the truth of what is happening or causing the identified problem. As established within the study by Van der Watt and Van der Westhuizen (2017), one of the main barriers found through the system theory approach was the lack of communication between intelligence-sharing protocols and the cultural and language barriers in existence preventing the prevention of human trafficking.

Therefore, through the utilization of the systems theory theoretical framework, systems theory worked to address the research question of discovering whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas in order to prevent the human trafficking of children ages of 5–17 through a systematic and organized approach putting all of the pieces together from a linear approach.

## **Human Trafficking**

### **United States Policies General CTIP Policies on Human Trafficking**

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) is a public law established by the 106<sup>th</sup> session of Congress. The TVPA was the first section of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection

Act of 2000 established that the global phenomenon of human trafficking includes sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude. Within the first division of the act, Division A, TVPA was established. Within Division A, titled Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, section 102, part (a), defined the purpose of the act was to combat the global phenomenon of human trafficking, deeming women and children as the primary victims to ensure punishment of the traffickers, as well to establish protection for the victims (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000).

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, established in 2015, is a public law enacted by the 114th session of Congress to provide justice for those victims of human trafficking. The act consists of 10 titles. Title I works to establish justice for victims through the Domestic Trafficking Victims' Fund, bring about clarity for the benefits and protections that are offered to domestic victims of human trafficking, establish direct services for victims of child pornography, increase the amount of compensation and restitution for individuals who have been victims of human trafficking, enhance the reporting of human trafficking, reduce the demand for sex trafficking, the utilization of existing task forces and components to target the human trafficking offenders who have exploited children, a plan to target child predators, monitors all human traffickers as violent criminals, the human trafficking crime victims' rights, establishes the Combat Human Trafficking Act, the Survivors of Human Trafficking Empowerment Act, the Bringing Missing Children Home Act, the SAVE Act, establishes grant accountability, education and outreach to human trafficking survivors, and expands the statute of

limitations for civil actions by children who have been victims of human trafficking (Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, 2015).

Title II works to combat human trafficking through four subsections. Subsection A works to enhance services for runaway and homeless victims of youth trafficking. Subsection B works to improve the response to victims of child sex trafficking. Subsection C establishes an interagency task force to monitor and combat trafficking. Sub-section D works to expand training. Title III establishes the Hero Act. Title IV works to establish rape survivor child custody. Title V works to establish military sex offender reporting. Title VI works to stop exploitation through trafficking by establishing safe harbor incentives, reporting restitution paid with specific human trafficking offenses, establishing the NHTH, establishing job corps eligibility, clarifying the authority of the United States Marshals Service, and establishing a national strategy to combat human trafficking. Title VII works to increase trafficking awareness training for healthcare. Title VIII works to better the response for victims of child sex trafficking. Title IX works to establish anti-trafficking training for Department of Homeland Security Personnel. Title X establishes the Human Trafficking Survivors Relief and Empowerment Act (Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, 2015).

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Ending Trafficking in Government Contracting, Title XVII, established in 2013, consists of seven sections. Section 1701 establishes definitions. Section 1702 establishes contracting requirements. Section 1703 establishes a compliance plan and certification requirement. Section 1704 establishes the monitoring and investigation of trafficking in persons. Section 1705

establishes the notification to inspectors general and cooperation with the government. Section 1706 establishes the expansion of penalties for fraud in foreign labor contracting, including attempted fraud and work outside the United States. Section 1707 establishes improving Department of Defense accountability for reporting trafficking in persons claims and violations. Section 1708 establishes rules of construction and effective date (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year, 2013).

The US Code, Title 22, Chapter 78 entitled, Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2006, consists of twelve sections. Section 7101 establishes the purposes and findings. Section 7102 establishes the definitions. Section 7103 establishes the interagency task force to monitor and combat human trafficking. Section 7104 establishes the prevention of human trafficking. Section 7105 establishes the protection and assistance for victims of human trafficking. Section 7105, subsection (a), works to increase the effectiveness of anti-trafficking programs. Section 7106 establishes minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking. Section 7107 establishes actions against governments failing to meet minimum standards. Section 7108 establishes actions against significant human traffickers. Section 7109 works to strengthen the prosecution and punishment of human traffickers. Section 7109, subsection (a) establishes research on domestic and international human trafficking. Section 7109, subsection (b) establishes the presidential award for extraordinary efforts to combat human trafficking. Section 7110 establishes authorizations of appropriations. Section 7111 establishes the report by the Secretary of State. Section 7112 establishes additional activities to monitor and combat forced labor and child labor (Foreign Relations and Intercourse, 2006).

The U.S. Code, Chapter 18, Chapter 77 entitled, Slavery, Peonage, and Trafficking in Persons, established 2012, consists of seventeen sections. Section 1581 establishes peonage and obstructing enforcement. Section 1582 establishes vessels for the slave trade. Section 1583 establishes enticement into slavery. Section 1584 establishes the sale into involuntary servitude. Section 1585 establishes the seizure, detention, transportation, or sale of enslaved people. Section 1586 establishes service on vessels in the slave trade. Section 1587 establishes possession of enslaved people aboard the vessel. Section 1588 establishes the transportation of enslaved people from the United States. Section 1589 establishes forced labor. Section 1590 establishes human trafficking concerning peonage, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor. Section 1591 establishes sex trafficking of children by force, fraud, or coercion. Section 1592 establishes unlawful conduct concerning documents regarding human trafficking, peonage, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor. Section 1593 establishes mandatory restitution. Section 1593, subsection (a) establishes benefitting financially from peonage, slavery, and human trafficking. Section 1594 establishes general provisions. Section 1595 establishes civil remedy. Section 1596 establishes additional jurisdiction in certain human trafficking offenses. Section 1597 establishes unlawful conduct concerning immigration documents (Crimes and Criminal Procedure, 1946).

Executive Order 13333, Amending Executive Order 12357 to Implement TVPA 2003, is an executive order created by former President George W. Bush that established amendments implement the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003 (Bush, 2004).

Executive Order 13257, Presidential Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, created by former President George W. Bush, established in 2002, is inclusive of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and works to combat human trafficking, the punishment of human traffickers, and to protect victims of human trafficking (Bush, 2002).

The National Security Presidential Directive 22, Combating Trafficking in Persons, created by former President George W. Bush, established in 2002, is a national security presidential directive that instructs federal agencies collectively to strengthen within the areas of efforts, capabilities, and coordination in order to support the policy to combat trafficking in persons (Bush, National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-22, 2002).

### **State of Texas Policies on Human Trafficking**

87 (R) HB 2633 pertains to resources provided to human trafficking victims and implementing the trafficked persons grant program. The trafficked persons grant program was implemented to operate and fund shelter and treatment for human trafficking victims; prevent the recruitment of human trafficking victims within shelters; provide long-term solutions for research-based treatments, provide safe and secure shelter for children and young adults; maintain dedicated housing and recovery programs for human trafficking victims, and raise awareness. 87 (R) HB 2633 also established a general revenue account to fund these services for human trafficking victims (An Act, 2021).

87 (R) HB 2795 pertains to the offense of solicitation of prostitution, the consequences of the offense, increasing the criminal penalty, and conforming charges. 87

(R) HB 2795 amends Chapter 43 of the Penal Code by changing the offense from a Class A misdemeanor to a state jail felony for knowingly offering or agreeing to pay a person for engaging in sexual conduct with the paying person. 87 (R) HB 2795 also amends the original state jail felony to a felony of the third degree for a person engaging in a sexual act with a minor under the age of eighteen regardless of knowledge of age, representation of age, or believed age. Penalties can be enhanced if more significant than the first offense. 87 (R) HB 2795 changes the law from only stating prostitution to including solicitation of prostitution, which is classified as a second-degree felony (An Act 2021).

87 (R) HB 3718 pertains to specific entities positing requirements of human trafficking signage. Under 87 (R) HB 3718, the Texas state legislature ordered that all entities permitted or licensed under Chapters 25, 26, 28, 32, 69, or 71 of the Alcoholic Beverage Code must post a sign or notice related to human trafficking approved or prescribed by the Texas state attorney general that must be inclusive of the contact information and a toll-free telephone number of the Department of Public Safety in order to report any suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety. The sign must be available in both English and Spanish, posted within each of the public restrooms within the entity or in any conspicuous places such as the public entrance, and within clear view of both the public and employees. After the first warning, civil penalties will be imposed upon any entity in violation.

87 (R) HB 390 pertains to establishing requirements for the awareness and prevention of human trafficking within commercial lodging establishments. Section 1, established Subtitle C, Title 5 of the Business and Commerce Code within Chapter

114.0001, defines human trafficking as an offense under Section 20A.02 of the Penal Code. Section 1 established Subtitle C, Title 5 of the Business and Commerce Code within Chapter 114.002 must include the contact information of the Department of Public Safety to report any suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety. Section 1 established Subtitle C, Title 5 of the Business and Commerce Code within Section 114.0003 and Section 114.0051 establishes regulations regarding human trafficking awareness and prevention training and certification required to prevent human trafficking for operators and employees of commercial lodging establishments. Section 1 established Subtitle C, Title 5, of the Business and Commerce Code, under Subchapter C, within the area of enforcement, established entry by a peace officer to ensure compliance, the opportunity to cure through the establishment of a violation, and subject to a civil penalty, and the civil penalty, (An Act, 2022).

87 (R) HB 3721 pertains to human trafficking signage and notices and the mandatory inclusion of the Department of Public Safety's information to individuals to report any suspicious activity. Under section 1 of 87 (R) HB 3721, the Texas state legislature enacted that section 104.07 of the Alcoholic Beverage Code required signage to include the contact information of the Department of Public Safety to report any suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety. Under section 2 of 87 (R) HB 3721, the Texas state legislature enacted section 102.101(b) of the Business and Commercial Code, that the signage must be in both English and Spanish, including the telephone number and website of the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, and the contact information of the Department of Public Safety to report any suspicious



activity to the Department of Public Safety. Under Section 3 of 87 (R) HB 3721, the Texas state legislature enacted section 125.002 (f-1) of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code required signage to include the contact information of the Department of Public Safety to report any suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety. Under Section 4 of 87 (R) HB 3721, the Texas state legislature enacted all signage within transportation hubs, including the Department of Public Safety's contact information, to report any suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety. Under Section 5 of 87 (R) HB 3721, the Texas state legislature enacted section 245.025 of the Health and Safety Code, which must be inclusive of the contact information of the Department of Public Safety to report any suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety. Under Section 6 of 87 (R) HB 3721, the Texas state legislature enacted section 455.207 (b) of the Occupations Code, which must be inclusive of the contact information of the Department of Public Safety to report any suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety, (An Act, 2021).

### **Greater Metropolitan Area in Texas Policies on Human Trafficking**

Division 2 of the Code of Ordinances for a greater metropolitan area in Texas establishes municipal codes related to human trafficking training and certification. Division 2 of the Code of Ordinances establishes Section 28 on established definitions, human trafficking training and certification, display of hotline information, prohibition of retaliation or discrimination, and penalties for noncompliance (Division 2 - Human Trafficking and Certification, 2020).

Section 28-211 establishes definitions. Section 28-211 defines department, director, employee, hotel, hotel operator, and human trafficking. Section 28-211 defines a department as inclusive of administration and regulatory affairs. Section 28-211 defines a director as either a department director or the director's designees. Section 28-211 defines an employee as anyone employed for monetary wages. Section 28-211 defines hotels as any entity defined as a hotel, motel, court, inn, rooming house, or other building that the public utilizes for sleeping accommodations. Section 28-211 defines a hotel operator as the person who owns, operates, manages, or controls the hotel within the metropolitan area (Division 2 - Human Trafficking and Certification, 2020). Section 28-211 then moves into the area of defining human trafficking in two parts:

- (1) Sex trafficking by way of the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for a commercial sex act in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such act has not yet attained 18 years of age; or
- (2) Labor trafficking by way of the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (Division 2 - Human Trafficking and Certification, 2020)

Section 28-212 establishes human trafficking training and the certification requirement for hotels. Section 28-212 mandates that the hotel operator ensure compliance by providing a minimum of 20-minute training, approved by the mayor's office, related to identifying human trafficking activities and victims and reporting human

trafficking annually. Each new employee has a maximum of 30 days at the hire date to complete the training, and the director must complete the training no later than March 31 of each year. A late processing fee will be subjected to the hotel operator for any employee or director found not in compliance, and the hotel operator must maintain sufficient records and submit records within 72 hours of the request. Records must be kept for a minimum of two years (Division 2 - Human Trafficking and Certification, 2020).

Section 28-213 mandates the display of human trafficking hotline information. A sign must be placed in plain sight for all employees with all rules, including the mandated annual human trafficking training and certification on how to recognize human trafficking and how to report human trafficking. The sign must be posted separately in English, and Spanish and, at a minimum, speak any other language of 10 percent of the hotel's employees (Division 2 - Human Trafficking and Certification, 2020).

Section 28-214 prohibits retaliation or discrimination. According to the ordinance, no employee, employer, hotel operator, or representative of an organization may act in a way that constitutes punishment, retaliation, or discrimination against an individual for their good-faith effort to report a suspected act of human trafficking to either a person's employer, law enforcement agency or the NHTH (Division 2 - Human Trafficking and Certification, 2020).

Section 28-215 establishes a penalty. The first violation for a hotel operator failing to maintain compliance is subject to a \$100.00 penalty. A hotel operator's second violation and failure to maintain compliance are subject to a \$500.00 penalty. Each shall

be constituted and punished as a separate offense. Each violation must be cured within 30 days (Division 2 - Human Trafficking and Certification, 2020).

## **Putting Pieces Together: Law Enforcement and Present Human Trafficking**

### **Barriers**

Human trafficking is an invasion of an individual's human rights. Human traffickers intrude upon a victim's right over a victim's ability to function within society. Taking a human being's pride, humility, dignity, and right to choose. Intrusion happens from when the individual is selected to be a target of human trafficking to when the individual becomes a victim of human trafficking, extending even after the victim is saved or rescued from the captivity of victimization from the global phenomenon of human trafficking. Human trafficking permanently affects and impacts the victim and the lives of all those surrounding them. Continued research and discovery are critical to continual efforts to resolve human trafficking through before-the-fact measures to prevent an individual from ever becoming the victim of human trafficking. Though the magnitude of human trafficking is significant in scope, it only takes one barrier. Whether a barrier is recognized, unrecognized, or unaddressed to the prevention of human trafficking, all-encompassing or specifically HTCE, can devastate not only the life of potential or current victims but individuals who have been victims of human trafficking and surrounding family or friends of individuals who have been affected by the global phenomenon known as human trafficking. Recognizing barriers that exist worked to assist in protecting the lives of those who could be potential victims, identified ways to address those who are currently victims, and sighed relief to those who were victims of human

trafficking through the continual combatting of human trafficking. The literature reflected law enforcement's significant role and impact in disseminating and executing of law enforcement policies and procedures that prevent human trafficking. As the literature reflected in the findings of the study conducted by Farrell et al. (2020), law enforcement officials play a vital role in the protection of individuals who have been victims of human trafficking, as well as meeting the needs of those individuals (Farrell, Bright, de Vries, Pfeffer, & Dank, 2020). However, this further signified the importance of identifying the barriers as if law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area are unable to fully execute their duties in order to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5–17, even human trafficking in general, the defense for individuals either potentially being victimized from, currently victims of, or have been victims of human trafficking is non-existent.

