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# A Mixed Methods Program Evaluation of a Youth Sexual Exploitation Prevention Module for Leaders of Afrocentric Churches

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2019

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## Abstract

Youth sexual exploitation (SE) is a crime and a problem of social concern in the United States and globally. Identifying and understanding factors that increase youth SE vulnerability at an early age is pivotal and requires specialized training. There is a gap in the literature regarding training programs to equip leaders of some Afrocentric churches with youth SE awareness and prevention. The purpose of this mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory research was to assess the influence of a youth SE theory-based prevention training module on leaders of Afrocentric churches' youth SE knowledge and how such model aligned with Triandis' theory of interpersonal behavior (TIB) as theoretical framework. Employing a one-group design with secondary data from 55 church leaders and a focus group resulted in findings reflecting feasible influence of the training module on church leaders' SE knowledge and possible alignment of the module with Triandis' TIB as theoretical framework. Focus group results reflected facilitating conditions (including feeling equipped), participants' roles as church leaders, and perceived consequences of SE involvement, as factors influencing participants' SE knowledge. Such results were significant to positive social change by filling the gap in research concerning culturally competent theory-based training models in the Afrocentric church community; to contributing to the development, implementation, and evaluation of youth SE awareness and prevention effort in religious entities; to aiding developers in generating targeted theory-based interventions among specific ethnic and social groups; and to aiding future multidisciplinary efforts to prevent and address youth SE.

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# Dedication

I dedicate this project to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has been my strength and lifeline during this dissertation journey. I especially dedicate this project to Tiffany Wright, a sexual exploitation survivor, who was the triggering force in me choosing this topic to help thousands of young people at risk of being sexually exploited globally. Rest in peace Tiff. Your work and efforts to be a support to young people will continue. I miss and love you dearly. Lastly, I dedicate this project to my mentor and friend, Dr. C. S. Redmon, who was instrumental in my pursuit of this degree and was ongoingly supportive until its completion. Thank you for being an inspiration and for teaching me how to trust in God and persevere in the pursuit of my dreams.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Youth sexual exploitation (SE) is a crime and a problem of social concern that has gained increased attention globally and in the United States. Addressing SE involvement through awareness and prevention is pivotal and requires specialized interventions, particularly amongst vulnerable populations such as Afrocentric youth. Based on such need, a youth SE prevention training module for leaders of Afrocentric churches was developed as a protective measure to equip church leaders in Afrocentric churches on how to address SE vulnerabilities among youth. The influence of such module was explored in the present study. This first chapter includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, nature of the study, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions and hypotheses, theoretical framework, definitions, assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations.

## Background to the Study

Approximately 27.6 million people across the globe are victims of forced labor, trafficking, and sexual exploitation (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Out of the millions of individuals forced into labor and SE, approximately 1.2 million are children (Brandt et al., 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018). Even though there is little to no consensus on the estimates reflecting the number of SE victims and youth at risk, research results from January 1999 to 2020, reflected that between 100, 000 and 200,000 youth are at risk of SE each year in the United States (Bounds et al., 2020; Brandt et al., 2021; Fedina et al., 2019; Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Moss et al., 2023). Regardless of the differences in estimates, the number of youths

affected by SE and exploitation for sex purposes remains a global social problem within United States borders (Fedina et al., 2019; Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Moss et al., 2023). In 2022, one in six reported runaway youth were likely victims of SE, and of children reported missing (who had run from the care of child welfare) 18% were likely victims of child sex trafficking (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2023).

Sexual exploitation is a criminal enterprise that encompasses violent sexual acts that may: generate the propagation of sexually transmitted diseases, increase the manifestation of disorderly public conduct, promote violations of human rights, and heighten suicide rates and crime rates in communities (Bounds et al., 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Youth between the ages of 12 and 17 are in danger of SE (Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Factors such as school dropout, homelessness, immigration issues, being part of a minority group, unfavorable history in foster care, mental illness, abandonment, and a history of sexual abuse may influence the age young boys and girls become at risk (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Josenhans et al., 2020; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Learning to identify SE risk factors in vulnerable youth at an early age may be beneficial to the development of community-based awareness and prevention programs to address youth SE involvement (Bounds et al., 2020; Cole & Sprang, 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Scoglio et al., 2021).

Throughout the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, there were several research studies on commercial SE. Such studies included information about prevention for at-risk youth; insights for training and resource building to increase awareness among practitioners; and information that propelled the collaboration of governments and child advocates in developing responses to human rights violations of sexually exploited children (Fedina et al., 2019; Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Moss et al., 2023; Nichols et al., 2023; Rothman et al., 2021; Shipe et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there is a gap in research for studies including information about SE of youth and the promotion of awareness and culturally competent interventions among leaders in the religious community (Curran et al., 2017; Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Moss et al., 2023). The domestic SE of youth is an underreported, unidentified, and propagating form of child abuse in the United States; hence, there is a need for training staff members in public, private, and nonprofit sectors (including religious organizations) to identify vulnerable youth (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Haney et al., 2020; Jackson, 2020; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017).

## Statement of the Problem

The number of youths at risk of SE, annually, in the United States is uncertain (Bounds et al., 2020; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). However, widely cited estimates reflect that annually, between 100,000 - 200,000 youth (particularly Afrocentric) are at risk of SE in the United States (Bounds et al., 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). The problem is that youth SE is a form of sexual abuse and a crime that hampers youth development and disrupts the moral, social, and

economic order of communities (Fedina et al., 2019; Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Moss et al., 2023).

Identifying SE risk factors in youth at an early age is pivotal to safeguarding practices and youth's resilience to SE involvement (Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Winters et al., 2022). Early identification of SE risk factors in youth requires professionals to undergo specialized training to increase knowledge of SE vulnerabilities in everyday practice (Bounds et al., 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Even though staff members of several United States public, private, and nonprofit organizations developed community-based training programs to assist youth at risk, there is a gap in literature regarding training programs that help leaders and members of some Afrocentric churches identify youth at risk of SE, especially Afrocentric youth (see Bounds et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2017; Flórez et al., 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). In response to the need for such training, staff members of a religious nonprofit organization attempted to address domestic youth SE through community education, by developing the Sexual Exploitation Module (SEM). The goal of the SEM was to increase participants' awareness in recognizing SE risk indicators in young people. Seemingly, developers of the program used Triandis' theory of interpersonal behavior (TIB) as an underlying theoretical premise for the SEM training (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 1991). Based on such premise, the SEM training should influence leaders of Afrocentric churches' knowledge-based intentions (SE knowledge) and feasibly helping behavior concerning youth SE (Bounds

et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2017; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Sanders, 2018). Some researchers have used the TIB as a framework in several studies in various professional arenas (e.g., Information & management, health management; medical informatics; public health), I found no study that contains the use of the TIB as framework for a youth SE prevention training; nor with regard to behaviors related to leaders of Afrocentric churches (Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991).

## Nature of the Study

The present study was a mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory study to determine the degree to which the SEM training influenced leaders of Afrocentric churches' youth SE knowledge; and how influenced knowledge aligned with the TIB as the SEM's underlying theoretical framework of the training. A program evaluation explanatory, sequential mixed methods research is a systematic method that enables researchers to collect, analyze, and use information to answer questions concerning the effect of a specific program; promote value; obtain conceptual clarifications for development and refinement; confirm the implied theoretical premise of a training prevention program; and employ two distinct phases of data collection and analysis to produce integrated answers to research questions and in-depth understanding of the research problem (Bloomberg, 2022; Gegenfurtner et al., 2020; Sreeram et al., 2021; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Stern et al., 2021; Venkatesh et al., 2016). I gathered the data in two phases (quantitative and qualitative), using secondary data from a control group quasi-experiment (pretest and posttest) and a focus group respectively (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). The sample included

leaders of Afrocentric churches whose backgrounds related to the objective of the program evaluation, and who had the information that I was seeking as a researcher (see Obilor, 2023). The sampling strategy was a secondary data asset encompassing a nonprobability purposive sampling of leaders of Afrocentric churches from a database of 30 Afrocentric churches in a U.S. Northeastern metropolitan area. Staff members from a nonprofit organization conducted the SEM training in a webinar setting.

## Purpose of the Study

I used this mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory study to determine the degree to which the SEM influenced leaders of Afrocentric churches' youth SE knowledge and align Triandis's (1977) TIB as underlying framework of the SEM. The Triandis's TIB premise encompasses that participants' (i.e., leaders of Afrocentric churches) SE knowledge would change because of various factors. Subsequently, such influence on intentions could potentially result in change in participants' helping behavior (taking action by helping youths at risk of SE). Such TIB factors include (a) affects (participants' feelings), (b) perceived consequences (potential consequences from behavior), (c) social factors (individuals' internalization and interpersonal agreements), and (d) facilitating conditions (objective environmental conditions conducive or not to behavior; Triandis,1977).

## Significance of the Study

This mixed methods program evaluation was pivotal for several reasons. First, developers had not tested if and to what degree the SEM influenced participants' knowledge about youth SE (including recognizing SE risk factors in vulnerable youth).