The focus within this section of the literature established many barriers currently recognized within human trafficking by researchers. Several studies have been conducted to analyze human trafficking through the scope of law enforcement policies, procedures, barriers, or child exploitation. Little to no research has been conducted utilizing a particular lens on law enforcement policies and procedures presenting barriers to human trafficking. Furthermore, little to no research has been conducted utilizing systems theory regarding law enforcement, human trafficking, and law enforcement policies and procedures, creating barriers to law enforcement officials in preventing human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

To grant background to the literature focused on law enforcement and present human trafficking barriers, one qualitative study conducted by Dandurand (2017) focused on a review of current established law enforcement policies, procedures, police management, and governance issues working to combat the global phenomenon of human trafficking (Dandurand, 2017). Another qualitative study by Farrell et al. (2020) utilized criminal offense records and qualitative interviews with law enforcement officials and service providers who have had direct experience in responding to human trafficking crimes within three communities in the United States. In contrast, the more frequently reported literature was a qualitative study conducted by Albright et al. (2019) consisting of a review of the literature, including 29 peer-reviewed articles surrounding the medical and mental health care of children who have been victims of human trafficking since 2010.

Looking into how the literature was analyzed in prior studies, the study conducted by Dandurand (2017) analyzed several different areas of law enforcement policy initiatives. Within shifting focus and priorities, the first law enforcement policy initiative established the barrier of conflation within the various forms of human trafficking. The second law enforcement policy initiative surrounds the area of labor trafficking within human trafficking. The third law enforcement policy initiative is the prevention of human trafficking.

Lastly, Dandurand pointed out that the fourth law enforcement policy initiative works towards the prevention of child trafficking. Another study by Farrell et al. (2020) analyzed how law enforcement officials identify with human trafficking victims and how

law enforcement officials' responses to human trafficking can impede or facilitate cooperation with victims of human trafficking. The study conducted by Farrell et al. additionally analyzed why the responses by law enforcement officials do not always meet the needs of the victims of human trafficking, and law enforcement responses that closely align with the needs of victims of human trafficking, as well as the impacts of implementing meaningful responses of justice through the criminal justice system. Additionally, a study conducted by Albright et al. (2019) analyzed a population of children, the phenomenon being human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation, concentrating on health services or barriers to care, and the original data from peer-reviewed articles.

The study conducted by Dandurand (2017) indicated that even though these tools and approaches to prevention need to be refined while refining the tools and approaches, one must proceed with caution not to increase the vulnerability of those individuals at risk or victims of human trafficking. Dandurand (2017) notes those capable policies and procedures established to prevent child trafficking, CSEC, and the demand for sex with children. The prevention of human trafficking has been happening through reducing the supply and strengthening communities. However, Dandurand indicated that a more proactive approach from law enforcement agencies needs to happen within child protection, multi-disciplinary approaches, and interagency cooperation. Utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach and interagency cooperation to combat and prevent human trafficking is the pure ideology of the system theory theoretic framework approach. Dandurand established the lack of research surrounding how to combat the barriers being

faced successfully. Dandurand established measures to successfully combat the barriers being faced through the improvement of police awareness and training; improving detection and victim identification consisting of gaps between police perception and the reality of human trafficking, interagency cooperation and identification of child victims; understanding the criminal and social networks surrounding human trafficking; promoting specialized and proactive investigations; making use of innovative methods, and linking with other investigative agencies and the services sector. Seemingly, as the literature reflects the implementation of systems theory within the study conducted by Dandurand, the findings found that many barriers exist within the failing state of the currently established policies and procedures that combat the phenomenon of human trafficking even more urgently. In turn, it triggered the current study from the gap identified within the literature in order to determine precisely whether and to what degree barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in the state of Texas within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17, from the perceptions of law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area within the state of Texas, as Texas ranks as the second-largest human trafficking population in existence within the United States. From the lack of data surrounding human trafficking, associated crimes, and the inability to establish an effective response to the global phenomenon of human trafficking, the evidence tends to be scattered, as well prior conducted research tends to be unfocused (Dandurand, 2017). Albright et al. (2019) found that the most common barriers faced in human trafficking



were cultural stigma, lack of knowledge or training, specific procedures and regulations, and roles and responsibilities.

However, there is still insufficient knowledge surrounding labor trafficking within the areas of recruitment, how the victims end up in the situations of exploitation and trafficking, and the patterns surrounding coercion and exploitation. Additionally, the criminal justice response to the phenomenon of labor trafficking needs to be strengthened to combat the underlying causes effectively (Dandurand, 2017). Dandurand (2017) establishes that the prevention measures established thus far must be refined within prevention tools and approaches (Dandurand, 2017).

For instance, studies conducted by Dandurand (2017), Farrell et al. (2019), and Albright et al. (2019) encompassed a particular initiative to see ways to increase the effectiveness of organizations in working toward bringing about a resolve within human trafficking. As deciphered within the literature, all of the research studies have identified barriers working against the prevention of human trafficking, yet the system continues to fail as the numbers of human trafficking continue to rise. The study conducted by Dandurand focused on seeking out implementation strategies that would increase the effectiveness of law enforcement officials within the areas of detection, investigation, and prosecution of human trafficking and strategies that would improve and increase victim protection standards. The study by Farrell et al. focused on examining police response to human trafficking cases within three communities in the United States. The study by Albright et al. focused on the facilitators of, barriers to, and recommendations for medical and mental health professionals of child trafficking victims.

Seminal contributions have been made to illustrate barriers to human trafficking. As Albright et al. (2019) asserted, the most common barriers encountered within the area of human trafficking were due to cultural stigma, lack of knowledge or training, specific procedures and regulations, and roles and responsibilities. In convergence with Albright et al.'s assertion, Dandurand (2017) claimed the existence of the barrier surrounding the lack of knowledge as a countering factor to the prevention of human trafficking. Dandurand further identified another barrier that will be difficult to defeat due to the rapid pace at which the patterns and methods change, defeating all efforts contributing to combatting human trafficking by law enforcement officials.

The literature showed that one of the existing barriers surrounds the lack of knowledge and understanding encompassing areas outside the scope of sex trafficking, such as the other two defined areas of human trafficking, such as labor trafficking and indentured servitude. However, Dandurand (2017) identified that the primary focus was placed solely on sex trafficking, excluding, in most cases, the area of labor trafficking and organ trafficking. Solely focusing on sex trafficking puts a limitation and barrier upon law enforcement officials in and of itself, as so many cases that could have been prevented within human trafficking are going to the wayside as human trafficking does not solely encompass one specific area. However, Dandurand (2017) acknowledged other forms of human trafficking, including labor trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced marriage. Dandurand indicated these items are emerging; however, there is still not the amount of attention needed on the trafficking phenomenon. Farrell et al. (2020) indicated an additional barrier from other seminal works on the issue surrounding human

trafficking and policing, within the scope of the practices of police officials, indicating the policing institutions were unlikely to adapt or change cultural beliefs. A recent study conducted by Farrell et al. (2020) concluded the same sentiment as Dandurand (2017) by indicating that the United States has been unable to tackle the area of labor trafficking successfully, in part, due to its inability to integrate labor trafficking enforcement within previously established routines and roles within human trafficking.

Farrell et al. (2020) also indicated limitations within the study about the scope of participants being limited to only police officials, prosecutors, and service providers of human trafficking cases and victims who survived being human trafficked. Farrell et al. noted limitations extended to police officials because roles and responsibilities within context are subject to change. The roles and responsibilities in one instance of human trafficking could require implementing one set of tactics and routines. In contrast, another instance of human trafficking could require a separate set of tactics and routines when responding, which extends outside the scope of traditional approaches. All these developments within the literature reflected the findings of Farrell et al. through police officers' lack of knowledge and understanding surrounding the definition of the crime, lack of institutional readiness, and the police routines deterring the combatting of labor trafficking cases.

When working towards combatting the global phenomenon of human trafficking, barriers tend to arise in many different forms. To look at human trafficking, law enforcement policies, and procedures, and law enforcement officials through the scope of systems theory, one must first understand the barriers confronted by law enforcement

policies and procedures by law enforcement officials. The understanding of these barriers is critical because the identification of these barriers works towards the further identification of other outstanding barriers, as well as creates the ability to find solutions to and work towards the overarching resolve within the area of human trafficking within the area of law enforcement policies and procedures presenting barriers to law enforcement officials.

However, barriers continue to arise, and many have yet to be identified as the global phenomenon of human trafficking consistently continues to adapt, change, and grow to the knowledge that is ascertained surrounding the phenomenon. This knowledge and literature continue to grow and develop regarding the definition of human trafficking. The purpose of this study was to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17 from the perceptions of law enforcement officials within the police department's Human Trafficking Unit, through the lens of systems theory. Law enforcement policies and procedures have been implemented and govern the police department's Human Trafficking Unit. The following section will examine barriers by focusing on policy barriers within human trafficking.

### **Policy Barriers**

No policy is perfect, nor will a policy ever be absolute perfection. The only way to establish a policy to establish long-term, lasting implications is to keep revising and realizing the implications, not solely on the individual but society. One cannot confront policymaking solely from a psychological standpoint but must confront the policymaking

process from a sociological standpoint. Each situation is different, which implicates how the law must continually be just and not based on fairness. What is just applies to the sociological perspective as it involves the treatment of and implications upon the whole. What is fair only pertains to what is happening to an individual or particular group and takes a psychological perspective without regard to the whole.

Moreover, improving a broken policy is critical to increasing the effectiveness of policies and procedures that prevent and stop human trafficking. The literature on policy barriers highlighted policies and procedures tackling evolving issues with a prior stance targeting the victim instead of the criminal; where the policy is implemented and charged based on prior precedent; when the issue is more complex than the analysis presents; and to where the gaps lie within the policy that needs to be revamped to be appropriately interpreted, implemented, and executed. All these factors operate against the prevention of human trafficking in children ages 5–17 and human trafficking in general terms.

While little to no research has been conducted utilizing the theoretical framework of systems theory, nor to the extent of determining whether barriers are present in law enforcement policies and procedures surrounding the area of human trafficking within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, many studies have established barriers being present within law enforcement policies and procedures contributing towards the failure of the implemented policies and procedures to the prevention of human trafficking. Each of the barriers established in the literature within law enforcement policies and procedures differs from the other as each is on a case-by-case basis. However, the literature established the system, the policy, and the barrier, exposing the failures and evolving

nature of law enforcement policies and procedures. Exposing the failures and evolving nature works to improve the system and prevent future instances where human trafficking is present or being targeted. By exposing these failures and evolving the system at play, removing barriers can save countless lives from victimization, whether directly or indirectly the victim. Studies have explored how law enforcement policies and procedures present barriers to human trafficking and establish a multitude of gaps. The studies collectively illustrate the critical nature of discovering what and to what degree barriers are presented within a particular system that will work to better the whole system.

Within a quantitative study conducted by Alizada and Wildman (2019), the researchers focused on two law enforcement strategies influencing the rate of child sex trafficking in King County, Washington. Alizada and Wildman explored specific law enforcement policies and procedures surrounding human trafficking. Alizada and Wildman analyzed two law enforcement policies and procedures, distinguishing the influence of two law enforcement policies in King County, Washington, and the policies' effects on child sex trafficking. One of two policies targeted the arresting and prosecution of minor sex trafficking victims for the crime of prostitution. The second policy targeted arresting and prosecuting those who purchased sex from minors. This study aimed to analyze the measurements of policy effectiveness. Alizada and Wildman found that targeting the demand of human trafficking, specifically that child sex trafficking, is more effective than targeting the supply. However, the barrier found within the study was the arrest and prosecution of minors who had been victims of human trafficking. The system

failed those who were victims of human trafficking rather than targeting those who were the victimizers, also known as traffickers, due to a prior policy targeting prostitution. The second policy should have targeted those purchasing sex from minors, in addition to the before-mentioned policy. Even though targeting the demand was found to be more beneficial than targeting the supply, as systems theory establishes, through focusing only on having your cake and eating it too, but not at the same time (Senge, 2006), one must work on the area of demand, but one must also tackle the supply, as it will take both to overcome the feat of human trafficking.

Another study placed focus on the supply and demand factors of human trafficking. Alizada and Wildman (2019) and Cole and Sprang (2020) established the same sentiments regarding focusing specifically on demand, as it will lower the supply due to the demand not being present. The study conducted by Alizada and Wildman (2019) and Cole and Sprang (2020) brings around the focus of systems theory, where even though one area is being resolved, another is being focused on and bringing about a long-term resolution to the problem. The study by Cole and Sprang focused on examining judges' perceptions of the Safe Harbor laws impact how sex trafficking cases are managed within the judicial system and all judges' perceptions of legal issues related to CSEC. The qualitative study conducted by Cole and Sprang consisted of 82 juvenile and family court judges currently working in the United States when the study was being conducted. If the demand lowers within human trafficking, the supply will lower because the demand is not present. The study by Cole and Sprang found early insight into the Safe Harbor laws and the opportunities to address the emerging barriers. One of many insights

was the legal loopholes that prevented a positive impact from the Safe Harbor policies. From national data, a high correlation between foster care children and youth exists among those victims of sex trafficking. The finding of a high correlation resulted in established funding for training, collaboration, and services for those who had become victims of sex trafficking within the foster care system to address the emerging phenomenon. More positive impacts were noted by Cole and Sprang than negative impacts from the Safe Harbor laws by judges' who participated in the study. Judges indicated identified limitations and unintended harmful consequences resulting from the Safe Harbor laws that restrict the laws' full potential. The foundation of this knowledge grants potential gains for the Safe Harbor laws.

Additionally, a study by Simmons et al. (2018) focused on exploring the impacts of new laws surrounding transnational activities that proliferate, including human trafficking. The quantitative study by Simmons et al. consisted of methodological tools between mechanisms and policy diffusion. They were utilizing the s-curve of cumulative policy adoptions with diffusion processes. The study by Simmons et al. analyzed prohibited activities, such as human trafficking, dramatically increasing globally as criminal activity. The study by Simmons et al. specifically analyzed "what unique patterns of policy diffusion should we expect if issue framing shapes policy adoption." The study by Simmons et al. found that depending upon the exposure to externalities, and governments tend to emulate the other countries' policies first established in transnational crimes. Simmons et al. indicated the same concept goes for the United States in the aspect of state governments implementing policies that reflect the ones set by the federal



government, as the United States does with other nation-states by leading the example within the area of policy diffusion.