Neither had developers assessed Triandis's TIB as the underlying theory of the SEM. Using a mixed methods program evaluation enabled a comprehensive investigation through two phases of data collection. Employing two phases of data collection and analysis helped determine whether participants' youth SE knowledge was influenced after SEM participation and rendered information to help align the TIB as the SEM's theoretical framework. Testing the TIB, as theoretical framework, was essential to researching the outcome of the SEM components that potentially influenced SE knowledge and subsequently increased the feasibility of helping behavior changes (i.e., taking preventive action to help vulnerable youth) essential to public, private, and nonprofit practitioners in daily practice. Second, results from this study rendered information that could be useful in assisting leaders of Afrocentric churches with developing training programs for youth SE prevention, empowerment, and advocacy, that could potentially increase SE awareness and skills among church parishioners and staff (see Bounds et al., 2020; Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Moss et al., 2023; Winters et al., 2022). Leaders of Afrocentric churches seem to be central players in understanding youth and the challenges young people face. Such leaders are also sources of information for community members who may not always embrace sexual issues such as SE (Bounds et al., 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). Third, leaders and members of Afrocentric churches and non-Afrocentric churches, as well as policymakers of other nonprofit organizations (with similar programs), may collaborate by using results from this study to increase existing knowledge on SE prevalence, dominance, and vulnerability. Moreover, collaboration

among practitioners may further lead to insights for developing theory-based and culturally competent interventions (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Gagnon et al., 2003; Moss et al., 2023; Nichols et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 1991; Triandis, 1977). Fourth, results from this study help fill the gap in literature concerning SE prevention programs in general, programs specifically designed for leaders of Afrocentric churches, and the evaluation of such programs (see Bounds et al., 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). Last, researchers may use results from this study to support subsequent studies on youth SE prevention and involvement; and the use of theory when developing youth preventive measures in other human and social services areas.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present mixed methods program evaluation study was based on one main research question:

RQ: To what degree does the SEM influence leaders of Afrocentric churches' (i.e., bishops, pastors, elders, ministers, deacons, evangelists, trustees, department directors, and coordinators) SE knowledge and how does influenced knowledge align with the TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM?

I collected data in the quantitative phase of the study to answer the first portion of the question,

$R_a$: To what degree does the SEM influence leaders of Afrocentric churches' youth SE knowledge?"

Answering the first portion of the question involved testing the following hypotheses:

There are no significant differences in church leaders' SE knowledge after participating in the SEM

$H_0$: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$

There are significant differences in church leaders' SE knowledge after participating in the SEM

$H_1$: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

The dependent variable (youth SE knowledge) was composed of seven subcategories: SE beliefs, SE definition and identification, scope and demand for SE, risk factors for SE entry, SE victims' behavior, SE laws and services, and taking action.

Subsequently, I collected qualitative data (qualitative phase) to answer the second part of the research question:

$R_b$: How does influenced SE knowledge align with the TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM?

## Theoretical Framework

I used Triandis' TIB as my theoretical framework. Triandis's TIB encompasses various cognitive models, including Ajzen and Fishbein's (1975) theory of reason action (TRA) and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB; Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). However, Triandis, unlike Ajzens and Fishbein, took into consideration other elements that intervene between intentions and argued that three dimensions or levels determine behavior: intention, facilitating conditions, and habit. Hence, behavior (across situations) is a function deriving partly from intentions, habits, and situational conditions and constraints (Elciyar & Şimşek,

2021; Li et al., 2020; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Based on the TIB, the SEM training may be a facilitating condition containing components that possibly address habit, intentions, and situational constraints and conditions about youth SE that may affect leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge potentially increasing the feasibility of such leaders' helping behavior (i.e., SE prevention; Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Therefore, conducting a mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory study was optimal for providing information about the SEM's influence and value and aligning Triandis' TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM training program.

## Definitions

*Afrocentric Church*: Religious entity or organization of religious believers focused on or influenced by African, African American, or Black cultures with practices centered on such cultures (Hunter, 2022).

*Knowledge-based intentions (SE knowledge)*: Knowledge-based mental states where an individual selects a specific course of action, guided by a range of factors (i.e., information, beliefs, experiences, emotions, societal influences, and environment) that are linked with an attitude stored in memory. The intensity of the connections between such factors and the attitude ultimately shapes the resulting action (Fabrigar et al., 2006; Triandis, 1977; Venkataramanan et al., 2020).

*Leaders of Afrocentric Churches*: Individuals with credentials or titles in leadership positions (e.g., bishops, pastors, ministers, deacons, evangelists, Christian workers, coordinators) within a church or church organization executing religious

practices centered on African American or Black cultures. Such positions may include trustees, board members, heads of church departments, program developers, and church workers. (Hunter, 2022).

*Risk factors*: Variables that may increase a person's exposure to a specific condition (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013).

*Youth Sexual Exploitation*: A form of sexual abuse where some individuals coerce young people to commit sexual acts (including pornography and sexually explicit websites) in exchange for money, goods (e.g., food, accommodation, drugs, or gifts), or other basics of life such as security and protection (Henry & Powell, 2018; Laird et al., 2020; Laird et al., 2022; Madigan et al., 2018).

## Assumptions

I made four assumptions for this study. First, a mixed method program evaluation sequential explanatory design was the appropriate method to answer the research question and hypotheses. Second, the secondary data provided were accurate measurements of the constructs in the study. Third, participants willingly participated in the study. Fourth, participants understood questions clearly and answered honestly.

## Limitations

Restrictions on the present mixed methods study were that executing a mixed method was costly and time consuming, whereas, conducting data collection, data analysis, and reporting results for two distinct methods (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) was challenging (see Johnson et al., 2007). Further, employing secondary data for the quantitative phase limited my control over the data collection process and the validity of

the study due to multiple treatment interference (see Campbell & Stanley, 2015). Threats to internal validity included history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, selection, differential mortality, contamination effect, Hawthorne effect, experimenter bias, and interaction effects (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Moreover, due to having no control over the data collected by the partner organization, the sample size was relatively small. Such sample did not represent the knowledge and experience of leaders of Afrocentric churches in the specified metropolitan area. Lastly, results from this study may not transfer outside of the sample population (see Johnson et al., 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

## Scope and Delimitations

This study encompassed assessing the influence of the SEM on participants' knowledge after SEM participation, and further assessing how influenced knowledge aligned with Triandis's TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM. Assessing influence on youth SE knowledge involved secondary data containing pre and post scores composed by the constructs of SE beliefs, SE definition and identification, scope and demand for SE, risk factors for SE entry, SE victims' behavior, and SE laws and services (see McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). Aligning the TIB as possible framework of the SEM training module encompassed measuring factors such as the SEM as a facilitating condition (objective environmental conditions conducive or not to influenced SE knowledge), and exploring other factors such as affect (participants' feelings toward obtaining SE knowledge), perceived consequences (potential consequences from participants' obtaining SE knowledge), and social factors (individuals' internalization and

interpersonal agreements toward SE knowledge) that could have subsequently influenced participants' SE knowledge increasing the feasibility of helping behavior (i.e., taking action by helping youths at risk of SE; Countryman-Roswurm & Patton Brackin, 2017; Curran et al., 2017; Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Johnson et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 1991; Triandis, 1977). Participants for this study included leaders (i.e., bishops, pastors, elders, ministers, deacons, evangelists, trustees, department directors, Christian workers, and coordinators) from over 30 Afrocentric churches in a U.S. northeastern metropolitan area.

## Summary

Chapter 1 was an introduction to youth SE as a problem and the background of the present research study. The problem projected was youth SE, a form of sexual abuse and a crime that negatively affects youth and community development. Specialized training is needed for staff members in public, private, and nonprofit human services organizations to address the SE problem. A possible lack of training in some nonprofit entities (such as Afrocentric churches) generated the development of a specialized training forum (SEM) to promote SE awareness and prevention through influenced youth SE knowledge. Therefore, I assessed whether the SEM training forum influenced participants' youth SE knowledge and whether developers indeed used Triandis's TIB as an underlying framework to develop the SEM module. The methodology was a mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory design encompassing secondary data from pretest and posttest surveys collected from one group of participants that attended the training and a focus group with some of such participants as data collection methods

for the quantitative and qualitative phases respectively. The underlying assumption and rationale for the present study was that a mixed methods program evaluation was the appropriate method to measure the influence of the training on participants and to align the TIB as framework. Limitations of this study included methodology cost and time-consumption challenges, disadvantages of employing secondary data collection, and restrictions due to the sample size and strategy. Chapter two includes a comprehensive historical review of the existence of youth SE and efforts to prevent youth SE in public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

While there are significant disparities and disputes on the number of youths sexually exploited; there are likely over 100,000 youth at risk of SE each year in the United States (Bounds et al., 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Powell et al., 2017). Some SE experts deemed such numbers as speculative with poor empirical support (Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019); however, SE remains a social issue to address due to SE effects on the development of individuals and communities (Bounds et al., 2020; Fedina et al., 2019; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Powell et al., 2017). A multiplicity of training programs and services are in place to equip staff members in some private, public, and nonprofit entities on preventing youth SE involvement (Bounds et al., 2020; Fedina et al., 2019; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Nevertheless, in some nonprofit religious organizations (i.e., Afrocentric churches) there is seemingly a dearth of culturally competent youth SE prevention training programs to equip leaders of Afrocentric church staff members concerning recognizing SE vulnerabilities in some youth (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Hence, this literature review contains a historical timeline on SE, youth SE, and youth SE prevention; the role of church leaders in social issues; SE knowledge and prevention training programs in public, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations; the role of leaders of Afrocentric churches in SE knowledge and prevention; SE knowledge and prevention in the Afrocentric church; and information about the SEM.

## Title Searches, Articles, Research Documents, and Journals

Resources for this review included approximately 300 articles, research documents, and peer-reviewed journals found through conducting title searches, keyword searches, and journal searches on Walden University's online library and Google Scholar. In Walden library I accessed resources through Thoreau Multi-Database, Academic Search Complete, Pro Quest Central, EBSCO, and Expanded Academic (ASA) databases, as well as Walden's Digital Dissertations Database, and Test and Measures database. Some keywords I used included *prostitution, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, sex trade, commercial sexual exploitation, youth sexual exploitation, sex trafficking prevention in public organizations, human trafficking prevention in the church, the African-American church, "HIV in church, AIDS in the church, AIDS and religion, Homosexuals and church, prostitution and church, prostitution and ministry or religion, sexual violence against youth, child abuse, sexual exploitation in the church, prevention programs and church, church and homosexuality, church and prostitution stigma, prostitution stigma*, and *prostitution and religion*." Further, I used bibliographic, and reference listings from approximately 297 related peer-reviewed publications as well several books on prostitution and SE.

## Youth Sexual Exploitation

Youth SE is a form of sexual abuse, human trafficking, and enslavement that limits a person's autonomy, freedom, and development (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021). SE involves the exchange of sex or sexual acts for drugs, goods (e.g., food, shelter, protection), and or money (Bounds et al., 2020; Fedina

et al., 2019; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Yang et al., 2020). Exploitation for sex purposes includes prostitution, pornography, trafficking for sexual purposes, sex tourism, forced marriages, and or the use of individuals for public or private entertainment (Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Mathews, 2017; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020).

Out of approximately 4.5 million sexually exploited individuals, 98% are women and 21% are youth under age 18 (Bounds et al., 2020; Fedina et al., 2019; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Investigative efforts exist regarding the sexual exploitation of youth for commercial gain; nevertheless, amidst some estimates, there remains a need for additional empirically based research to address numbering individuals involved in SE (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Bounds et al., 2020; Dandurand, 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Lavoie et al., 2019). As with other underground issues, there is an increasing number of unreported cases of sexually exploited youth; and a dearth of information on individuals responsible for youth SE (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Lavoie et al., 2019). While discrepancies exist as to whether the exchange of sex (amongst adults) for money or goods should be legalized, criminalized, or regulated, the consensus is that youth SE is a problem involving human rights violations (Dandurand, 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). The youth SE industry encompasses domestic, international, and marketing sectors; and a range of physical locations and cyber

platforms where operations take place (Dandurand, 2017). Such SE operations are increasing as technology, laws, and public opinion permit (Bounds et al., 2020; Dandurand, 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Huang, 2017; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Apparently, the SE of young people is a problem of social concern and significant consequences, due to the damage and deviant behaviors some SE acts encompass (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Fedina et al., 2019; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Laird et al., 2022; Lavoie et al., 2019; Murphy et al., 2016; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Putatively, such social concerns were not always present due to existing social norms encompassing acceptance of certain sexual behaviors and practices (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Historically, youth SE has been a global phenomenon in existence since antiquity; yet, seemingly poorly understood as a developing social problem affecting youth in ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary eras (Bauermeister et al., 2017; Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Coy et al., 2019; Sanger, 2002; Williams et al., 2012).

## Youth Sexual Exploitation (SE) Historical Timeline

Seemingly, youth SE has been a global phenomenon in existence for thousands of years (Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Coy et al., 2019). Under some religious laws (e.g., The Torah, the Koran), women and children were male property, slaves, and or citizens without rights (Benoit et al., 2019; Coy et al., 2019). As a result of such cultural, social, political, and religious settings, SE was largely unrecognized; and was part of some ancient social and legal norms (Benoit et al., 2019; Coy et al., 2019;

Wheeler et al., 2013). Further, SE ostensibly existed since recorded history (as prostitution) in various cultural and social settings globally; and was accepted overall as a social and political solution in some ancient and modern societies to ameliorate some social issues including poverty, chastity, and some religious rituals (Benoit et al., 2019; Coy et al., 2019; Wheeler et al., 2013; Vanwesenbeeck, 2013; Zigler & Hall, 1989). Likewise, youth SE and youth SE prevention are traceable in the history of prostitution through ancient regions (Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Coy et al., 2019). Such existence is significant to pinpointing the prevalence of youth SE throughout history, the societal lack of awareness about youth SE, and subsequently the dearth of reduced efforts to address youth SE as an imminent increasing social problem (see Paolella, 2020).

**Youth SE in Ancient Eastern Regions**

Acts involving the SE of individuals constituted prostitution in some ancient societies; and some members accepted or rejected such actions based on social and cultural norms, making youth SE prevention a matter of social perspective (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Wheeler et al., 2013). Views on prostitution, sex, and the sex trade in Eastern regions (i.e., Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Israel) ranged from sacred to profane (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Sanger, 2002; Wheeler et al., 2013). Virginity was not a premium, and intercourse outside of marriage was permissible (Benoit et al., 2019; Cawston, 2019; Sanger, 2002). Unmarried girls were allowed to become temporary prostitutes as an initiation into marriage and received money for sex services. Moreover,

single young girls turned to prostitution to escape from parental control (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Peirce, 2009; Sanger, 2002).

In Sumeria and other regions, women were inferior and men's property (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Sanger, 2002). Slave masters sold enslaved girls into SE while in poor villages, parents unable to afford necessary goods sold young daughters into the sex trade (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Sanger, 2002). In some cultures, arrangements like that of modern call girls existed whereas certain senior women in villages knew of youth willing to exchange sex for money and informed girls (sometimes the madam's daughters) to serve male customers for monetary remuneration (Bauermeister et al., 2017; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Sanger, 2002; Wamoyi et al., 2019). Likewise, in Jewish culture, prostitution was frequently mentioned in the Bible, and some traces of sexual acts involving youth were evident (e.g., child marriages), yet not regarded as SE because of religious norms (Sanger, 2002). Jews tolerated prostitution as a recourse for Jewish girls to enter their nuptials in purity and innocence, allowing single males to use prostitutes as accepted sexual outlets (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Sanger, 2002). Parents sold daughters to be sexually exploited as concubines under the law (English Standard Version Bible, 2011, Lev.19:29); and in some families, parents disgraced daughters involved in prostitution (Benoit et al., 2019; Cawston, 2019; Evans, 2014; Sanger, 2002).

Many neighboring people (e.g., Palestinians, Canaanites) practiced sacred prostitution where young women and men were exploited and regarded as priests (priestesses) or holy persons to serve temple worshippers (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). The origins of youth SE during the Biblical era were uncertain; nevertheless, some

orphans, disowned youth, and or economically unstable young people saw prostitution as the only choice (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). Such attitudes and cultural context concerning SE, formed in ancient eastern regions, were instrumental in reduced youth SE detection and prevention; and resulted in youth SE propagation into Greek, Roman, and Christian cultures seemingly generating a possible pattern of stigma within religious communities towards youth SE involvement (see Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Wheeler et al., 2013).

**Youth SE in Ancient Europe (Greco-Roman)**

Youth SE in Ancient Greece (i.e., Corinth) included slave owners forcing young slave girls to provide sexual services to sailors and travelers; some fathers selling teenage daughters (usually at age 14 or 15) to men in the form of dowry; certain slave owners, husbands, and families selling girls at birth to temples and brothels; and several fathers allowing adult men to kidnap young sons (i.e., pederasty) in return for gifts and other forms of remuneration (Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Coy et al., 2019; McGinn, 2004; Sanger, 2002). In Rome, youth SE increased with the demand for prostitutes, whereas some men auctioned girls to be prostitutes in brothels, temples, and other establishments and used young, exploited girls to control the sexual activities of young men (Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Cawston, 2019; Coy et al., 2019; McGinn, 2004; Sanger, 2002). Ostensibly, because of such social and cultural practices, youth SE prevention or detection was scarce in such regions. Such scarcity, possibly contributed to the propagation and possible acceptance of youth SE as

constructive instead of disruptive societal norm potentially propagating into new regions and eras (see Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Coy et al., 2019).