As illustrated within the literature by Simmons et al., from a global standpoint to a national standpoint, transitioning further to states and local implementation and execution of laws, each must work together collectively to bring about a resolution. All of these are parts of the system. If one part of the system fails, so does the other part. A study by Kappler and Richie-Zavaleta (2020) focused on Missouri's gaps within the area of anti-trafficking laws. The qualitative case study conducted by Kappler and Richie-Zavaleta consisted of policy analysis regarding Missouri's currently established anti-trafficking laws. The study analyzed existing ranking systems established nationally and internationally recognized by non-governmental organizations and governmental reports. The study also analyzed Safe Harbor legislations' best practices and law implementation in other states within the United States. The study by Kappler and Richie-Zavaleta found that Missouri has not upgraded state laws to reflect the Safe Harbor laws established by the federal government. Continuous upgrades of state laws and evaluations of current efforts to combat human trafficking are needed at the state and local levels of government.

Last but not least, exhibiting both failures and evolving nature of policies, a study conducted by Allerfeldt (2019) focused on examining how slavery has been manipulated from the initially established policy of the American abolitionist legislation, the 1910 White Slavery Act, and the Mann Act. All have significantly influenced trafficking policy within the United States more than any other law established since the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment

within the Constitution of the United States. The qualitative case study conducted by Allerfeldt consisted of terminology and legislation. The study analyzed the career, ambitions, and misfortunes of Marcus Bran to demonstrate how the concept of slavery had been manipulated over time, affecting the attitudes of United States Constituents on sex and morality. The study by Allerfeldt found how slavery was manipulated over the years to coin the term human trafficking, which is still slavery in existence within today's society. Policies present barriers in multiple ways, from targeting the supply and demand within human trafficking and identifying loopholes established within the law to the restrictions imposed by prior established laws that influence other established laws. Laws can have unintended consequences, resulting in limitations of the law or unintended harmful effects and establishing the critical nature and importance of the study being conducted as one must unveil those barriers to prevent human trafficking from happening and protect as many individuals as possible from becoming the next victim of human trafficking. The literature shows that training, communication, and collaboration are critical to preventing human trafficking. The following section further establishes the barriers within education, knowledge, understanding, and ambiguity.

### **Education, Knowledge, Understanding, and Ambiguity Barriers**

A large volume of published literature emphasized an extensive focus on barriers presented to the prevention of human trafficking through the lack of education, knowledge, understanding, or established ambiguity. However, as the literature illustrated, little to no research has been conducted either in a greater metropolitan area in Texas or within Texas, even though Texas has the second-largest human trafficking

population in the United States. A study conducted by Farrell et al. (2020) examined two areas within the issue of human trafficking, specifically labor trafficking. The first area focused on police officials' role in resolving labor trafficking within four specific communities. The second area focused on identifying the cultural and institutional factors that either worked to assist police officials in bringing about resolve or that worked against labor trafficking within those four specific communities. The study utilized human trafficking labor trafficking cases investigated by police officials. The labor trafficking cases investigated included semi-structured interviews of 24 police officials, 34 interviews with service providers who worked with police officials, and 28 interviews of individuals who were victims of labor trafficking. Farrell et al. identified four themes of police officials' role and the lack of identification of labor trafficking cases. The four themes included police officials' lack of understanding surrounding the definition of labor trafficking, lack of institutional readiness, routines of traditional police work, and police officials' role when responding to labor trafficking crimes.

The study by Irwin (2017) sought to understand the perceptions of law enforcement officials surrounding human trafficking, their knowledge of anti-trafficking policy and legislation, and whether law enforcement officials' awareness was confined to demographics. Irwin utilized three specific questions to examine the knowledge and perceptions of police officials surrounding human trafficking and the policy and legislation related to the area of Tasmania, Australia. By utilizing open-ended questions, the study interviewed 87 lower-ranking police officials and general duty officers through

thematic analysis. The study conducted by Irwin indicated that participants were unaware of any national anti-trafficking legislation and agency anti-trafficking policy.

Another study by Gouty (2015) focused on child trafficking and the United States' role in resolving child trafficking laws' ambiguities. The study by Gouty found that while most of the police officers interviewed held a broad understanding of human trafficking compared to the United Nations definition, many of the understandings tended to combine human trafficking with people smuggling. The study looked at ways to create and enforce child-specific remedies and protections. The study conducted by Gouty found that when child trafficking victims have been identified, the information will be more prevalent, increasing the number of prosecutions for child trafficking victims and reducing the number of child trafficking victims.

Additionally, a study by Deeb-Swihart et al. (2019) focused on understanding "the needs of law enforcement officials working on human trafficking cases from a sociotechnical perspective and understanding how HCI researchers can design better tools to support law enforcement." The qualitative study by Deeb-Swihart et al. consisted of sixteen semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officials working on human trafficking cases. In the study by Deeb Swihart et al., participants' law enforcement officials' positions included analysts, detectives, and senior personnel. The study by Deeb Swihart et al. analyzed the computational needs of law enforcement officials as this can alleviate barriers to combatting human trafficking. The study by Deeb-Swihart et al. found that three major areas were identified to assist in progressing the combatting of human trafficking through human and computer interaction. Deeb-Swihart et al. noted

that the first of these is the advancement of “information visualization of large, complex, geospatial data, as victims are frequently and forcibly moved across jurisdictions.” The second finding by Deeb-Swihart et al. is that a unified information database needs to be established and raises critical research issues within usability due to security and privacy. Lastly, Deeb-Swihart et al. indicated that “the archaic nature of information systems available to law enforcement raises policy issues regarding resource allocation for software development.”

Lastly, a study by Barrick et al. (2014) focused on the global phenomenon of labor trafficking for agricultural services in North Carolina. Barrick et al. conducted a qualitative study of 380 farmworkers interviewed within seventeen counties in North Carolina. The study by Barrick et al. analyzed the perceptions and experiences of farmworkers, stakeholders, and law enforcement officials within the state of North Carolina. The study conducted by Barrick et al. found knowledge as a barrier to combatting human trafficking. The gap found within the study was their individualized perceptions of what law enforcement officials have seen as labor trafficking activities versus the reality of what was being reported by farmworkers and stakeholders. Barrick et al. indicated “from the general lack of awareness revolving around agricultural labor trafficking to state and local law enforcement agencies either ignoring requests for information or no evidence of victimization.”

From the literature, barriers exist within knowledge, identification, awareness, readiness, routines, and response critical to preventing human trafficking. Overcoming these barriers would require education and training implementation surrounding current

human trafficking and law enforcement policies, how to correctly identify individuals who are potential victims, current victims, or who have been victims of human trafficking, and creating and establishing current readiness policies, current routines, and procedures to respond to human trafficking appropriately. All of these play a critical role within the system and prevent the growing phenomenon of human trafficking, including acknowledging the existence of labor trafficking and indentured servitude outside the scope of sex trafficking within human trafficking.

### **Risk Factors and Experiences**

Diving into the literature surrounding risk factors and experiences within human trafficking, two studies were identified. One study by Fedina et al. (2019) focused on addressing the gap by identifying risk factors associated with domestic child sex trafficking in the United States. Fedina et al. conducted a quantitative study that utilized respondent-driven sampling in five cities within one midwestern state. 115 participants were identified as current or former domestic child sex trafficking victims. Fedina et al.'s findings suggested rape, running away from home, family members in sex work, and having friends who purchased sex were all contributing factors to domestic child sex trafficking.

Another study conducted by Mostajabian et al. (2019) worked to identify risk factors and experiences. The study placed focus on two specific purposes. The first was to compare the frequency of sex and labor exploitation and trafficking-related risks and experiences. The second was to identify the gaps within the knowledge of human trafficking and the available resources and barriers posed to disclosing human trafficking

and seeking help. Mostajabian et al. conducted a mixed-methods case study utilizing surveys, medical record reviews, and focus group discussions. The study established two key findings. The first was that the Human Trafficking Screening Tool, designed by the Urban Institute, could identify better children experiencing sexual and labor exploitation within the area of human trafficking. The second finding was that children did not trust the system and feared reporting to police officials. The second finding established a barrier to identifying and disclosing human trafficking victims.

### **Identification Challenges**

Moving into the identification challenges, as previously established by Farrell et al. (2020), within education, knowledge, understanding, and ambiguity, barriers remain a barrier faced by law enforcement officials. A study by Greenbaum (2017) focused on the challenges in identifying and assisting child sex trafficking victims for healthcare professionals. The study conducted by Greenbaum analyzed child sex trafficking victims' statistical data to display the challenges healthcare professionals face in fulfilling their roles in identifying and assessing child sex trafficking victims. The study by Greenbaum found that many healthcare professionals' challenges were lack of awareness, time, and training. The barriers faced by healthcare professionals are consistent with the challenges faced by law enforcement officials.

Continuing, a study by Villacampa and Torres (2017) focused on identifying victims and the lack of identification from law enforcement officials. The qualitative study conducted by Villacampa and Torres consisted of 37 semi-structured interviews with professionals, 28 of whom collaborated with the criminal justice system specializing

in human trafficking, including police officers, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and prison officials. Nine participants worked within victims' services. The study analyzed the determining factors of what was causing the failure of the criminal justice system to identify victims of human trafficking to prevent victims of human trafficking from remaining victims. The study conducted by Villacampa and Torres found that there was a lack of police strategies explicitly targeting the identification of a human trafficking victim, a lack of knowledge on who can be considered a victim due to stereotypes and affiliation with sexual exploitation, transferring responsibility to other individuals within the police force due to authority over-identifying victims, and looking at identification through the lens of an act rather than process.

The literature currently reflects a recent study conducted by Hounmenou and O'Grady (2019), between a total of 4,457 to 20,994 children and youth between the ages of 13-24 being sex trafficked within the United States. The vast spread of victimized individuals comes from the inability to identify human trafficking victims due to a lack of identification and reporting. Irwin (2017) indicated the lack of knowledge surrounding the phenomenon of human trafficking as one of the major contributing factors to the extent of misclassification of victims and failing to act upon suspected trafficking cases, to the study by Barrick et al. (2014) exposing the general lack of awareness revolving around agricultural labor trafficking to state and local law enforcement agencies either ignoring requests for information or no evidence of victimization.



## **Role of the Internet**

Along with other challenges faced with preventing human trafficking, studies examined the role of the internet. To begin, a study by O'Brien and Li (2020) focused on domestic minor sex trafficking and the internet's role in grooming, exploitation, and exit. The qualitative study by O'Brien and Li utilizes semi-structured interviews of twenty service providers in North Carolina and Texas. O'Brien and Li found that the internet plays a direct role in facilitating domestic minor sex trafficking, preventing the facilitation of domestic minor sex trafficking, and victim exit and survivorship.

A study by Strike (2020) focused on laying the background on human trafficking from how most law enforcement studies have explicitly focused on women and girls, excluding men and boys' victimization. The study by Strike then focused on the area of the online platform and how the complexity of human trafficking became even more vast with the scale of prostitution and sex trafficking within the online platform. The qualitative case study conducted by Strike consisted of scenarios of human trafficking and prostitution instances and policies implemented to establish the differences between prostitution and sex trafficking within an online platform. The qualitative study conducted by Strike additionally looked at how countries with differing prostitution models can identify the differences between prostitution and sex trafficking within the realm of the internet and how the distinctions between prostitution and sex trafficking compare all of the above within the nation-states of the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. The study by Strike analyzed how different prostitution models within different countries vary and identified the differences between prostitution and sex trafficking,

with the international system of the internet contributing to the greater complexity of human trafficking. Strike found that the distinctions between prostitution and sex trafficking cannot be readily identified until after learning about the victim's situation. The study by Strike also established that governments must be careful before implementing policies like FOSTA-SESTA due to the contradictory nature of such a policy, inevitably putting the victims in a predicament where the victim is left with a less safe option.

The study conducted by Chen and Tortosa (2020) focused on the consequences imposed on victims of human trafficking using digital evidence of human trafficking investigations. The qualitative case study by Chen and Tortosa analyzed a case where traffickers sexually exploited women online and used digital evidence against the victims by law enforcement officials. The study by Chen and Tortosa analyzed a case of women who had migrated from the country of Venezuela to the country of Austria and were sexually exploited within private apartments and hotels due to the internet platform apps of WhatsApp, email, and direct messages on Facebook and Instagram through the use of false job offers to require specific documentation, eventually leading to the victims flying to Austria by the traffickers. In turn, with the assistance of digital evidence, law enforcement officials could track the hours the traffickers worked, the working conditions, threats and logistics of transport, and the daily income and constant control and abuse of women trafficked. The findings of Chen and Tortosa found that digital evidence worked to establish the credibility of the exploited women. However, it was also established does not offer protection to trafficked persons.

The study by Halverson (2018) focused on court interpretations of the CDA and their implications regarding sex trafficking and prostituted persons through internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation. The qualitative case study conducted by Halverson consisted of the CDA, and the application thereof regarding internet facilitated commercial sexual exploitation. The study by Halverson analyzed the original intent and historical application of the CDA, specifically related to section 230 of the CDA. Through analyzing several cases and the court's interpretation and application of the CDA, Halverson found immunity to online facilitators of sex trafficking and prostituted persons. In turn, Halverson found that establishing FOSTA-SESTA was critical to establishing the legality of in-person and online commercial sexual exploitation.

The study conducted by Burbano and Hernandez-Alvarez (2017) focused on Spanish texts to identify patterns within different internet sources to establish the best features that are needed in order to train algorithms for different machines to identify human trafficking patterns due to most studies regarding human trafficking have solely been based on English data alone, and predominantly from the United States. The quantitative study by Burbano and Hernandez-Alvarez consisted of newspapers and other online platforms, such as social media. The study analyzed different online sources, including newspapers, to identify sources of information in the Spanish language about human trafficking online, “create Spanish corpus of relevant information automatically to combat human trafficking, detect behavioral patterns related to human trafficking through the application of machine learning algorithms, and build a predictive model based on machine learning algorithms that allow identifying crimes related to human trafficking

heterogeneous datasets.” Burbano and Hernandez-Alvarez found that only seven percent of the news was composed of datasets, resulting in bias towards the number of news not related to human trafficking.

The study conducted by Volodko et al. (2020) focused on the feasibility of identifying individuals who could become potential victims of labor trafficking through the internet platform’s open-source data by looking at specific commonly used indicators within online job advertisements. The quantitative case study conducted by Volodko et al. consisted of content analysis through a coding process that included the analysis of three stages inclusive of descriptive statistical analysis utilizing the entire sample of the study being a total of 430, the number of indicators present within each of the advertisements analyzed, the dependent variable being a count variable. The study by Volodko et al. analyzed the “extent of commonly used indicators of labor trafficking within online job advertisements aimed at Lithuanians seeking work abroad, which characteristics of advertisements predict the overall number of indicators present, and are robust indicators associated with particular characteristics of the advertisements.” Volodko et al. found indicators to be present within Lithuanian job advertisements. Multiple indicators are present to deem human trafficking prevalence, but a single indicator is not indicative of human trafficking being present but is also not impossible.

### **Strategies**

Moving into strategies within human trafficking, a study by Duger (2015) explored strategies to combat HTCE. The study explored the anti-trafficking efforts by critiquing current United States strategies to address the CSEC phenomenon. The study

conducted by Duger analyzed children's economic and social rights as a prevention strategy to CSEC within the United States utilizing a human rights-based approach. The study conducted by Duger found that using a human-rights-based approach contributed to CSEC prevention in the United States by providing benefits to the CSEC movement. The CSEC movement targeted migration, poverty, discrimination, and gender-based violence, left children vulnerable to CSEC, and further brought about a resolve to CSEC.

An additional study by Jurek and King (2020) focused on the sizeable municipal police department to understand their processes and response to the recent criminalized global phenomenon of human trafficking by establishing specialized units focused on human trafficking. The quantitative study by Jurek and King utilized structural contingency theory through primary data collected through postcard surveys, BJS LEMAS survey, U.S. Census, and FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. The study by Jurek and King analyzed the possibility of social problems being influenced by the different operating environments within police responses to the issue of human trafficking. The study conducted by Jurek and King found that as of 2013, only 13.69% had established a human trafficking unit within police departments. Additionally, only 32.08% of the 155 of 168 agencies participating in the study responded that there were formalized procedures, protocols, or policies for identifying and responding to human trafficking. Jurek and King indicated whether or not a police department had established a human trafficking unit was found to be dependent upon certain factors such as a female police chief, certain percentage of female officers within the police department, spatial differentiation, size of the police department, task scope, social disorganization, violent

crime rate, and the region in which the police department was located within the United States.

### **Systematic Gaps**

Lastly, but not withholding additional studies, little research has been conducted on systematic gaps. A study by Walts (2017) sought to establish examples of child trafficking cases in the United States and provide an overview of systematic gaps in the law, policy, data collection, research, and practice. Walts indicated that these areas have primarily focused on sex trafficking, which undermines the policy intentions of the TVPA, which includes both sex and labor trafficking within the United States. The study utilized statistical data from documented human trafficking cases within the United States. The findings by Walts established that private and public agencies should evaluate their intake procedures and data collection measurements regarding child trafficking, specifically in the area of labor trafficking.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Human trafficking has many barriers that continue to be identified. Chapter 2 reviewed the current literature relating to the law enforcement policies being implemented and executed by law enforcement officials presenting barriers to the prevention of human trafficking. The study further expanded upon the prior research conducted to address law enforcement officials' barriers to human trafficking through law enforcement policies and procedures. There is little to no research conducted to answer the research question of discovering whether, and to what degree, existing law enforcement policies do a human trafficking unit's law enforcement officials perceive as

barriers to preventing human trafficking of children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area within the state of Texas. The study worked to expand the current foundation of knowledge in existence.

From the literature, the study conducted is relevant because the numbers of human trafficking continue to rise, and the global phenomenon of human trafficking remains the third most significant organized crime. The literature reflected that identifying the barriers faced by law enforcement officials within law enforcement policies is critical to increasing prevention within not only human trafficking but specifically HTCE. Within the area of barriers, the literature reflected within the studies conducted by Farrell et al. (2020) and Dandurand (2017), the focus by law enforcement officials has lacked within the area of labor trafficking by solely placing focus on the area of sex trafficking. As previously stated, the understanding of these barriers is critical because the identification of these barriers works towards the further identification of other outstanding barriers, as well as creates the ability to find solutions to and work towards the overarching resolve within the area of human trafficking within the area of law enforcement policies presenting barriers to law enforcement officials.

From the standpoint of policy barriers, both Alizada and Wildman (2019) and Cole and Sprang (2020) illustrated the same sentiment with the argument that the focus should be on the demand of human trafficking rather than the supply. The focus has been placed on demand because supply will decline if the focus is placed on demand. If the demand is not present, supply is not needed. The studies of Farrell et al. (2020), Dandurand (2017), Cole and Sprang (2020), and Alizada and Wildman (2019) all

indicated that training, collaboration, and communication are critical components to overcoming barriers. These studies failed to understand the impact made after barriers were found, how barriers were addressed, and what resolutions came about.

Little to no research has been conducted utilizing the systems theory approach. As established in the literature, the primary focus has been on sex trafficking (Farrell et al., 2020; Dandurand, 2017; Alizada & Wildman, 2019; Cole and Sprang, 2020; Walts, 2017; Halverson, 2018; Chen & Tortosa, 2020). By utilizing the systems theory approach, the study was able to capture the system as a whole, the impacts barriers are taking from all aspects, and how to move the system forward by identifying the barriers being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies on the level of federal, state, and local.

Chapter 3 transitions into the overview of the research design established for this study. Within Chapter 3 are the research design and rationale for selecting qualitative inquiry of case study. Additionally, the role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and a summary is established.



### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies and procedures in a human trafficking unit within the area of HTCE prevention of children between the ages 5 to 17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The focus was placed on identifying barriers created by law enforcement policies faced by law enforcement officials in a greater metropolitan area in Texas to combat the human trafficking of children ages 5–17. In 2021, the U.S. DOS (2021) reported that the human trafficking industry had grown to generate an estimated \$150 billion per year globally. From a global perspective, in 2020, there were 109,216 victims identified, of which 28,538 were within the United States.

In this chapter, I describe the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, procedures for data collection, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and summary. The findings I found contained in this study have provided a pathway for additional research to be conducted. The findings I have found may assist law enforcement officials, human trafficking units, the NHTH, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Federal, State, and Local legislative bodies, and many working towards the prevention of human trafficking. The findings I found may also assist those who are at potential risk of being human trafficked, are currently a victim of human trafficking, or have been victims of human trafficking in the identification of barriers, how barriers are addressed, and establishing a resolution that

does not implement a short-term solution to the barriers, but rather long-term, well-thought-out implications for permanent resolutions to the barriers being faced. The findings I found within this study can assist law enforcement officials in identifying barriers posed by law enforcement policies and procedures and grant the ability to work towards assisting and protecting potential victims, current victims, and individuals who have been victims of human trafficking.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study addressed the following research question: What existing law enforcement policies do law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit perceive as barriers to preventing human trafficking of children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area within Texas?

Human trafficking comprises three areas: sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and indentured servitude. Human trafficking is not limited in scope by any means; it is a large and ever-changing global phenomenon by which more and more information is developing as time passes. Human trafficking can be studied from different perspectives using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods traditions. Upon reviewing the different methodologies and correctly answering the research question, I sought to understand the phenomenon by utilizing the individual perceptions of barriers presented by law enforcement policies to human trafficking law enforcement officials within a greater metropolitan area in Texas; I, therefore, used a qualitative methodology.

The study aimed to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies and procedures in a

human trafficking unit within the area of HTCE prevention of children between the ages 5 to 17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The barriers to law enforcement officials within the scope of HTCE are analyzed, ranging from local, state, and federal law enforcement policies and procedures. The barriers within policies and procedures to law enforcement officials were additionally analyzed to determine what barriers are presented to those who are serving within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas to become more effective in the prevention of human trafficking of children who range within the ages of 5 to 17 before the human trafficking cases happen in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The study worked to assist a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas and scale ranging from local, state-wide, and national, extending globally to combat the global phenomenon of human trafficking within the area of HTCE. The study contributed to before-the-fact resolutions within the scope of HTCE. The study worked to stop HTCE by alleviating current and potential barriers and bringing forth the resolution of prevention within HTCE within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I served as the primary research instrument during the data collection by developing the survey questions, capturing the survey responses, and keeping a journal. I included 10 participants to participate in this study who were not acquainted with me. The participants have no prior relationships with the researcher, the committee, the program director, or the chief academic officer. The participants have had some experience related to human trafficking within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Each

participant participating currently works within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, making the participant's attributes to the participant's current profession an excellent contribution to furthering the study conducted within HTCE. The purpose of utilizing only participants who currently work within a human trafficking unit in Texas worked to establish the current barriers law enforcement officials face through law enforcement policies and procedures.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

Before conducting the Qualtrics active link email survey, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A). Before receiving IRB approval, I made a telephone call to establish the proper procedures and protocols for conducting an active link email survey with law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit in Texas. Once the proper procedures and protocols were established, I sent an email to the Planning and Data Governance, Research, and Special Projects division of the police department to start the approval process to conduct the study. Included in this email were the survey questions and an active link to the survey questions to be asked in order to receive clearance from the legal team and the Chief of Police over the law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit in Texas. The active link was not distributed to any participants until I received approval and clearance from the IRB and the Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research, and Special Projects Unit, Deputy Director, legal team, and Chief of Police. The approval process from the Office of Planning and Data Governance took approximately one month after

submitting the research email survey questionnaire. All participants selected to participate in the study met the IRB's guidelines and received approval and clearance from the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas' Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research, and Special Projects Unit, Deputy Director, legal team, and Chief of Police. Approval from the Office of Planning and Data Governance and Walden University IRB took approximately two months after submitting the research email survey questionnaire.

After obtaining approval from the IRB and the Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research and Special Projects Unit, Deputy Director, legal team, and Chief of Police, I contacted the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to distribute the active link for voluntary participation within the study from the designated unit. The participants then received an email from the Office of Planning and Data Governance containing the invitation to participate in the study voluntarily. Once participants elected to participate voluntarily and provided informed consent, the participants were granted access to the email survey questionnaire to capture the participants' perceptions of the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The email survey was then conducted via the active link due to the current pandemic of COVID-19 and to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants participating in the study. I then analyzed the data collected.

The researcher then took all appropriate measures to avoid and minimize any bias that could affect the study's reliability and validity. Ethical compliance was ensured throughout the voluntary election of participants to participate, the providing of informed

consent to participate within the study, collecting of data, analyzing of data, interpreting of data, and presentation of findings. Per the guidance granted by the IRB, no persons were sought out within protected populations, including children, prisoners, residents of any facility, or mentally/emotionally disabled individuals. All data collected were stored in electronic format for the duration of the study and stored for a minimum of 5 years on a password-protected Western Digital external hard drive. All data were de-identified as soon as possible to minimize the risk of inappropriate disclosure of personal information. The de-identification process included removing all direct identifiers from the raw data and database, such as names, addresses, or telephone numbers. No part linkable to a participant's identity was disclosed to anyone. No payment, compensation, reimbursement, free services, extra credit, or other gifts were given to any participant or projected participant. Participation in the study was entirely and solely voluntary.

All information and data collected and recorded during the active link email survey process strictly adhered to the email survey questionnaire. No knowledge outside the scope of the information and data provided during the active link email survey was utilized for this study. No personal perspectives or personal opinions were contributed or used in any manner to conduct this study.

Participants were invited to participate in the research study based on their experience working within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas through the distribution of an active link email survey to participate voluntarily. This unit was purposefully selected to correctly identify the perceptions of law

enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit who currently have direct experience in preventing the human trafficking of children ages 5–17.

Saturation is reached when all the collected data consistently repeats the same information. Some researchers suggest that 20 interviews are enough to get data saturation; however, some even suggest interview totals upwards of 50 interviews. Farrell et al. (2020) conducted a total of 86 interviews before reaching the point of saturation, and O'Brien and Li (2020) reached the point of saturation after 20 interviews, whereas Mostajabian et al. (2019) conducted 129 interviews before reaching the point of saturation. The amount of data that can be collected is endless; however, there is a certain point where the data starts repeating itself. The researcher must continue re-evaluating the collected data to see if recurring themes are happening. Once no new information is being collected, the data at that point have reached saturation.

However, due to the limited number of individuals serving within human trafficking units, specifically narrowed down to a specific metropolitan area within Texas, saturation was expected to be reached with fewer participants than the listed participant populations above. The data collected were expected to start a repetitive trend of exploring whether and to what degree barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Once saturation was reached, this guided the pathway to look at the recurring codes, categories, and themes within personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking within systems theory in conjunction with the case study approach to the study.

Law enforcement officials serving a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas were selected as participants in this study. The 7 participants were gained through the distribution of an active link email survey by the Office of Planning and Data Governance based on their current position in the designated unit within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area within Texas to gain further insights on potential barriers presented through the use of a random sample. If more than 10 participants had elected to participate in the study, there was the possibility of including more than 10 participants; however, if 10 voluntarily had elected to participate, those participants' responses would have been evaluated to determine if saturation had been met. Participants were continuously permitted to participate in the study until saturation was reached.

The best way to choose information-rich cases is by searching for key terms to identify the appropriate information. This eliminated anything outside the study's scope and identified experiences with the research topic and research question. Another way to identify information-rich cases is by looking at prior research conducted on the research topic and research question using previous dissertations and journal articles.

The Office of Planning and Data Governance distributed the active link email survey to all individuals working within the human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. For survey participant participation in the study, an invitation was extended to each potential participant serving a human trafficking unit in Texas. The first slide of the survey provided the informed consent form, which covered all the details of what the email survey will be used for, disclosed the dissemination of information, and



de-identified data to minimize the risk of inappropriate disclosure of personal data or anything about the participant's identity. Informed consent to conduct the active link email survey was gathered before any active link email survey was conducted.

### **Instrumentation**

I collected the data for this study using a sole instrument: an email survey questionnaire developed by me and provided by an active link utilizing the data collection software Qualtrics. The focus within the development of the email survey questionnaire was placed on specific keywords from within the research question; the research was conducted prior to this study within journal articles and prior dissertations. The developed email survey questionnaire sought to understand participants' understanding of human trafficking, the definition of human trafficking, and the children within human trafficking. The email survey questionnaire also sought to understand what prevention means; what barriers are being faced; what barriers have been corrected; how to further prevent and deter these barriers in place; and how to overcome these barriers within the area of law enforcement, politically, to expand knowledge not only locally, state-wide, federally, but to assist globally. The email survey questionnaire uncovered why the system is failing within the area of prevention and the decline of human trafficking statistical numbers pertaining to children between the ages of 5 and 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. To ensure the instrument's reliability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability, all responses were collected and recorded using the open-ended data from participants of the study utilizing Qualtrics, which alleviated any bias and granted the true perceptions of the participant.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, Data Collection**

The current pandemic of COVID-19 the world has been facing for the past three years has raised many challenges throughout the process. In order to recruit participants, once the IRB approved (see Appendix A), I reached out to the Office of Planning and Data Governance within the police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas for clearance to conduct the study utilizing law enforcement officials within a human trafficking units' perceptions of barriers presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17. An invitation from the police department was then distributed for voluntary participation.

To protect the study's participants, each individual received an email invitation to participate in the study. The Office of Planning and Data Governance, Research, and Special Projects Unit distributed the active link email survey to the participant. The participant then provided voluntarily informed consent to participate in the study. The email survey questionnaire used open-ended questions to gather data for the study. After the data from the Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey had been collected, the data was then transferred into the NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis system for analysis. The duration of data collection events took place over approximately four weeks. The email survey questionnaire was expected to take each participant approximately 60 minutes to complete.