**Youth SE in India, China, and Medieval Europe**

Indian customs concerning sexual freedom and youth SE varied in each region and changed with religion and political events (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002). Youth SE was part of the social, religious, and political setting; hence, deeming SE an acceptable norm (Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002). For example, in religious settings, older prostitutes recruited children to become temple prostitutes or slaves of God (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001, Sanger, 2002). Many young girls were exposed to SE from being sold by devout worshippers to secure blessings, through birth from a prostitute mother, from being purchased from parents or captured in warfare, and as punishment for adultery (Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002).

In Ancient China, religious and philosophical traditions influenced ideas about sex and youth SE (Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Ruan, 2013; Sanger, 2002). Parents arranged marriages and had the power to sell daughters into SE (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002). In the 7th century children exposed to SE were seemingly singing and dancing girls who in some instances were purchased from low-income families or victims of kidnapping (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002). In other accounts, youth SE dated to Hun Dynasty where prostitutes (yin-chi or camp harlots) serviced soldiers in the Chinese army and prominent

families sexually exploited beautiful daughters to obtain imperial favors (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Ruan, 2013; Sanger, 2002).

In Medieval Europe, Christianity influenced the propagation of youth SE (Brundage, 2009; Clark, 2019; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002). Some traces of youth SE prevention included early medieval emperor, Theodosius, issuing a code to abolish prostitution, by depriving parents of the right to sell daughters or slaves into SE (Brundage, 2009; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Clark, 2019). Moreover, through the Middle Ages, signs of concern for youth SE (mainly young girls) were visible, when Theodora (wife of Emperor Justinian) built a home to provide shelter and resources for young women sexually exploited by parents (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). Similar efforts for SE prevention took place during the Byzantine era when prostitution was widespread yet condemned (Clark, 2019). Byzantine emperors and Germanic groups tried to eliminate SE abuses by building refuges for exploited girls and women; and by deeming women as valuable and in need of protection (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Clark, 2019). Further, penalties and punishments arose for people involved in living off prostitution earnings (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002). Early in Christian Church history, SE and other sexual acts were capital sins (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Sanger, 2002). Although increasing progress existed concerning youth SE prevention, some theologians (in support of some politicians) halted SE prevention progress by proposing that prostitution be allowed and restricted to certain areas as a means of tax revenue for the imperial government, and a way of avoiding sodomy and other sexual crimes (Bullough &

Bullough, 1987; Clark, 2019). Despite efforts, laws, and moral standards existing to address youth SE involvement, the lucrativeness of SE to the socio-political system of the time resulted in more youths being exposed and involved in youth SE in Medieval Europe. Moreover, such acceptance of youth SE made the SE problem undetected and may have contributed to lack of awareness and prevention (see Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Dean, 2014; Padella, 2020; Ruan 2013; Sanger, 2002).

**Youth SE in Religious India and China**

Religious attitudes in India and China toward prostitution have included tolerance, encouragement, and increasing double standards (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Ruan, 2013; Sanger, 2002). Youth SE detection and prevention was putatively contrary to the social-religious norms (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Ruan, 2013). In Islam, prostitution was a tolerated trade embraced through concubinage and slavery (Hughes & Hughes, 2001; Ruan, 2013; Sanger, 2002). Men in some Islamic countries sexually exploited concubines, young slaves, orphans without relatives, people imported from other areas, or daughters of prostitutes who grew up in the trade (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Sanger, 2002; Wheeler et al., 2013). Such endorsement of youth SE seemingly extended the promotion and lessened the prevention of youth SE within some religious communities, prompting the continuance and propagation of youth involvement through the early and mid modern eras.

**Youth SE in the Early and Mid Modern Eras**

Kings influenced the social actions toward prostitution in Europe's monarchical reign in the early modern era (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). Youth SE was in the social

construct; whereas prostitutes became mistresses and "*madams* who exercised increasing influence on kings and used sex to obtain titles and royal favors for family members (Ringdal, 2004; Rossiaud, 1988; Sanger, 2002). French kings became trailblazers in such practices, and the '*having madams model'* was customary in some European countries (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Ringdal, 2004; Sanger, 2002). Having prostitute daughters was an advantage for some parents, who often sexually exploited daughters for survival and to secure positions of power and influence (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). Additionally, men groomed young girls to sell to the highest bidder (Ringdal, 2004; Rossiaud, 1988; Sanger, 2002).

Royal practices on prostitution influenced the approach to youth SE at other levels of society in France (Ringdal, 2004; Sanger, 2002). Prostitution became technically illegal yet continued with some police sanction and participation whereas police officers obtained a share of SE income (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Ringdal, 2004; Sanger, 2002). Brothels became recruiting and training centers for country girls (some as young as 12) who were taught the arts of prostitution and then were sexually exploited as employees (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Ringdal, 2004; Rossiaud, 1988; Sanger, 2002). In 1684, a distinction was made between the professional prostitute and impoverished minors prostituted due to the absence of other means to earn a living such modifications were seemingly pivotal to addressing youth SE legal means to address youth SE as a social problem (Bullough &Bullough, 1987). In England and France, prostitution was somewhat widespread. Beginning in the 18th century, prostitution was viewed as entertainment and private use of young girls (ages 11 and 12) became common while

they were still underage. Such use was not always sexual (Ringdal, 2004; Rossiaud, 1988; Sanger, 2002). Some reformers and moralists tried to establish prevention modules to protect sexually exploited minors by implementing the regulation of prostitution and assigning places for prostitutes to freely and voluntarily service men (Ringdal, 2004; Rossiaud, 1988; Sanger, 2002). Other reformers (i.e., John Fielding) addressed youth at risk of SE by proposing alternatives to youth prostitution (i.e., special lodging places where children were taught skills and trades) for orphan children with no other means of survival (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). Moreover, during the mid modern era, policymakers in some countries, regulated prostitution through the Chastity Commission of Vienna (Galbraith, 1920) and implemented policies and regulations based on disease prevention, illegal immigration, as well as protecting children and young women from slavery and SE (Gilfoyle, 1999; Sanger, 2002). Some of such efforts represented the incipient stages of needed youth SE awareness, protective, and prevention efforts, even though the concept of sexual exploitation was still to be developed and explored and both the eastern and western worlds.

In the Americas, the sex trade seemed to be part of the American Indian culture (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Men purchased wives as property from the women's fathers, which gave husbands absolute control and bartering power over wives (Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Cawston, 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Forms of youth SE included men stealing young girls from neighboring tribes for wives or sexual satisfaction; and tribe chiefs prostituting young daughters for valuable items (e.g., horses; Sanger, 2002). In the 18th and 19th centuries, prostitution

was uncommon in some rural areas of the United States; yet some urban areas experienced an increase in prostitution due to industrialization, the migration of women from other countries, and the demand for prostitutes due to the California Gold Rush (Benoit et al., 2019; Cawston, 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Subsequently, prostitution became a means of survival, and the sex trade increased with the settling of immigrants from Europe in the United States (Benoit et al., 2019; Cawston, 2019; Thompson, 1999; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Youth SE included some recruiters and brothel owners introducing 14 and 12-year-old girls to the sex trade (Benoit et al., 2019; Cawston, 2019; Thompson, 1999; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Such practices continued through the beginning of the 20th century with the United States as one of the countries with significant commercial sex markets along with Jamaica, the Netherlands, and Japan. The significant propagation of youth SE in the United States in the 20th and 21st centuries generated a need to explore youth SE as a social problem and possible ways to address youth vulnerability and involvement from an awareness and prevention standpoint. (see Benoit et al., 2019; Bounds et al., 2020; Cawston, 2019; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2022).

**Youth SE in the 20th and 21st Centuries**

Historically, youth SE seemingly existed, yet was unrecognized or labeled as such due to viewpoints influencing the cultural, political, and social settings (see Baird & Connolly, 2023; Chang et al., 2022; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Lavoie et al., 2019; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Petersén & Carlsson, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in the last part of the 19th century, challenges to such views helped

generate a change of attitude toward prostitution and the SE of youth (see Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Chang et al., 2022; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Petersén & Carlsson, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Consequently, youth SE became a matter of social attention resulting in lawmakers abolishing some laws regulating prostitution; instituting laws criminalizing prostitution promoters; and exercising advocacy initiatives against youth involuntary prostitution (Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Kemp et al., 2014; Kenny et al., 2020; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Sprang & Cole, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Regardless of such changes and advocacy efforts, youth SE involvement remained an increasing problem (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Hence, policymakers instituted (along with new laws) new policies and services to protect individuals coerced into the sex trade (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hampton & Lieggi, 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Such efforts, however, remain in nascent stages due to the underground and hidden nature of the crime (see Bounds et al., 2020; De Vries & Goggin, 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hampton & Lieggi, 2020).