Each participant was required to fill out a form establishing informed consent to participate in the research study (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). The form acknowledged that the participant agreed to participate in the study voluntarily and disclosed the research

study's purpose. Any information that was not essential to identify the barriers to preventing human trafficking by law enforcement policies presented on the local, state, and federal levels was not disclosed. Additionally, one way to protect the identity and safety of all individuals involved within the research process, as well as the individuals who could be at potential risk of becoming a victim of commercial sexual exploitation of children, was to ensure all identities within the study being conducted were held in confidence (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). Another way to address ethical challenges that could have arisen is by keeping locations confidential where individuals work. Ethical standard compliance to achieve a principled study is achieved by keeping the identities of individuals, workplaces, and workplace locations confidential, keeping the exact locations of human trafficking hotspots confidential, and keeping the areas individuals are currently or potentially targeted confidential. These are just some of the ethical challenges that could have been presented and are not all-encompassing.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

After conducting the Qualtrics email survey with the law enforcement officials within the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, the researcher established codes, categories, and themes within the data collected by taking all of the data and inputting it into a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software. The first step was to code all of the data collected. Coding is cumulating several pieces of information and placing them in groups or themes (Laureate Education, 2016). The second step was categorizing the information by grouping codes under an overarching umbrella. Categorizing is where a multitude of codes are grouped to form a collective

whole. The collective whole becomes a part of an overall group or specific classification, referred to as categorizing (Saldana, 2016). The third step was to place each of the categories into themes. Theming takes it a step further. A theme is the outcome and is either a phrase or a sentence. A theme is a recurring pattern present (Saldana, 2016). The Qualitative Data Analysis software selected to conduct data analysis for the study was NVivo. According to PAT, NVivo can be utilized for both qualitative and mixed methods studies, and “its design is to help users to organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data such as interviews, open-ended survey responses, articles, social media, and web content,” (PAT Research, 2020). NVivo establishes a platform in order to be able to identify major recurring themes and identify any discrepant cases from the data. NVivo grants the ability to uncover more profound insights into the patterns and connections within the data, make robust conclusions by illustrating the whole picture, and deliver comprehensive findings to create and uncover defensible conclusions (QSR International, 2021).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability**

Trustworthiness is established through four criteria being credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility looks at internal validity. Transferability looks at external validity. Dependability looks at reliability. Confirmability looks at objectivity (Shenton, 2004).

Credibility consists of thirteen criteria. The establishment and adoption of research methods, researcher’s knowledge and familiarity with the organization

participation within the study, random sampling, triangulation, ensuring honesty from informants, iterative questioning, negative case analysis, consistent debriefing, colleagues, peer, and academic scrutiny of the study, background, qualifications, and experience of investigator, member checks, detailed description of the phenomenon being scrutinized, and pre-established research findings examination, (Shenton, 2004). The establishment of credibility was adapted to the qualitative study utilizing the direct responses from the Qualtrics email survey. The Qualtrics active link email survey was conducted until saturation was met. Prolonged contact was established through continuous email communication with the Office of Planning and Data Governance. Member checks were conducted during the email survey process to ensure the accuracy of the information being reported. Reflexivity is established by reporting any biases that could have arisen, and to the best of the researcher's ability, no personal judgments, practices, or beliefs will be reflected within the study. Peer review was completed during the study by continuous reviews from the committee chair, committee member, university research reviewer, program director, and chief academic officer.

Transferability involves applying the study's findings and conclusions to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004). The study has the potential to be continued by reconducting the study focused on human trafficking within other human trafficking units within greater metropolitan areas of other states or countries and comparing and analyzing the findings and conclusions.

Dependability is established through the researcher documenting the processes utilized in detail, granting future researchers to continue to study, even if the prospective

study does not specify the same results (Shenton, 2004). Dependability is established when the researcher lays the groundwork for the study to be continued by future researchers. Everything through the way the study was conducted must be detailed throughout the study. Dependability is where the researcher grants future research the ability to continue the study, establishing credibility on prior, completed work, even if a different outcome results. Details were based on the participants' perspectives on whether and to what degree barriers are presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17 through their experiences and perceptions. Future researchers can continue the study through established gaps and potentially look at whether and to what degree barriers are being presented to a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17. Researchers can also continue the study by looking at other human trafficking units within greater metropolitan areas of other states or countries.

Confirmability consists of the researcher establishing their predisposition within the study, putting forth all decisions made, methods adopted, the reasoning for the research's approach, strengths and limitations, and recommendations gathered throughout (Shenton, 2004). All decisions made throughout the study have been included, including the methods utilized in field notes. Recommendations have been made by identifying gaps within the study for further research to be conducted.

## **Ethical Concerns and Procedures**

When dealing with the lives of individuals who either could be victims of, are being targeted to be victims of, or have been victims of human trafficking through the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the security of these individuals and the individuals trying to protect them are at the utmost risk. Individuals' identities could have been exposed throughout the study by individuals' responses to the Qualtrics active link email survey questions, and identities could have been declared throughout the Qualtrics active link email survey of the individuals who were completing the Qualtrics active link email survey. Locations of where the human trafficking of children is explicitly taking place could have potentially been reported. Areas of potential human trafficking targets of children could have been declared. An endless number of ethical problems could have arisen, but how the researcher managed these ethical problems was vital for the protection and safety of all individuals involved. These individuals' lives could have been placed in danger by exposing these individuals' location and the area at risk of commercial sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, and indentured servitude of children. It could also put the families of individuals at risk of commercial sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, and indentured servitude of children.

The current study implemented the strategy of working towards discovering whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies in a human trafficking unit within the area of HTCE prevention of children between the ages 5 to 17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas through the perceptions of law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit within a greater

metropolitan area in Texas. The Qualtrics active link email survey was conducted and retained solely based upon the voluntary consent without coercion of the participants within the study. The participants within the study had the right to change their minds surrounding participating in the study and had the right to decline to answer any questions to which the participant did not feel comfortable providing an answer. Participants in the study were ensured of their anonymity and confidentiality. In order to ensure the safety of individuals working to protect, prevent, and rescue from, and those individuals who are potential victims of, currently victims of, or have been victims of the heinous organized crime of human trafficking, all identities and locations remained anonymous for the entirety of the study and continuing after. From all data collected and reported within this study, every participant was within a safe space of their choosing while the active link email survey was being conducted, no participant was forced to speak, and no participant had to fear reprisal for participating in the study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies in a human trafficking unit within the area of HTCE prevention of children between the ages 5 to 17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The qualitative methodology of the case study was best suited for this research study to grasp a proper understanding of law enforcement officials' experiences through their perceptions of how law enforcement policies present barriers to preventing human trafficking in children ages 5–17. The qualitative methodology of the case study was employed and determined



to be the best applicable qualitative method of inquiry due to the complexity of human trafficking. As indicated by Crowe et al. (2011), “the case study approach is instrumental in employing when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural, real-life context” (Crowe, et al., 2011). The literature reflected a gap in knowledge surrounding if and to what degree barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies. All of the literature reflected barriers to law enforcement officials through the ever-changing nature of human trafficking, but no article presented how law enforcement policies impact the prevention of human trafficking, specifically within a metropolitan area in Texas. In order to address the scope and magnitude of how law enforcement policies and procedures were considered to be presenting barriers to law enforcement officials working against the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17, the perceptions of law enforcement officials working within a human trafficking unit were considered crucial to the purpose of the study.

Procedures for recruitment were placed to ensure the highest level of ethical standards compliance to conduct this study in a principled manner. Approval from Walden University’s IRB was obtained before the research was conducted for data collection. No coercion took place for a participant to participate in the study. No monetary rewards or gifts were permitted to be extended or accepted for participation in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before any active link email survey responses were collected. Confidentiality and anonymity were established with participants before any active link email survey responses were collected.

Participants were notified before the active link email survey responses were collected of their ability to withdraw from participation at any time.

Chapter 3 illustrated the researcher's design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, procedures for recruitment, data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness for the study. The implications for positive social change are inevitable as the bounds of the research can extend beyond the grasp of a human trafficking unit within a metropolitan area in Texas to other states, other nation-states, and the world to work towards the prevention of human trafficking and hold accountable law enforcement policies and procedures that were considered to present barriers to the prevention of human trafficking. Chapter 4 moves into the results by establishing the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary.

## Chapter 4: Results

Time is of the essence as the knowledge foundation surrounding the area of human trafficking continues to be expanded upon and ever-changing. Human trafficking has consistently been a growing phenomenon as the number of individuals becoming victims of human trafficking continues to rise. Law enforcement officials continue to face a battle within human trafficking and confront barriers consistently. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement officials within a greater metropolitan area's human trafficking unit in Texas to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures within HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17. This study addressed the research question of what existing law enforcement policies and procedures a human trafficking unit's law enforcement officials perceive as barriers to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

The significance of the findings of this study includes educating on, increasing awareness of, and identifying barriers that exist from law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas working towards the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5 to 17. The findings could also improve prevention by identifying these barriers. The findings may also contribute to other local police departments, local, state, and federal agencies, bureaucracies, and government.

The qualitative case study approach of this study allowed law enforcement officials to share their perceptions and insights into the barriers being posed by law

enforcement policies and procedures within the area of the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Chapter 4 establishes the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

### **Setting**

The current global pandemic of COVID-19 has continued to place an impact not only on the lives of individuals but also on the field of research. As the number of cases has continued to rise, the current total number of cases in the United States alone has reached 74,037,216 (CDC, 2022). The total number of deaths from COVID-19 in the United States has continued to rise to 879,971 (CDC, 2022). The continual rise in the number of cases and the total number of deaths impacted how data were collected within this study. The initial intent was to collect data through in-person interviews, which would have granted the ability to probe deeper into the questions being asked to gather a more in-depth response.

In addition to the impacts of COVID-19, the police department within the greater metropolitan area in Texas and I worked collaboratively to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in the study. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I changed the original format of the study utilizing the data collection tool of interviews to an anonymous active link email survey for participants to participate in the study voluntarily. I coordinated with the Office of Planning and Data Governance to distribute the survey to all working within the specified human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

The Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey was distributed on Tuesday, January 25, 2022, in email format by the Office of Planning and Data Governance. Data collection began immediately upon distributing the Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey. Accordingly, after receiving the email from the Office of Planning and Data Governance, all participants voluntarily elected to participate in the study. When opening the Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey, each participant was required to either consent or decline to consent to participate in the study before proceeding. All participants in the study gave their consent. The participants had a period of 4 weeks to participate in the study through the date of Tuesday, February 22, 2022. No limitations were placed on participants as to where each participant chose to complete their Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey, and each participant chose their own safe and secure place to take the survey.

All questions asked within the email survey, outside the scope of the consent, were open-ended questions. The survey permitted each participant to take approximately 1 hour to complete the survey but permitted participants up to 4 weeks to complete the survey. All responses were recorded using the data collection software of Qualtrics, and all responses were locked by Qualtrics, so only the participant could edit or change any responses.

### **Demographics**

The reason this study was conducted in a greater metropolitan area in Texas remained due to the significance of Texas remaining second in the United States with the number of human trafficking cases since reporting began. All participants in the study

currently worked within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area, ranging from 1 year to 20 years of experience at the time this study was conducted. The participants started their years of service between 1995 and 2020. Most participants had no experience working within a human trafficking unit before working for the human trafficking unit where this study took place. Specific ages and start years are not disclosed to protect the participants' identities.

### **Data Collection**

The original data collection method to be utilized was in-person one-on-one interviews. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for my protection, as well as that of the participants, and the protection of all participants' identities, I conducted the study through the data collection method of anonymous surveys. Additionally, the original intent was to collect 10 participants within the research survey to meet 50% participation with 20 individuals currently serving within the human trafficking unit under study. However, after two different distributions by the police department's Planning and Data Governance Unit, voluntary participants in this research study included only seven individuals, a 35% participation rate.

To ensure the anonymity of all participants who elected to participate in the study voluntarily, I sent the initial link for participants to volunteer for the study to a police officer within the Planning and Data Governance Unit of the police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Once that officer received the initial link, they distributed the Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey to all 20 potential participants within the department's human trafficking unit. The data collection began on

January 25, 2022, and continued for four weeks through February 22, 2022. Before they could access the survey questions, consent was obtained from each participant at the initial opening. All seven participants who completed the survey consented to participate voluntarily in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the four-week data collection process ended on February 22, 2022, I imported the collected survey data into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to begin the data analysis process. The NVivo system worked through a thematic automated coding process to identify codes and themes from the participants' responses. In addition to using NVivo software, I manually coded utilizing in vivo coding, a type of coding in which a researcher seeks to identify codes from the data themselves to emphasize the depictions of the participants through establishing meaningful concepts, patterns, and themes. Codes and themes were generated solely based on descriptive responses to each survey question.

Thus, codes and themes were created from the responses of voluntary participants currently serving as law enforcement officials within the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The first round of coding, using NVivo software, generated generic codes from the participants' responses. The major data themes can be identified in Figure 2. The themes are organized from the most frequent occurrence being the largest to the least frequent occurrence being the smallest. The color-coded themes were the most frequently occurring themes identified within the data (see Figure 2). Figure 3 is representative of all themes found within the data (see Figure 3). In the second

round of coding, completed manually using in vivo coding, I created codes and themes specific to directly answering the study's research question of whether, and to what extent, existing law enforcement policies and procedures within a human trafficking unit's law enforcement officials perceive as barriers to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area within Texas. Based on the results, themes were created to answer the study's research question effectively.

## Figure 2

### *Major Data Themes Identification Word Cloud*





**Figure 3**

*Complete Data Themes Identification Map*

trafficking	traffickers	evidence	forensic	yes	cooperation	different	family	get	good	help	involved			
	child	lack	human	just	run	sane	sex	statement	system	ability				
			identification	nothing	arrest	cooperative	county	door	etc	exam	foreign			
victims	department	persons		placement	assist	give	level	local	none	officers	one			
	procedures	trafficker	leos		barriers	groups	outreach	someone	state	warrants	years			
			medical		police		call	hours	phone	also	assistance	attempting	attention	based
children	services	dtps	non	priority	charge	identify	potential	answered	bonds	case	cases	cellphone		
prosecution	victim	even	time	prostitution	city	investigation	protective	apartment	business	certain	coming	conducted		
				resources				area	cant					
					continue	juvenile	revolving	asked	care		change	cps	educational	
										domestic				

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

**Credibility**

Credibility consists of 13 criteria: (a) the establishment and adoption of research methods; (b) the researcher’s knowledge and familiarity with the organization's participation in the study; (c) random sampling; (d) triangulation; (e) ensuring honesty from informants; (f) iterative questioning; (g) negative case analysis; (h) consistent debriefing; (i) colleagues, peer, and academic scrutiny of the research; (j) background, qualifications, and experience of the investigator; (k) member checks; (l) detailed description of the phenomenon being scrutinized; and (m) pre-established research findings examination (Shenton, 2004, pp. 64-69).

The research question and the survey questionnaire were developed based on a solid foundation of current literature and worked towards the discovery and understanding of whether and to what extent, do existing law enforcement policies and procedures within a human trafficking unit's law enforcement officials perceive as barriers to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area within Texas. The research approach was consistent with the methods used by prior researchers conducting studies within the realm of both human trafficking and case studies. Before conducting any research, I received approval from Walden University's IRB and the Office of Planning and Data Governance, the legal team, and the chief of police of the police department, where the study was to ensure credibility, legality, and ethical compliance. As Yin (1981) indicated, a case study "attempts to examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident." As prescribed, this exploratory case study aimed to provide insight through explanations of human trafficking unit officials within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5–17 through identifying barriers by law enforcement policies and procedures. All procedures prescribed within the study were strictly adhered to to ensure the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Transferability**

Transferability involves applying the study's findings and conclusions to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). The study focused on gathering perceptions of law enforcement officials to share their insights into the barriers law

enforcement policies, and procedures face in the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Nonetheless, with all of the information gathered during this study, the study can pave a pathway to be expanded upon and seamlessly allow new opportunities to be transferred and applied to future studies. The purpose of the study was to explore and discover whether, and to what extent, existing law enforcement policies and procedures within a human trafficking unit's law enforcement officials perceive as barriers to the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area within Texas, which grants the ability to transfer the data in order to determine whether the same barriers identified in this study exist in other areas, applicable to other age range fields, and extend to looking at other areas extending outside of the scope of policies and procedures and extending beyond law enforcement officials. Additionally, even though the population from which the data were collected was narrow in scope, the population could be expanded to other human trafficking units, multiple units at a time for a compare and contrast analysis, multiple nation-states, and/or globally.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is established through the researcher documenting the processes utilized in detail, granting future researchers to continue to study, even if the prospective study does not specify the same results (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). This is where the researcher lays the groundwork for the research to be continued by future researchers. Everything through the way the study was conducted must be detailed throughout the

study. This grants future research the ability to continue the study, establishing credibility on the completed work prior, even if a different outcome results.

The qualitative study was conducted utilizing the survey software of Qualtrics to distribute an anonymous link email survey by the Office of Planning and Data Governance within a police department located within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to law enforcement officials within the appropriate designated unit of the human trafficking unit. Once all data collection was completed by voluntary participation in the survey, the survey was then transitioned into the qualitative data analysis software of NVivo. The study sought to collect 10 participants to participate in the study conducted or until evidence of saturation was reached. Out of twenty individuals currently serving within the human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas, the study collected responses from seven voluntary participants. The initial coding process was conducted utilizing the qualitative data analysis software of NVivo through an automated coding process and thematic analysis. The second round of coding and thematic analysis was conducted utilizing Microsoft Excel.

All data collected during the duration of the development of this study will be preserved and available for five years on a Western Digital, password-protected, external hard drive. After such time has passed, all data will be deleted to ensure the anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy of all participants who participated in the study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability consists of the researcher establishing their predisposition within the study, putting forth all decisions made and methods adopted, the reasoning for the

study's approach, strengths and limitations to the study, and recommendations gathered throughout (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). In order to ensure the confirmability of the study conducted, the research includes verbatim responses from the survey, except for the exclusion of any identifying information that could potentially place the participants, human trafficking potential victims, or human trafficking victims in harm's way. Utilizing verbatim survey responses from the participants of the study permitted contextual data. The study's results were analyzed, coded, categorized, and themed. Distribution of the survey results to participants within the study was unable to be distributed as the survey was conducted in an anonymous format.

### **Results**

In this section, the findings are presented in a direct correlation between the research question and the responses granted by the voluntary participants in the study. As previously described, the responses were collected by utilizing the survey software of Qualtrics through an anonymous active link email survey sent by email to the office of Planning and Data Governance of a police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The office of Planning and Data Governance then distributed the survey among the designated unit of the human trafficking unit in order to collect the perspectives of law enforcement officials directly working with human trafficking in order to gain a direct understanding of the barriers that are derived from law enforcement policies and procedures directly affecting the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17. The survey questionnaire consisted of a total of twenty-four questions, with the first three being demographic questions regarding the years of experience working with human

trafficking prior, start date, and understanding of whether or not each individual had held any type of experience working with human trafficking prior to coming to the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Questions 7 and 9 were purposely repetitious, working on delving deeper into the responses collected by the respondents. Question 2 was alleviated from both reporting and data analysis to ensure anonymity was protected because the starting year of an individual participant could directly link to the participant's identity being disclosed.

Once the data collection process concluded, the results of all seven participants were transmitted to the qualitative data analysis software of NVivo for data analysis. The Auto code feature within NVivo 12 was utilized to decipher thematic analysis. Throughout the results section of this chapter, I will be directly iterating and providing an in-depth analysis of the participants' responses by presenting the e-mail survey findings summarized by each question posed. This will be inclusive of direct quotes from the participants.

### **Years of Service in the Unit**

Email Survey Question 1: "How many years of service have you dedicated to the Human Trafficking Unit located within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?"

There was a wide variance in response among the years of service dedicated to the Human Trafficking Unit thus far within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Each participant's experiences and perceptions vary. As such, each differing level of experience is critical to understanding the differing perspectives of each individual, from newly starting within the field working towards the prevention of human trafficking to

those participants who have developed tenure. Participant experiences within the Human Trafficking Unit ranged from one year of experience, extending to a total of twenty years of experience. One participant indicated a total of one year of experience, one participant indicated two years of experience, two participants indicated three years of experience, two participants indicated four years of experience, and one indicated twenty years of experience. The themes identified through the provided responses were that majority of the individuals currently serving within the police department's Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas hold four years or less from the seven participants within the study.

### **Prior Experience in a Human Trafficking Unit**

Email Survey Question 3: "Did you have experience working with Human Trafficking before coming to the Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?"

The third question inquired about each participant's experience working with Human Trafficking before serving in the police department's Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Five of seven individuals indicated no experience working with Human Trafficking prior to serving within the police department's Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Only two participants indicated prior experience with Human Trafficking before serving within the police department's Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The theme identified through the provided responses was that most individuals who serve on the human trafficking unit among the seven participants held no direct

experience in working with human trafficking prior to becoming a part of the Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

### **Examples of Prior Experiences With Human Trafficking Cases**

Email Survey Question 4: “Can you give me an example of your experiences working in Human Trafficking before coming to the Police Department’s Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?”

As two of the seven participants indicated experience prior to serving on the Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, the fourth question followed up to probe to determine what experiences had been held with the declared prior experience within the realm of Human Trafficking. Four of the seven participants declared no prior experience before deeming an answer of none or not applicable to the probing question. One of the two individuals with prior experience stated, “I worked undercover in the Vice Division, where we had direct interaction with potential trafficking victims during our operations. I had been assigned to Vice for over nine years, four years before an established trafficking unit,” The second participant who had indicated prior experience stated, “speaking with victims of human trafficking who make outcries. Dealing with their pimps. Taking the victims to the hospital and finding other resources to recover from trafficking. Writing arrests warrants for their traffickers”. The themes identified by the two individuals who had direct experience with human trafficking before serving on the police department’s Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas were interactions with victims and traffickers. The



other theme identified was held by four of the respondents who held no experience prior to joining the human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

### **What Human Trafficking Encompasses**

Email Survey Question 5: “From your perspective, what all does human trafficking encompass?”

A total of five of the seven participants responded to the question pertaining to what all does human trafficking encompass. Four of five respondents directly identified human trafficking as encompassing sex trafficking. Sex trafficking was directly linked to the responses of ‘sex buyer’, ‘labor buyer’, ‘buyers’, ‘sex slavery’, ‘forced labor’, and ‘identifying and grooming persons to engage in sex/work’. Relating to sex trafficking, two of five respondents reported prostitution by directly identifying “street prostitution”, “hotel prostitution,” and “prostitution” as encompassing human trafficking. Four of five respondents directly linked human trafficking to encompass traffickers, with three respondents specifically stating “traffickers” and one stating “promoting and profiting from those persons”. Three of five respondents directly reported victims as encompassing human trafficking, while only one of five respondents indicated “potential victims”.

Two of five respondents indicated recruiter as encompassing sex trafficking by directly identifying “recruiter” and “identifying and grooming persons to engage in sex/work trafficking” as parts of what human trafficking encompasses. Two of five respondents identified law enforcement as part of what human trafficking encompasses by stating, ‘law enforcement’, and ‘search warrants/arrest warrants’. One of five respondents directly indicated non-governmental organizations as encompassing human

trafficking. One of five respondents directly indicated indentured servitude as encompassing human trafficking. One of five respondents directly indicated child trafficking as encompassing human trafficking. Lastly, only one of five respondents indicated the areas of “service providers, foreign trafficking, domestic trafficking, brothels, massage parlors, and cantinas.” The themes identified through the provided responses were sex trafficking, traffickers, and victims.

### **Defining Prevention**

Email Survey Question 6: “From your perspective, how do you define prevention?”

There was a wide variance in response among the five out of seven responses received from the participants. However, even though each of the responses differed in each participant’s perception, each of the responses interconnected with one another, and all responses collected focused on the phenomenon of human trafficking. Four out of five respondents indicated that working towards a resolution was defining prevention. The respondents declared, “a plan how to solve the issue; prevention through suppression; ‘find and punish; rescuing and rehabilitating; and stopping (a crime) from occurring” Three out of five respondents indicated the defining of prevention to place particular emphasis on the root of the problem. This was illustrated through the respondents indicating, ‘I believe in prevention through suppression. If ‘you’ arrest John’s and traffickers less victims can be trafficked,’ , ‘find and punish persons contributing to the financial benefits of trafficking while rescuing and rehabilitating victims,’ and ‘stopping (a crime) from occurring’. Only one respondent indicated that education and planning

defined prevention. Only one respondent indicated a 'good stable family foundation,' was defining prevention. The themes identified through the provided responses focused on the root of the problem and working towards a resolution.

### **Perceived Barriers to the Prevention of Child Trafficking**

Email Survey Questions 7 and 9: "What types of barriers are presented to you while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?"

Five out of seven participants responded to the question about what types of barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials working within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17. All five respondents indicated cooperation as a barrier. Four out of five responses stated that the area of cooperation that presented a barrier was the child victim of human trafficking. The responses indicating the cooperation that presented a barrier was the child victim of human trafficking stated, 'the great majority of these children either run from home or DFPS placement. We cannot put them in a lockdown facility, so they just run again with a different trafficker,' 'cooperation from the victim especially teenage victims who are in the dfps/case system,' 'child protective services can sometimes be a revolving door,' 'cooperation of those children for prosecution of their traffickers,'. One out of five responses stated that the area of cooperation that presented a barrier was the provided services. The response stated, "poor social services and NGO's unwillingness and inability to assist LEOs."

All five respondents indicated services as a type of barrier being presented to law enforcement officials working within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17. The respondents identified these services as a barrier to identifying children, DFPS placement, case system, children's protective services, social services, and NGOs. Two out of five respondents noted prosecution as a barrier. The respondents stated, 'they are also notoriously non-cooperative and we need a good statement to prosecute (assuming the county prosecutes when for the majority of the cases, they just plead down to a lesser charge),' and 'prosecution of the persons involved in the trafficking, '. When asked the question an additional time within question 9 of the Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey, one respondent added one additional area by indicating, 'besides the above statement, the immediate problem is waiting for a forensic medical exam. Only a certified SANE nurse can conduct the exam and the wait can be long. When this happens, she is even less likely to participate and that evidence is gone, '. The themes identified through the provided responses are cooperation, services, and prosecution.

### **Examples of Barriers to Prevention**

Email Survey Question 8: "Can you give specific examples excluding any type of identifying information within the area of prevention?"

Four of the seven participants responded to the question of can you give specific examples excluding any type of identifying information within the area of prevention. Three out of four respondents indicated cooperation. The respondents stated, 'I have recovered several juveniles who have run from Child Protective Services (CPS)

placement (where the newer girls were recruited by more seasoned victims). During interview they swear up and down that they will just run again from Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) because they just hate it that much. They refuse to give a statement and they decline a forensic medical exam. They are usually gone before they can be forensically interviewed. Any evidence in the phone is swiped remotely by the time we get a search warrant on the device,’ ‘when coming into contact with juvenile victims of trafficking, getting assistance from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government entities like DFPS during evening hours takes multiple hours of phone calls met with constant resistance or refusal from said entities to assist LEOs in providing victims placement or resources,’ ‘identification of persons from foreign countries, (ex. China, Guatemala, etc.). They are brought to (a greater metropolitan area in Texas), forced or coerced into sex trafficking. They do not speak the language or know where they are. They constantly move from city to city and from apartment to apartment or business to business. Even when identified, they are too scared to give information. It has been my experience that they would rather go to jail/be deported than give testimony of their experiences,’. Three out of four respondents indicated services. The services indicated were DFPS, CPS Placement, NGOs, and government entities. Only one of the respondents indicated ‘a good family foundation. Nothing is certain that someone will not become a victim,’. There was a total of two themes identified. The themes identified through the provided responses were cooperation and services.

### **Top Three Barriers to the Prevention of Child Trafficking**

Email Survey Question 10: “What do you feel are the top three barriers presented to you while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?”

Four of the seven participants responded to the question of what do you feel are the top three barriers presented to you while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. There was a wide variance in responses among all four respondents. Resources was the key theme identified among all four respondents’ responses. The second theme identified among two of the four respondents was that of prosecution. The responses indicated, ‘lack of forensic sane nurses on call, lack of familial support/children in the system who hate it, ability to easily swipe cellphone evidence,’ ‘children’s protective services, foster care, the trafficker manipulating a child into thinking they are the only one that will ever care for them,’ ‘lack of resources, manpower shortages within the department and refusals from civilian organizations to offer aide expected of them makes preliminary investigations take 8-12 hours wasting valuable time and money. Lack of prosecution from District Attorney’s Office. No prospective punishment from the (greater metropolitan area in Texas) Judges. Year-long investigations result in \$100 bonds and a revolving door justice system. Traffickers out on bond pose a threat to victims and result in lack of future cooperation and create an illusion that LEOs cannot help or protect victims,’ and ‘prosecution of perpetrators resources involved,’. The themes identified through the provided responses were resources and prosecution.

### **Significance of the Top Three Barriers**

Email Survey Question 11: “What is the significance of these three barriers, in your opinion?”

Four out of seven participants responded to the question of what is the significance of these three barriers, in your opinion. Two of four respondents indicated the area of cooperation as a significant factor of the three barriers previously identified within question 10. One of the respondents indicated the area of cooperation while also alluding to the area of prosecution, ‘no trust between LEOs and victims means no cooperation means no prosecution to traffickers. Two respondents indicated that the significance of the three barriers identified was that of resources. One of the respondents indicated the area of resources and included cooperation and prosecution by stating, ‘without a strong family background and supportive foster home, the child will continue to run and find shelter with a trafficker. This will continue the cycle of the child being non-cooperative with the sane nurse and deletion of any cellphone evidence. This makes prosecution near impossible and allows trafficker to continue victimizing children,’. Another respondent indicated resources but indicated time, education, and training as barriers by stating, ‘most police departments are results-oriented and reactive. It is easier to identify and investigate the ‘obvious’ cases of human trafficking. It is difficult and time consuming to identify the underground trafficking. It takes a level of skill and computer savvy to identify on-line traffickers,’. Three of the four respondents indicated that the significance was resources. From foster homes, shelters, SANE nurses, cellphone evidence, children’s protective services, computer savvy, skill, time, training, and

education. The themes identified through the provided responses are cooperation, prosecution, and resources.

### **Whether Policies Contribute to Barriers**

Email Survey Question 12: “Are policies contributing to these barriers presented to you while working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?”