At the end of the 20th century, efforts for youth SE detection and prevention were scarce yet evolving indirectly as child abuse advocacy and prevention (Bounds et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022; Laird et al., 2022; Petersén & Carlsson, 2021). The apparent scarcity of efforts to recognize SE and consequently youth SE was a factor in the slow development of policies, advocacy, services, laws, and prevention programs to address youth SE as an increasing social problem at the end of the 20thcentury (see Franchino-

Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). At the beginning of the 21st century, leaders in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors became interested in increasing youth SE detection and prevention. Consequently, there was heightened advocacy, preventive and rehabilitative programs and services, and implementation of laws such as The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), the first comprehensive federal law to address trafficking in persons in the United States (Bounds et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Kenny et al., 2020; Petersén & Carlsson, 2018). The tridimensional approach of the TVPA (prevention, protection, and prosecution) generated a significant shift in how some policymakers, advocates, academics, and practitioners viewed, addressed, and referred to individuals involved in prostitution. . . Whereas, individuals coerced into the sex trade were no longer referred to and handled as criminals but as "sexually exploited," "sex trafficked," "sex enslaved," or "sex traded" victims (Chang et al., 2022; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Petersén & Carlsson, 2021). The public perception of SE began to evolve from an overlooked issue to a social problem requiring attention and specialized resources and interventions for victims and individuals at risk (see Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Marburger & Pickover, 2020).

Additional efforts to address SE in the 21st century involved distinguishing between prostitution and sexual exploitation as two issues differing in whether an individual deliver sex as a service or under conditions of coercion or force respectively (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Further efforts encompassed viewing prostitution as a form of SE and individuals subject to SE as

victims entitled to concessions including labor standards, social rights, and personal empowerment (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). Establishing a clear distinction between prostitution and SE encompassed exploring the youth SE historical timeline. . . Such exploration was significant to defining SE and identifying youth SE as a social problem in need of interventions to address youth involvement through awareness and prevention (Brandt et al., 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018

## Prostitution vs Sexual Exploitation

Exploring the SE historical timeline was significant in identifying possible factors contributing to the unidentified, undetected, and underreported nature of youth SE. Such exploration further revealed how arguments on the different definitions and views of prostitution and SE also hindered youth SE recognition as a significant problem within communities. Such views included (a) legalization supporters viewing prostitution as a profession involving the voluntary delivery of sex as a service, (b) criminalization supporters viewing prostitution as a crime, and (c) human rights advocates considering prostitution a form of SE where an individual provides sex under coercion or force (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Additionally, because prostitution seemingly existed since the incipient stages of human development and was active in antiquity (yet undefined in some societies), exchanging sexual services for resources, finances, social status, or religious beliefs was part of some socio-economic systems and cultural norms (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). Members of society accepted such standards and did not see SE acts as negative or positive but as part of life

(Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987). Such circumstances further contributed to the undetected and unidentified nature of youth SE.

In Inuit and Irish traditions, for example, prostitution was a form of hospitality, where the host would offer a woman (i.e., wife) to a visitor (Bullough & Bullough, 1987). In return for the woman's sexual favor, the guest would give a small gift the woman could keep. Moreover, in many primitive societies, there was no need for girls to be virgins before marriage, which created difficulty in distinguishing prostitution and adolescent promiscuity. Likewise, age and what some ancient societies considered to be a girl and a woman also generated difficulties in categorizing acts that may have been perceived as youth SE. In many ancient cultures a young girl was deemed ready for marriage once reaching puberty; and was considered a woman after bearing children (Benoit et al., 2019; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Cawston, 2019; Evans, 2014).

From a Western 21st-century perspective, advocates could deem such cases as youth SE (see Benoit et al., 2019; Cawston, 2019; Evans, 2014). However, the lack of accurate statistics and information about the prevalence and impact of SE on young individuals generated challenges for advocates to garner support to identify and address youth SE as a social problem (see Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Moreover, advancements in technology that have revolutionized communication and global connectivity in the 21st century, have simultaneously facilitated the growth and ease of sexual exploitation involvement and risk. As youth SE recognition and awareness grew over time, the urgency in addressing youth SE as a significant social problem increased (see Benoit et al., 2019; Cawston,

2019; Evans, 2014). Despite such significant increase in SE awareness, prevention, advocacy, and changes in laws to identify and address SE as a social problem in the 21st century, youth SE remains an increasing problem with significant consequences to the development of some youth and communities (see Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017).

## Consequences of Youth SE

An increasing number of young people are exposed to SE involvement within United States borders (Hampton & Lieggi, 2020; Greenbaum 2018). Ostensibly, youth involved in SE are younger because exploiters are worried about contracting diseases (e.g., HIV, AIDS) from exploited youth (Murphy et al., 2016). Young people, families, and community members are exposed to serious short and long-term consequences due to SE involvement (Bounds et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Petersén & Carlsson, 2021). Such consequences include physical health issues (e.g., broken bones, sexually transmitted infections, malnutrition); mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, fear, post-traumatic stress disorder); vulnerability to self-destructive behaviors (e.g., drug/alcohol abuse, suicide attempts); struggle developing healthy relationships and identity; and social stigmatization (Brandt et al., 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Marburger & Pickover, 2020; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Such consequences may have lifelong impacts on vulnerable youths' well-being. Vulnerability to SE is also an issue among some youth (Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Understanding the factors ostensibly contributing to such vulnerability is pivotal

to addressing the youth SE problem (Brandt et al., 2021; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017).

## Youth SE Risk Factors

Individual, socio-political, environmental, and organizational factors (Figure 1) seemingly heighten youth SE vulnerability in the United States (Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). One or more risk factors depicted in Table 1 may be part of a comprehensive assessment to help determine SE vulnerability in some youth (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019: Panlilio et al., 2019). Nevertheless, some of such risk factors, when isolated, are ostensibly significant to youth SE vulnerability but may: (a) be insufficient contributors to youth SE, (b) necessitate the presence of an exploiter to result in youth SE, (c) function independently or in combination to trigger significant effects or initiating pathways into or out of youth SE, or (d) be risks for other types of violence against youth (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017: Panlilio et al., 2019). Subsequently, there may be a need for caution when assuming that the presence of any single risk factor necessarily signals youth SE (Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Addressing the underlying factors contributing to sexual exploitation is crucial. Implementing comprehensive measures to protect potential involvement and hold individuals promoting youth SE accountable is also pivotal to combating youth SE. Moreover, addressing youth SE as a social problem requires knowledge, understanding, and social action through targeted awareness and prevention training encompassing, (a) a clear definition of youth SE as a specific problem, (b)

recognizing and understanding the consequences of youth SE, and (c) developing diversified interventions to recognize SE risk factors in vulnerable youth (see Bounds et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022; Fedina et al., 2019). Various youth SE prevention efforts are in place within some public, private, and nonprofit organizations to address youth SE. Nevertheless, such efforts are scarce and in need of specificity to the SE issue, cultural competency, and empirical testing for effectiveness (see Bounds et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022; Fedina et al., 2019; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Panlilio et al., 2019).

**Figure 1**

*Factors Increasing Youth SE Vulnerability*

| YOUTH SE RISK FACTORS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **INDIVIDUAL/RELATIONSHIP** | **SOCIO-POLITICAL** | **ENVIRONMENTAL** | **ORGANIZATIONAL** |
| Family Dysfunction<br>• Neglect<br>• Sexual/Physical Abuse<br>• Maltreatment<br>• Domestic Violence<br>• Drug Addiction<br>• Homelessness<br>• Disability<br>• Low Self-Esteem<br>• Economical Marginalization<br>• Lower Intellectual Functioning<br>• Poor School Success<br>• Inadequate Social Skills<br>• System Involvement (E.G., Juvenile Justice, Child Welfare)<br>• Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender Tendencies<br>• Earlier Pubertal Maturation<br>• Early Adversity Experiences<br>• Mental Health | • Poverty<br>• Tolerance of SE Markets<br>• Glamorization of Pimp Culture<br>• Objectification of Women And Girls<br>• Gender Bias<br>• Widespread Internet and Social Media Use | • Gang Involvement<br>• Pedophilia<br>• Relaxed Legal Enforcement<br>• Debt Bondage<br>• Sadomasochism<br>• Inter-Generational Prostitution<br>• Sex Tourist-Receiving Countries<br>• High Economic Demand<br>• Community Disintegration<br>• Social And Cultural Devaluation of Children<br>• Areas With Large International Airports<br>• Large Transient Male Populations Community Violence<br>• Street-Involved Culture/Economy<br>• Poor Living Conditions<br>• Pre-existent Crime Organizations<br>• Technological Developments | • Poor Collaboration Among Entities<br>• Budget Restrictions for Programs<br>• Stigma Among Practitioners<br>• Scarce Staff Training on Awareness/Rehab |

*Note.* From "Vulnerabilities Relevant for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Systematic Review of Risk Factors," by H. Franchino-Olsen, 2021, *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 22 (1), 99-111.