Four out of seven participants responded to the question of are policies contributing to these barriers presented to you while working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. There was a wide variance in response among all four of the respondents. However, all respondents agreed that policies contribute to these barriers to law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17. One of the respondents indicated policies created a barrier within the area of releasing the child to a family member by stating, ‘Yes. I do not have authority to release a child to a family member she prefers if she is in the custody of CPS,’. Another respondent indicated that policies created a barrier to services and resources. The respondent stated, ‘a policy limiting officers to where they need to get these specific services. Only one facility when there are others but there is an agreement in place based off of financial arrangements,’. The theme identified through the provided responses was that policies contribute to the barriers presented to law enforcement officials while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.



**Effects of Policies at the Local, State, or Federal Level**

Email Survey Question 13: “If so, do you feel departmental policies affect these policies on the local, state, or federal level, or a combination of the three, or all levels?”

Four out of seven participants responded to the question of if so, do you feel departmental policies affect these policies on the local, state, or federal level, or a combination of the three, or all levels. Three of four respondents indicated state. Three of four respondents indicated local. Two of four respondents indicated both local and state. The themes identified through the provided responses were local, state, local and state.

**Procedures Implemented to Prevent Child Trafficking**

Email Survey Question 14: “What procedures are implemented when working towards the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?”

Four out of seven participants responded to the question of what procedures are implemented when working towards the prevention of human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. There was a wide variance in response among all four respondents. One of four respondents declined to indicate any police procedures throughout the survey. One of four respondents indicated there are ‘many steps outlined by each department,’. One of four respondents stated within their current position, ‘prevention of trafficking is not the priority. Identification, arrest, and prosecution of those involved in human trafficking is the priority,’. One of four respondents indicated, ‘law enforcement is educating the public and we have implemented procedures to work cooperatively with DFPS, non-governmental services,

forensic interviewers, and forensic medical examiners. The themes identified through the provided responses were not transparent. Further research will need to be conducted to determine the exact procedures implemented. Some responses indicated that implementing prevention procedures was not a responsibility of the police department as the police department focuses on after-the-fact resolutions and not before the fact. However, another inclination led to certain procedures being implemented to tackle the prevention piece within the HTCE prevention of children ages 5 to 17.

### **Whether Procedures Contribute to Barriers**

Email Survey Question 15: “Are procedures contributing to these barriers presented to you while working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?”

Four out of seven participants responded to the question of are procedures contributing to these barriers presented to you while working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. There was a wide variance in response among all four respondents. One of the respondents declared there are ‘no departmental procedures at this time,’. Three out of four respondents indicated that current procedures are contributing to the barriers presented to law enforcement officials within the human trafficking unit working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. One of four respondents stated the police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas ‘was one of the first law enforcement agencies to start such a task force,’. One of four respondents indicated, ‘procedures taken by the police department only encompass a

small part of human trafficking within the city.’ While the responses were varied and similar in conjunction with Question 14, one particular theme was identified through the provided responses in indicating procedures contribute to the barriers being presented to law enforcement officials working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Further research will need to be conducted in order to clarify the discrepancies.

### **Perceived Effects of Procedures on Prevention of Child Trafficking**

Email Survey Question 16: If so, what procedures and how do you perceive the procedures to be affecting the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?

Four out of seven participants responded to the question of, if so, what procedures and how do you perceive the procedures to be affecting the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Two out of four respondents indicated medical services as the procedures affecting the prevention of human trafficking ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. One of the four respondents stated, ‘the procedures help law enforcement to gather evidence for prosecution while providing medical assistance to the child and linking them with victim services who have the ability to follow up with the victim more often.’ One of the four respondents indicated, ‘wait time and priority based on other factors which have nothing to do with human trafficking. Such as being in an emergency room where other physical injuries take priority of my case’. One of the four respondents had a differing perception by indicating, ‘if there are procedures to prevent the trafficking, they are conducted by a

different area in the police department or by non-governmental groups. In my area of the department, it is the identification, arrest, and prosecution,.’ One respondent declared it not applicable due to the respondent’s provided perception within the previous question. The theme identified through the provided responses was medical services.

### **Specific Contributors to Barriers**

Email Survey Question 17: “Are there specific areas contributing to these barriers within the scope of prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?”

Three out of seven participants responded to the question of are there specific areas contributing to these barriers within the scope of prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. There was a wide variance in response among all three of the respondents. One of the respondents indicated hospitals, the second respondent indicated outreach is conducted by outreach groups, while the third respondent indicated a simple ‘yes.’ However, the consensus among the three respondents agreed that specific areas are contributing to these barriers within the scope of prevention of human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Among the three responses, the theme identified through the provided responses specific areas contributing to barriers within the scope of prevention of human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

### **Examples of Barriers Being Presented**

Email Survey Question 18: “Without identifying these areas, could you provide specific examples of the barriers being presented?”

Two out of seven participants responded to the question of without identifying these areas, could you provide specific examples of the barriers being presented. One of the respondents indicated the respondent would not elaborate, while the other respondent stated, ‘I recover a juvenile who is in a hotel bought by a potential trafficker. I cannot get a charge without a good statement from the juvenile and evidence that prostitution is occurring. If she is non-cooperative, she will not talk. She will refuse the sane and her phone will be swiped before the warranted extraction. He will not be charged with anything trafficking related and I will not even get a harboring charge. If I cannot prove that he knew she was a runaway,’. No theme was identified, as only one respondent elaborated on specific examples relating to Question 17. Further research will need to be conducted to present a more accurate viewpoint.

### **Perceived Improvements**

Email Survey Question 19: Have you seen any improvements towards these barriers being presented to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?

Four out of seven participants responded to the question of have you seen any improvements towards these barriers being presented to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Two of the respondents indicated improvements, while two of the respondents indicated no improvements. One

of the two respondents who indicated improvements stated, ‘attempts so far,’ while the other elaborated and indicated, ‘outreach groups, churches, etc. are making the trafficking of humans more understood. Laws regarding signs put up in nail salons, massage parlors, airports, etc. to help people understand what trafficking is.’ One of the respondents elaborated on the respondent’s response of no improvement, stating, ‘LEOs voice concerns and are told that we are “heard.” Nothing has changed in three years.’ The themes identified through the provided responses were improvements and no improvements. Further research will need to be conducted to determine whether or not improvements are being made or improvements are not being made within the area of barriers being presented to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

### **Specific Examples of Improvements**

Email Survey Question 20: If so, can you give specific examples of these improvements, excluding any identifying information?

Three out of seven participants responded to the question of can you give specific examples of these improvements, excluding any identifying information. Two of the respondents indicated improvements, while one respondent stated, ‘no improvement.’ The two respondents who indicated improvements stated, ‘supervisors willing to listen to officers who deal with the barriers more frequently and attempting to change procedures after listening to officers’ input,’ and ‘social media advertising.’ Among the two responses, the theme identified through the provided responses was improvement.

### **Effects and Side Effects of Improvements**

Email Survey Question 21: Have these improvements contributed to alleviating these barriers or created more barriers to preventing the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?

Only four out of seven participants in the study responded to the question of whether these improvements contributed to alleviating these barriers or created more barriers to preventing the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. There was a wide variance in response among all four of the respondents. One of the four respondents indicated, ‘the barriers remain the same,’ while another respondent indicated, ‘more and more barriers are added to ability to combat trafficking.’ On the other hand, one respondent indicated whether the improvements are alleviating or creating more barriers to preventing the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, while another respondent indicated a response of ‘neither.’ The theme identified through the provided responses is that barriers are present. Further research will need to be conducted to determine if barriers are stagnant or continuing to rise in number, as it is apparent that barriers are not being alleviated through the responses.

### **Examples of These Effects**

Email Survey Question 22: Can you give specific examples excluding any identifying information?

Only two out of seven participants responded to the question of can you give specific examples excluding any identifying information. The two responses illustrated

the ability to grant specific examples. However, one respondent declared a response of ‘not while excluding identifying information, while the other respondent declared, ‘signs in airports/nail salons,.’ No themes were identified as responses varied, and a limited number of responses were received. Further research will need to be conducted in order to gather specific examples.

### **Ideas for How to Overcome Barriers**

Email Survey Question 23: “In what ways do you feel the barriers you presented today that are being presented to the prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas can be overcome?”

Out of seven participants within the study, only two participants responded to the question of in what ways do you feel the barriers you presented today that are being presented to the prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas can be overcome. The first respondent declared, “someone needs to be brave enough/want to effect change to the Harris County Judicial System.” The second respondent did not grant any details into the specifics of how they can be overcome but indicated with a response of ‘a few,’ indicating the respondent has thoughts regarding how, but did not disclose the ways barriers could be overcome within the study. One theme, in particular, was brought to light through the two responses that were granted by the respondents that there are barriers present, and the law enforcement officials do have ideas to how these barriers can be overcome in order to further work towards the prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.



## **Final Thoughts**

Email Survey Question 24: “Do you have anything else you would like to share?”

Only one respondent, when asked the question of if the respondent had anything else the respondent would like to share, responded with an additional response. The respondent indicated, “more attention needs to be spent on identifying and attempting to rescue male children – via the internet, or through confidential informants. Most of the attention now is on females – street walkers.” As only one participant responded to the question, no themes were recorded.

## **Summary**

In Chapter 4, I provided a detailed analytical review of the research methodology utilized for this study. Participants voluntarily elected to participate in the study through a Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey created by the researcher and distributed by the Office of Planning and Data Governance to the designated unit of the Human Trafficking Unit within a police department within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. NVivo qualitative data analysis software assisted in facilitating the coding and thematic analysis of data collected within the 24-question anonymous active link email survey questionnaire. The seven respondents to the anonymous Qualtrics active link email survey provided insightful data to the discovery of whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17. After compiling all of the data from the respondents, thorough and rigorous analysis granted transparency to the thematic

patterns emerging from the responses that complemented the prior peer-reviewed research within the literature compiled in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 will provide the integration, synthesis, and evaluation of the literature review findings and email survey findings as they relate to the research question.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter provides the integration, synthesis, and evaluation of the literature review findings and email survey findings as they relate to the research question. From the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations to the study's implications, I can present the ability for positive social change as a result of this study.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement officials within a greater metropolitan area human trafficking unit in Texas to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures within HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17. In this study, I sought understanding and clarity from the lived experiences of law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to what law enforcement policies and procedures were implicitly implied to be understood as barriers to the area of HTCE prevention of children ages of 5–17. The theoretical framework of ST allowed me to approach the data collected in a systematic and organized approach by putting all the pieces together from a linear perspective to determine the truth of what is happening or causing the identified problem in full context. ST provided the theoretical lens through which I could look at the barriers presented by law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit by the study's participants.

The literature review revealed the gap in knowledge within the discipline of public policy and administration addressed within the study related to law enforcement

policies and procedures presenting barriers to law enforcement officials within the area of prevention of children between the ages of 5 to 17, specifically within the area of HTCE. As the researcher, I attempted to contribute to the body of knowledge by determining whether and to what degree barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17.

The Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in the state of Texas works diligently in their efforts to combat the phenomenon of human trafficking. However, there is still room for improvement. The literature reflected and the study has confirmed the existence of barriers within law enforcement policies and procedures.

As the results reflected, participants agreed that barriers are present and presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area within HTCE prevention of children between ages 5 to 17 in Texas. Most participants perceived that the barriers from law enforcement policies and procedures were present within the identified areas of cooperation, services, prosecution, and resources. However, to what extent these barriers are being presented has yet to be clarified. As illustrated within the results and identified themes, further research needs to be conducted in several areas to ground concrete evidence from the perceptions of law enforcement officials working within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas. Some of the results reflected divided opinions, while others failed to respond or provide any answer with a substantive nature. Several major themes emerged:

- cooperation

- services
- prosecution
- victims
- trafficking

In this chapter's next section, I present the interpretation of the findings.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The literature provided a solid foundation for conducting the study. The purpose of the study was to discover whether, and to what degree, barriers are being presented by law enforcement policies and procedures to law enforcement officials of a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas within HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17. The interpretation of the findings has confirmed within the knowledge contained in current literature the existence of barriers facing the ability to prevent human trafficking, including where most studies have focused directly on the instance of human trafficking after-the-fact (Albright, 2019; Alizada & Wildman, 2019; Brandt et al., 2018; Farrell et al., 2020; Fedina et al., 2019; Greenbaum, 2017; Hampton & Lieggi, 2020; Lavoie et al., 2020; Middleton et al., 2019; Mostajabian et al., 2019; O'Brien & Li, 2020; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019; van der Watt & van der Westhuizen, 2017; Walts, 2017; Zejneli, 2021).

The literature indicated that most prior studies have reflected knowledge of the existence of barriers and established a foundation for after-the-fact resolutions and recommendations. However, the current study extends the knowledge foundation from the perceptions of law enforcement officials within human trafficking that the same

barriers within prior studies are still relevant and exist today from a before-the-fact preventative perspective. This study extends the knowledge of the perceptions of law enforcement officials working within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas while confirming the knowledge from prior studies.

### **Reiterating the Systems Theory Lens**

As indicated prior, systems theory consists of five areas that work collectively to create the whole to bring about a sustainable resolution to the occurring phenomenon. Within Senge (2006), the five areas contained within systems theory are systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning. Each of these five areas within systems theory cannot work within a silo but must bring forth a collective front. Personal mastery focuses on the individual as the critical piece within the organization. Senge indicated that the individual could continually grow by clarifying and deepening one's vision, collecting one's thoughts, establishing patience, and seeing reality with an open mindset impartially and accurately. Senge indicated that personal mastery takes account of the individual who becomes a participant within the study by sharing their individual perspective and the researcher's interpretation of that particular set of data. Senge stated that mental models consist of looking at something from the inside out and unveiling it for analysis. Mental models unveil when the researcher dives into the literature and the data to bring about an understanding. Senge specified that building shared vision grants the ability for individuals to work together, building towards a set of principles and guiding practices to achieve the vision. Building shared vision unveils when all the data has been collected and analyzed to provide an

interpretation to bring about a resolution for change. Senge determined that team learning established that communication and thinking as a collective unit are critical to the organization's overall success and the level of achievements being accomplished. Team learning unveils itself when all the data has been collected and is placed alongside the literature to identify what has changed, what has not, and what needs to be changed. Senge showed that systems thinking works towards realizing the specific patterns, how those patterns have changed over time, and building what is known into a complete understanding of the entire system. Once the data has been collected, the researcher will then perform coding, categorizing, and theming to analyze the data to the literature to confirm and extend the literature as a collective whole with the data. From building shared vision establishing commitment, mental models unearthing shortcomings, team learning developing skillsets, personal mastery bringing about an understanding of how actions affect the world, and lastly, bringing it all together by establishing the individual's perception of oneself and the individual's perception of the world (Senge, 2006). Systems theory takes mental models, team learning, personal mastery, and systems thinking to build upon the other to reflect the learning organization and how all the pieces come together to create a lasting resolution.

While little to no research has been conducted utilizing the theoretical framework of systems theory, nor to the extent of determining whether barriers are present in law enforcement policies and procedures surrounding the area of human trafficking within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, many studies have established barriers being present within law enforcement policies and procedures within the area of human trafficking.

Through the confirmation and extension of the literature through the data, looking at the system through the lens of systems theory, the study can identify whether barriers are present in law enforcement policies and procedures surrounding the area of human trafficking within a greater metropolitan area in Texas, and further extend the knowledge foundation to work towards correcting the barriers identified or utilize the study for further research to be conducted in order to continue working towards combatting the phenomenon of human trafficking. Next, I will provide a deeper look at the application of the literature and the data collectively.