## The Need for Prevention

Initial examinations on SE reflected, (a) the involvement and transport of youth (mainly girls) from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America to the United States and Canada for sex purposes, (b) the involvement of boys as much as girls in SE, (c) a decrease in age of sexually exploited youths (from twelve-year-old to seven-year-old); and (d) an increase in domestic SE in the United States (Assini-Meytin et al., 2021; Baird & Connolly, 2023; Benavente et al., 2022; De Vries & Goggin, 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Lavoie et al., 2019). Conclusions from such examinations attracted the attention of leaders in some public, private, and nonprofit organizations to the increasing number of youths involved in SE; subsequently generating demand for collaboration and joint efforts to develop policies, services, and prevention programs to assist youth at risk; and specialized training for staff members to recognize, address, and prosecute youth SE (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Benavente et al., 2022; Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Lavoie et al., 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017;). Seemingly, legal and training efforts were developed to combat SE. Nevertheless, barriers such as poor reliable and timely information, inaction diffusing and scrutinizing existing information, stereotypes and misinterpretations, poor training opportunities, funding constraints, competing priorities, and reduced collaboration among agencies, ostensibly prevented leaders and members in national and local systems from obtaining the necessary training to assist youth at risk of SE (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Lavoie et al., 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Further (due to

multiple forces seemingly involved in generating youth SE) prevention and intervention efforts targeting only single risks had limited utility. Such limitation generated the need for a comprehensive understanding of youth SE risk factors to engage in the dynamic processes associated with youth SE prevention (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Lavoie et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2020). Efforts to overcome such challenges and the need for youth SE prevention knowledge and skills have resulted in public, private, and non-profit leaders' increased focus on developing culturally competent resources for youth SE prevention training in the United States (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Lavoie et al., 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020).Youth SE Prevention in the United States

Prevention is the alteration of risk, promotive, and protective factors in individuals and environments to change the probability of problems occurring in the future (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hage & Romano, 2010; Lavoie et al., 2019). Through prevention, community members, groups, or individuals (not involved in the problem) receive services, resources, or interventions that may reduce the probability of future unhealthy or criminal behaviors, resulting in the well-being of individuals and communities (Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). Prevention also encompasses advocacy for legislation, public policies, and institutional change strategies that help preclude problems, improve quality of life, and evoke social change (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Bounds et al., 2020; Lavoie et al., 2019). Purportedly, in some communities, there is a need for increased prevention

practices focusing on crimes against youth. Research estimates reflected that 14% to 20% of youth experience mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders in any one year as a result of such crimes (Assini-Meytin et al., 2021; Baird & Connolly, 2023; Bounds et al., 2020; E. J., 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Rothman et al., 2021; Shipe et al., 2022). Addressing such disorders may require prevention programs to help reduce youth crime incidence and improve the quality of life for some youth (Lederer, 2014; Franchino-Olsen, 2021).

Prevention is better than cure was the philosophic view as prevention practices expanded to benefit the health and well-being of people in communities (Murphy et al., 2016). Prevention, in essence, is identifying and altering predictors of problems (e.g., youth SE, substance abuse disorder, mental health, crime) to avoid such problems (Bounds et al., 2020; Halkett et al., 2022; Planey et al., 2019). Moreover, avoiding problems may incorporate various types of prevention including, (a) primary prevention (stopping a problem before occurring), (b) secondary prevention (targeting interventions for specific at-risk groups), and (c) tertiary prevention (interventions preventing complications or relapse resulting from an existing problem (Bounds et al., 2020; E. J., 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). Other variations of prevention may include (a) universal prevention (action for everyone such as seatbelt use); (b) selective prevention (for individuals at risk, such as youth SE); and (c) indicated prevention (activities for individuals at high risk of developing problems, such as tutorial programs for children with low grades; Bounds et al, 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021).

Through the 20th and 21st centuries, prevention advocates in the United States, advanced the SE prevention premise, resulting in increased prevention action and advocacy in psychology, counseling, human services, health, social services, social justice professions, and faith-based organizations (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Murphy et al., 2016). Multidisciplinary services were in place in the United States to assist with violence against youth prevention (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Lavoie et al., 2019; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Seemingly a vast number of such efforts were on human trafficking, excluding programs specific to the youth SE issue (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Lavoie et al., 2019; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Young people vulnerable to youth SE involvement may experience a myriad of issues Recognizing and responding to the complex needs resulting from such vulnerability may necessitate multi-sector approaches, such as primary and specialized prevention programs involving public, private, and nonprofit organizations (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017).

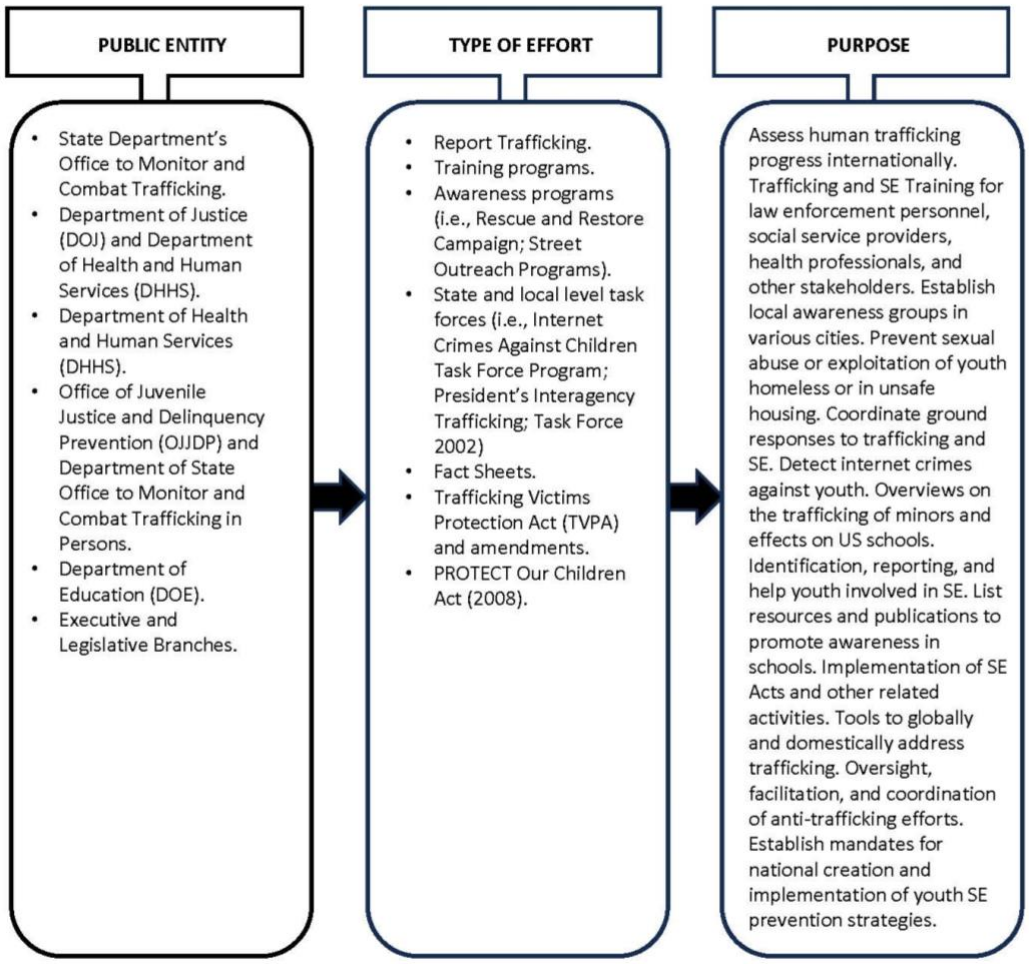
**Prevention in the Public Sector**

Two factors seemingly added to the problem of youth SE prevention in the U.S. public sector. First, federal lawmakers' main focus being on SE prosecution and not on SE prevention Second, federal lawmakers and program developers addressing the root of SE primarily outside of US borders, and failure to include root causes within US borders (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Lavoie et al., 2019; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, since the TVPA

in 2000, several government leaders instituted various policies, programs, training, and special efforts to respond domestically to SE through awareness and enhancement of staff members' capacity to identify risk factors in vulnerable youth (see Figure 2; Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). In addition to specific efforts in government entities to prevent, identify, and respond to youth SE, coordination and collaboration among concerned stakeholders and public agencies' staff members also contributed to addressing domestic youth SE. Such collaboration included agencies such as the Office of the Deputy Attorney General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (which encompasses the Crimes Against Children Unit and the Innocent Images National Initiative), the US Marshals Service, Interpol Washington, the US Attorney's Office, the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, and the Office of Justice Programs (Franchino-Olsen, 2021, U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). The Office of Justice Programs encompasses the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Victims of Crimes; The Bureau of Justice Statistics; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Efforts in the public sector also included partnerships and collaboration with companies and organizations in the private sector. Many of such private entities also have youth prevention efforts to address youth SE (Kenny et al., 2019).

**Figure 2**

*SE Prevention Efforts in The Public Sector*




*Note.* From *Federal Government Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking,* by Office on Trafficking in Persons, 2020, Administration for Children and Families (https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/resource-library/federal-efforts).