### **Confirming the Literature**

The literature and the data additionally supported one another within the area that policies and procedures present barriers to preventing human trafficking. The literature directly reflected that continuous upgrades of state laws and evaluations of current efforts to combat human trafficking are needed at the state and local levels of government (Kappler & Richie-Zavaleta, 2020). As the data reflected, policies can place limitations on law enforcement officials to where they could provide services or act to prevent human trafficking. The data reflected a mixed consensus on whether or not improvements have been made towards the barriers being presented to the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas by policies and procedures. The literature and the data also directly indicated procedures contributing to preventing human trafficking. However, the data reflected a wide variance in responses as some indicated there were no procedures currently in place, while others indicated procedures only encompass a small part of human trafficking.



## **Cooperation and Victims**

The literature and data directly aligned with the types of barriers presented from cooperation, services, prosecution, victims, and trafficking. As the data reflected, these barriers are seen within the law enforcement officials' inability to speak the victims' language, the cooperation of the victims, lack of manpower, lack of resources, and identification of potential and current victims. The studies of Farrell et al. (2020), Dandurand (2017), Cole and Sprang (2020), and Alizada and Wildman (2019) all indicated that training, collaboration, and communication are critical components to overcoming barriers. Without the ability to speak the language of the victims, cooperation from the individuals who are either potential victims or either being victimized, not enough individuals to support the operation being conducted or the resources to conduct the operation, establishes a multitude of different barriers when it comes to the prevention of human trafficking, especially pertaining to potential victims. The data extended upon the literature to indicate further that when coming into contact with juvenile victims of trafficking, getting assistance from NGOs and government entities like DFPS during evening hours takes multiple hours of phone calls met with constant resistance or refusal from said entities to assist LEOs in providing victims placement or resources.

To elaborate further, the literature reflected by Simmons et al. (2018), from a global standpoint to a national standpoint, transitioning further to states and local implementation and execution of laws, each must work together collectively to begin a resolution. All of these are parts of the system. If one part of the system fails, so does the other part. As the data reflected, one specific issue pertaining to the system not working

is that of poor social services and NGOs' unwillingness to assist LEOs. The literature also reflected that a prior established policy targeted the arresting and prosecution of minor sex trafficking victims for the crime of prostitution (Alizada & Wildman, 2019). The system fails those who have been victims of human trafficking rather than targeting those who were the victimizers, known as traffickers, due to a prior established policy targeting prostitution. This ties directly to the cooperation from victims of human trafficking cooperating with LEOs when prior instances have occurred set a standard of reputation that hinders the future trust placed in LEOs by victims of human trafficking. The literature additionally reflected that children did not trust the system and feared reporting to police officials, establishing a barrier in identifying and disclosing human trafficking victims (Mostajabian et al., 2019). As the data reflected, no trust between LEOs and victims means no cooperation means no prosecution of traffickers, and the cooperation of those children for the prosecution of their traffickers is critical.

### **Services and Victims**

Ferrell et al. (2020) indicated that law enforcement has a critical role in protecting individuals who have been victimized by the global phenomenon of human trafficking and meeting victims' needs. One area identified within the literature by Farrell et al. indicated that the responses by law enforcement officials do not always meet the needs of the victims of human trafficking, and law enforcement responses that closely align with the needs of victims of human trafficking, as well the impacts of implementing meaningful responses of justice through the criminal justice system. Deeb-Swihart et al. (2019) also stated, "the needs of law enforcement officials working on human trafficking

cases from a socio-technical perspective and understanding how HCI researchers can better design tools to support law enforcement.” As the data reflected, this stems from educating the general public and law enforcement officials to work cooperatively with DFPS, nongovernmental services, forensic interviews, and forensic medical examiners who are directly involved with assisting the needs of human trafficking victims.

The data reflected several barriers being faced by victims, including poor social services, NGOs’ unwillingness and inability to assist LEOs, Children’s protective services being a revolving door, and policies limiting officers’ ability to assist by agreements being in place to where they are only permitted to use specific facilities and/or services to get the victims the assistance they need, specifically those with financial agreements in place. One significant finding from the literature that was not evident within the data collected was the indication from Dandurand (2017), in establishing that a more proactive approach from law enforcement agencies needs to happen within the area of child protection, multi-disciplinary approaches, and interagency cooperation. The data reflected that law enforcement officials are still solely focusing on the reactionary versus preventative approach to the global phenomenon of human trafficking.

### **Prosecution and Victims**

Prosecution is seen in two parts from the literature perspective, both of which are a product of a failing judicial system. The first part was only identified within the literature to the degree that policies specifically target individuals who have been identified as victims of human trafficking after the fact for crimes of prostitution. As the

literature indicated, a prior established policy targeted the arresting and prosecution of minor sex trafficking victims for the crime of prostitution (Alizada & Wildman, 2019). As indicated previously, within the area of cooperation, the system fails those who have been victims of human trafficking rather than targeting those who were the victimizers, known as traffickers, due to a prior established policy targeting prostitution. The second part is where LEOs are unable to prosecute due to a multitude of factors. As the literature reflected exposing the lack of general awareness around agricultural labor trafficking to state and local law enforcement agencies, either ignoring requests for information or showing no evidence of victimization (Barrick et al., 2014). The data reflected that without cooperation and a good statement, prosecuting the case is extremely difficult and most times results in a lesser charge to the trafficker, lack of prosecution of the District Attorney's office due to victims' unwillingness to assist, lack of fitting bonds or punishments, and minimal bonds. Lack of prosecution results in an illusion that LEOs cannot assist human trafficking victims and permits traffickers to continue victimizing children. No trust between LEOs and victims means no cooperation means no prosecution of traffickers.

### **Trafficking**

As found within the data collected during the duration of this study was that human trafficking unit law enforcement officials relate human trafficking to that of solely sex trafficking. Within the study conducted by Farrell et al. (2020), labor trafficking is less identified than sex trafficking because law enforcement officials have tended to focus primarily on sex trafficking. Even though the definition of human trafficking is still being

expanded upon today, the literature reflected, the DOS stated, “the United States considers trafficking in persons, human trafficking, and modern slavery, to be interchangeable umbrella terms that refer to both sex and labor trafficking,” (United States Department of State, 2020). Additionally, the United Nations indicated specifically child trafficking, “child trafficking occurs when a person recruits, transfers, harbors, or receives a child less than 18 years of age for sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (Albright et al., 2019). Specifically bringing into question why the focus remains within solely the area of sex trafficking versus the encompassed definition detailing sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and indentured servitude (State News Service, 2021). The data reflected the perceptions of law enforcement officials defining human trafficking within a greater metropolitan area in Texas to the data reflected the perceptions of LEOs within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area to define human trafficking as consisting of the identification (domestic and international) and grooming of persons to engage in sex work trafficking; promoting and profiting from persons; prostitution; indentured servitude; sex slavery; forced labor; child trafficking; traffickers; buyers; and victims. The literature reflected the lack of knowledge surrounding the phenomenon of human trafficking as one of the major contributing factors to the extent of misclassification of victims and failing to act upon suspected trafficking cases (Irwin, 2017). The data also reflected that most police departments are results-oriented and reactive. It is easier to identify and investigate the obvious cases of human trafficking. It is difficult and time consuming to identify the underground trafficking. It takes a level of skill and computer

savvy to identify online traffickers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study had several limitations that arose during the completion of this study. The first of those limitations was the global pandemic of COVID-19. COVID-19 set parameters to how a study could be conducted due to the transmissibility and fatality rate. These parameters were set to protect not only the researcher but also the study participants. The second of those limitations was the method by which data could be collected. The original intent of the study was to be conducted through in-person interviews. However, a limitation arose during this study conducted due to the nature of the line of work in which these individuals work to combat the area of human trafficking. This limitation was addressed by changing the data collection tool from an interview questionnaire to a Qualtrics anonymous active link email survey distributed directly by the police department to all individuals working within the human trafficking unit. Each participant was ensured of their anonymity and confidentiality during this study, protecting the identities and locations of all participants.

However, several limitations arose, stemming from this one limitation to fully grasping a well-grounded and comprehensive understanding of the perspectives provided by law enforcement officials within the human trafficking unit in Texas. This limitation led to fewer participants and responses due to the survey being conducted online instead of the original intent of the study being conducted utilizing an in-person semi-structured format. Another limitation that stemmed was the inability to ask more probing questions or to be able to bring clarity through the re-wording of the question in order for the

participant to understand or to fully grasp the extent of what the question was asking comprehensively, and the study in and of itself was seeking to understand that the in-person semi-structured format would have permitted. A larger sample size of the participant population could have also granted more clarifying answers with a fuller explanation and solidifying themes to gain a deeper understanding of the survey questions.

Lastly, the law enforcement officials within the human trafficking unit in a metropolitan area in Texas could not be given a gift card in the amount of twenty-five dollars for their participation in the study due to their general order of not accepting any types of gifts for participation.

### **Recommendations**

The study was a qualitative case study designed to address the gap identified within the literature surrounding if and to what degree barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies and procedures working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17. The study results have just started to touch the surface to fill the gap in the knowledge of whether and to what degree barriers are being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies and procedures. In order to further the findings of this study, taking the knowledge gained from this study and continuing within other greater metropolitan areas, either in the state of Texas, within other states and those specific states' metropolitan areas, or doing a cross-comparison analysis of multiple greater metropolitan areas within the United States would be beneficial to gather more concrete evidence of exactly if and to what degree barriers are

being presented to law enforcement officials by law enforcement policies and procedures within a human trafficking unit to the HTCE prevention of children ages 5–17.

Further research would also benefit from being able to conduct the same study in an in-person semi-structured interview format utilizing confidentiality in order to ask more probing questions and gather a more in-depth answer to fully understand what barriers and to what extent the barriers are affecting law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

Additionally, further research would benefit by utilizing multiple metropolitan areas either within the same state or within multiple states where the numbers are continuously rising in order to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers being faced and to what extent these barriers hold an impact on the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5 to 17.

### **Implications**

The findings of this research can contribute to positive social change by providing insight into the barriers being faced by law enforcement officials serving within human trafficking units not only within the greater metropolitan area's human trafficking unit in Texas utilized within this study but in other metropolitan areas, local, state, or federal levels of officials working to combat human trafficking from a prevention standpoint of children ages 5 to 17, facing the barriers identified within this study. The study grants a pathway for future researchers to be conducted to continue working towards the prevention of human trafficking of children ages 5–17 and demonstrated gaps within this study. The potential for future research to be conducted in order to address gaps within



this study. The gaps include conducting the study in an in-person format utilizing in-person semi-structured interviews and being able to address the following gaps within the Qualtrics active link email survey:

- Question 14: Further research will need to be conducted to determine the exact procedures implemented. Some responses indicated that implementing prevention procedures was not a responsibility of the police department as the police department focuses on after-the-fact resolutions and not before the fact. However, another inclination led to certain procedures being implemented to tackle the prevention piece within the HTCE prevention of children ages 5 to 17.
- Question 18: No theme was identified, as only one respondent elaborated on specific examples relating to Question 17. Further research will need to be conducted to present a more accurate viewpoint.
- Question 19: Further research will need to be conducted to determine whether improvements are being made or improvements are not being made within the area of barriers being presented to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.
- Question 21: The theme identified through the provided responses barriers are present. Further research will need to be conducted to determine if barriers are stagnant or continuing to rise in number, as it is apparent that barriers are not being alleviated through the responses.

- Question 22: No themes were identified as responses varied, and a limited number of responses were received. Further research will need to be conducted in order to gather specific examples.
- Question 23: One theme, in particular, was brought to light through the two responses that were granted by the respondents that there are barriers present, and the law enforcement officials do have ideas to how these barriers can be overcome in order to further work towards the prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas.

The study grants some key barriers that could potentially be addressed by policy and procedural reforms.

### **Conclusion**

In this qualitative anonymous Qualtrics active link email survey-driven case study, I unveiled that many of the barriers identified within the literature are still relevant and exist today. The presentation of the findings of the research question indicated the prevalence of barriers in existence, and law enforcement officials tend to only focus on after-the-fact solutions rather than before-the-fact preventative stances. This results in a more reactive rather than proactive approach to resolving the phenomenon of human trafficking. This study illustrated the perspectives of law enforcement officials serving within a human trafficking unit in a greater metropolitan area in Texas pertaining to the area of policies and procedures presenting barriers to the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17. The study did confirm that law enforcement officials perceive policies and

procedures as presenting barriers to a human trafficking unit's law enforcement officials working towards the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5–17 in a greater metropolitan area in Texas. The results of this study granted the pathway for future research to be conducted within several areas, from determining the exact policies and procedures implemented, whether improvements are being made within the area of the prevention of human trafficking and whether barriers are stagnant or if barriers are continuing to rise in number.

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## Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

Dear Earl Laws,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Prevention: Human Trafficking - Child Exploitation."

Your approval # is 01-21-22-0995542. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on January 20, 2023 (or when your student status ends, whichever occurs first). One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 10 business days of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained on the Tools and Guides page of the Walden website:  
<https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/research-center/research-ethics/tools-guides>

Doctoral researchers are required to fulfill all of the Student Handbook's Doctoral Student Responsibilities Regarding Research Data regarding raw data retention and dataset confidentiality, as well as logging of all recruitment, data collection, and data management steps. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d)

Sincerely,

Research Ethics Support Specialist  
Research Ethics, Compliance, and Partnerships  
Walden University

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link:

<http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>

## Appendix B: Active Link Email Survey Questionnaire

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many years of service have you dedicated to the Human Trafficking Unit located within a greater metropolitan area in Texas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What year did you start?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you have experience working with Human Trafficking before coming to the Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can you give me an example of your experiences working within Human Trafficking before coming to the Police Department's Human Trafficking Unit within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From your perspective, what all does human trafficking encompass?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From your perspective, how do you define prevention?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of barriers are presented to you while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can you give specific examples excluding any type of identifying information within the area of prevention?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of barriers are presented to you while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you feel are the top three barriers presented to you while working to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ What is the significance of these three barriers, in your opinion?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are policies contributing to these barriers presented to you while working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ If so, do you feel departmental policies affect these policies on the local, state, or federal level, or a combination of the three, or all levels?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What procedures are implemented when working towards the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are procedures contributing to these barriers presented to you while working to prevent human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ If so, what procedures and how do you perceive the procedures to be affecting the prevention of human trafficking children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there specific areas contributing to these barriers within the scope of prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Without identifying these areas, could you provide specific examples of the barriers being presented?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have you seen any improvements towards these barriers being presented to prevent the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ If so, can you give specific examples of these improvements, excluding any identifying information?</li></ul></li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have these improvements contributed to alleviating these barriers or created more barriers to preventing the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Can you give specific examples excluding any identifying information?</li></ul></li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In what ways do you feel the barriers you presented today that are being presented to the prevention of the human trafficking of children ages 5 to 17 within a greater metropolitan area in Texas can be overcome?</li></ul>	