**Prevention in the Private Sector**

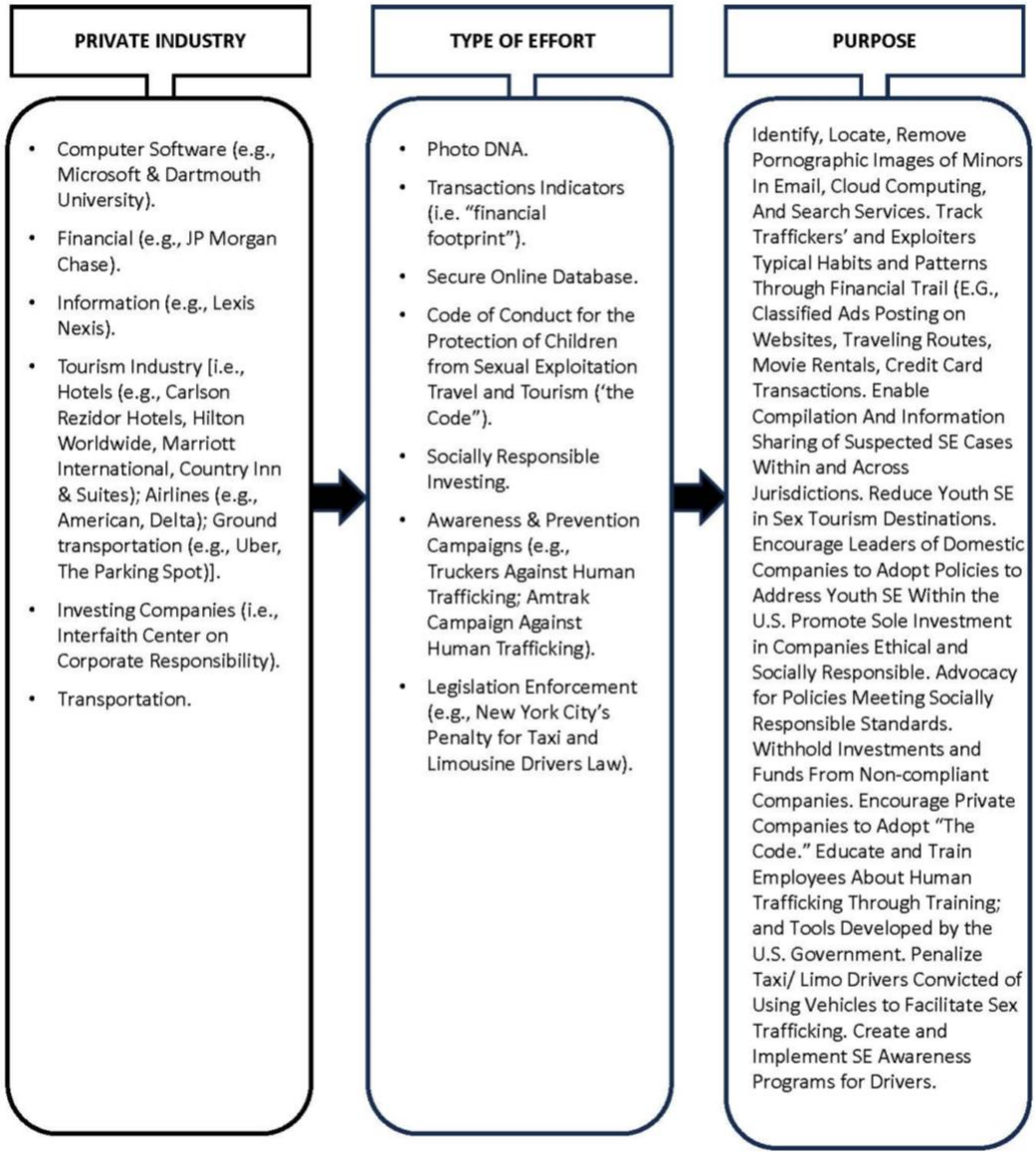
Youth SE has become a profitable market in the private sector, generating increasing demand and billions of dollars globally each year (Brandt et al., 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Some for-profit companies and industries have the capacity to facilitate youth SE. Internet transactions, hotels, transportations, financial companies, and the media offer services and products that may promote the SE of youth; whereas exploiters may use businesses such as banks, financial service providers, landlords, airlines, hotels, railroads, and bus lines undetected (Desrousseaux et al., 2021; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). To combat such demands, some leaders in the private industry engaged in efforts against youth SE by taking actions to address the risk of inadvertently supporting trafficking operations (Bejinariu, 2022; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017; Yang et al., 2020).

For example, in the banking sector, financial institutions are typically required to keep tabs on customers' transactions and file suspicious activity reports (SARs) (Desrousseaux et al., 2021). Hotel chains may inspect multiple rooms booked under one name or closely inspect cash-only paying guests requesting a single key for multiple guests (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Social media platforms encompass technology to alert about pages, posts, and users' possible links to trafficking efforts (Desrousseaux et al., 2021). Additional efforts included implementing some SE awareness and prevention programs depicted in Figure 3

(Desrousseaux et al., 2021; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Further efforts to address youth SE encompassed collaboration through special legislation (i.e., The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2013 [TVPR] signed by President Barack Obama) where leaders of public and private entities built, promoted, and sustained partnerships to ensure that U.S. citizens fail to use items, products, or material generated from trafficking or SE. Collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors was productive, yet seemingly insufficient to address the increasing number of youths involved and at risk of SE. Such insufficiency resulted in new such partnerships and collaborative efforts with nonprofit organizations (Bejinariu, 2022; Jeng et al., 2022; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017; Vaughan, 2023).

**Figure 3**

*SE Prevention in the Private Sector*



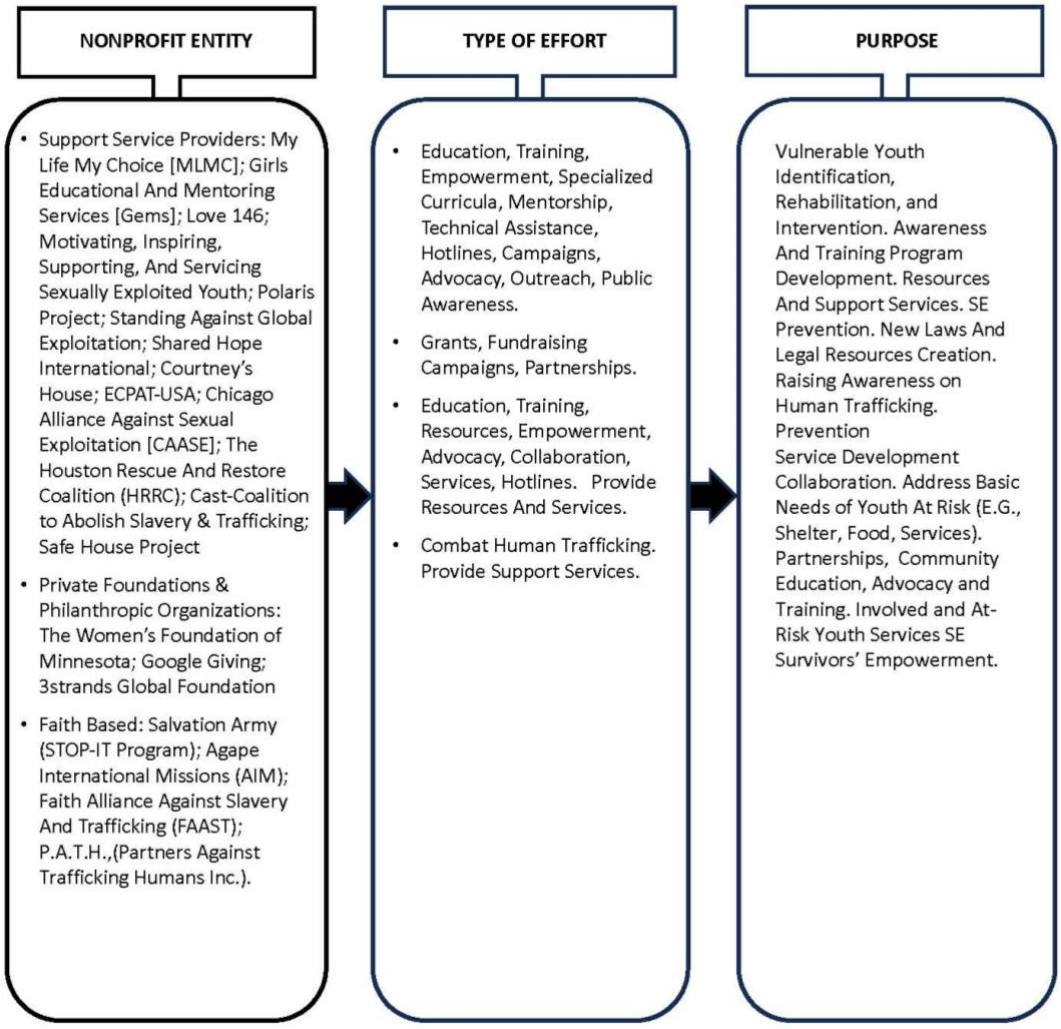

*Note.* From *Human Trafficking,* 2023, U.S. Department of Transportation (https://www.transportation.gov/stophumantrafficking).

**Prevention in Nonprofit Organizations**

Some nonprofit organizations servicing youth at risk of SE included specialized direct service providers, service providers, advocacy organizations, private foundations, and faith-based organizations. As depicted in Figure 4, the focus of efforts in such organizations was seemingly national, international, regional, or local. Moreover, services were apparently unspecific in integrating youth SE into broader service portfolios (AIM, 2018; ECPA, 2021; Faith Alliance Against Slavery And Trafficking [FAAST], n.d.; Partners Against Trafficking Humans [P.A.T.H.], 2019). A significant number of SE preventive efforts were concentrated in nonprofit organizations. Out of such number, few were faith-based organizations and fewer were Christian churches (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; ECPAT, 2021; National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2023; Wirsing, 2012). Such increase in youth SE involvement, seemingly generated the need to focus on additional resources, such as faith-based organizations, as viable conduits to promote youth SE awareness and prevention in some communities (Fedina et al., 2019; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Jackson, 2020).

**Figure 4**

*SE Prevention Efforts in the Nonprofit Sector*




*Note.* From Sex Trafficking Prevention and Intervention Organizations, n.d., Child Welfare Information Gateway (https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspList&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=57).

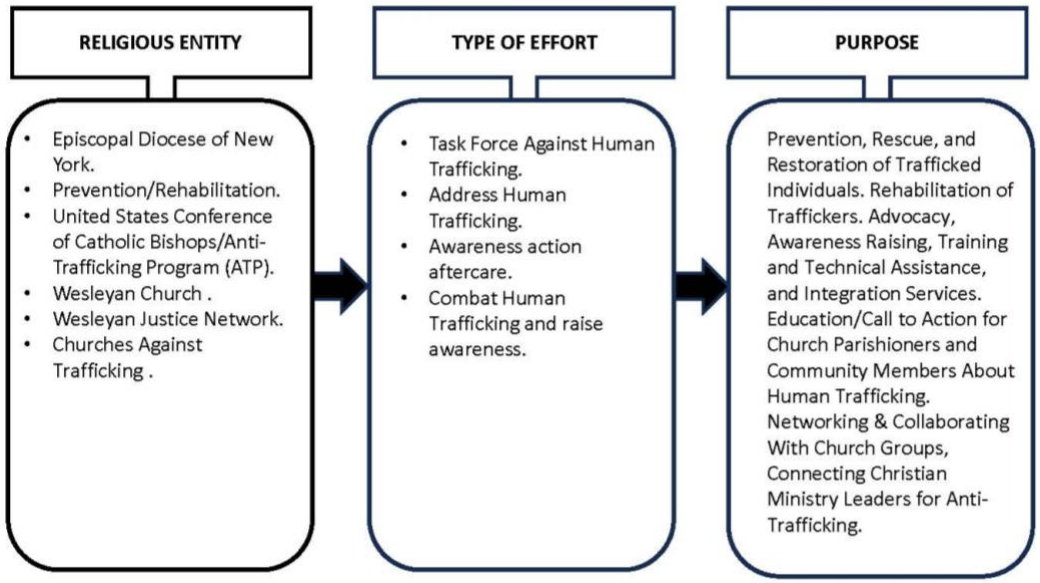
**Prevention in Faith-Based Organizations**

An increasing number of nonprofit religious organizations and entities address youth SE; nevertheless, the focus of such efforts has been predominantly on human trafficking, and the scope mainly international (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Further, an increasing number of programs and services were seemingly aimed at addressing the needs of youth already involved in SE and on advocacy efforts toward treating sexually exploited youth as victims and not as juvenile delinquents. Ostensibly, existent SE awareness and preventive efforts in some faith-based entities remained in a developmental stage due to the complexity of the crime. Moreover, in a significant number of faith-based entities (such as Afrocentric churches) efforts to address youth SE were scarce or inexistent. Figure 5 contains prevention efforts in some Christian Churches. Apparently, a significant number of existing efforts were trafficking awareness and prevention programs executed in non-Afrocentric churches (Churches Against Trafficking, 2023; The Episcopal Diocese of New York, n.d.; Rife, 2013; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2023). Scarcity in efforts specific to youth SE and the dearth in executing such efforts within the Afrocentric church community seemingly resulted in minimal involvement from leaders of some Afrocentric churches in addressing youth SE. Moreover, the lack of leadership involvement in some Afrocentric churches seemingly resulted in reduced SE awareness and prevention community engagement (Albright et al., 2020; Gonzalez-Pons et al., 2020; Hampton & Lieggi, 2020. Nonetheless, the number of young people at risk is rising along with the need for developing targeted and culturally competent youth SE preventive interventions seemingly scarce as reflected

in the literature (Albright et al., 2020; Gonzalez-Pons et al., 2020; Hampton & Lieggi, 2020).

**Figure 5**

*SE Prevention Efforts in Christian Churches*




Note. "Task Force Against Human Trafficking," by The Episcopal Diocese of New York, n.d., (https://dioceseny.org/mission-and-outreach/human-trafficking/

## Youth SE Prevention Research in the Literature

Significant efforts exist to address SE in some public, private, and nonprofit organizations (Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kemp et al., 2014; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018; Yang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, existing evidence-based prevention programs specific to sexual violence against youth are geared to address human trafficking, child sexual abuse, or youth already involved in SE (Baker & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2013; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Nurse, 2017; Salisbury et al., 2015; Walker-Descartes et al., 2021). Few programs

have been preventive resources specific to educating community members, particularly, religious leaders on youth SE issues. Further, evidence on prevention and intervention programs specific to youth at risk or exposed to SE was ostensibly limited (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Nurse, 2017; Rothman et al., 2021; Shipe et al., 2022). In addition to such limitations, existent prevention programs have been seemingly undirected, insufficient, uncoordinated, financially unsupported on the community level, and under-evaluated (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Laird et al., 2022). In a systematic review of prevention and intervention strategies in public, private, and nonprofit organizations for SE reduction, out of over 19,000, apparently, few studies encompassed evaluation research (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Rothman et al., 2021; Shipe et al., 2022). Out of such studies, few met the requirements to support substantive conclusions on the effectiveness of the evaluated anti-exploitation initiatives, and apparently, none encompassed youth SE prevention training influencing Afrocentric church leaders (Baker & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2013; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Nurse, 2017; Sanchez et al., 2019).

For example, Nurse (2017) evaluated the influence of an adult training program (the Protecting God's Children training program) in a study encompassing pretest/posttest questionnaires, a six-month follow-up, and a control group to explore the program's influence on participants' knowledge and behavior concerning child sexual abuse detection and prevention. Results from such study reflected an increase in participants' knowledge and changes in behavior (Nurse, 2017). Yet, low racial/ethnic and religious diversity in the sample nonrandomized control group; and non-specificity to youth SE (the study was on child sexual abuse) ostensibly restricted results' generalizability and

substantial contribution to youth SE prevention efforts among leaders of Afrocentric churches. Baker and Rigazio-DiGilio (2013) evaluated a child maltreatment one-day prevention training program designed for church volunteers and ordained leaders by using a mixed methods pretest/posttest (with a control group) and focus group. Results from such study were that participants' knowledge increased, yet not participant's behavior to take action concerning child maltreatment. Limitations included a small number of participants and demographic differences between the intervention group and control group (Baker & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2013; Stern et al., 2021). The limited number of empirically based research within the youth maltreatment scope putatively confirms the need for more empirically based research on youth maltreatment and more so on youth SE awareness and prevention training within the Christian church community, particularly Afrocentric churches (McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Vigliotti et al., 2020). However, to address such needs, understanding how social issues are addressed in the Christian church community is significant.

## Addressing Social Issues in the Christian Church Community

Addressing social issues, such as youth SE, in Christian churches is a complex process requiring religious leaders' involvement in collaboration and partnership between sectors (Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020). Religious leaders appear to exercise influence, knowledge, concern, and cultural understanding when addressing some social issues during the oversight and management of numerous entities located in grassroots communities (Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020). Moreover, some people seem to find in some religious entities, a) systems of care and assistance with solving spiritual,

emotional, and personal issues; b) relationships and networking with other individuals; c) resources for well-being; d) foundations for social services; and e) empowerment to address social and human rights challenges (Williams & Jenkins, 2019). Subsequently, religious belief systems may have a significant role in some segments of human society; and may be influential to, (a) attitudes and practices that may influence knowledge and change behavior, (b) service delivery, (c) referral pathways, and (d) advocacy efforts (Bounds et al., 2020; Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Litam et al., 2023; Litam & Lam, 2021; Willis et al., 2017). Moreover, the long-term commitment (e.g., achieving peace, justice, and social equality) in some religious belief systems may be instrumental in addressing inequality, marginalization, stigma, conflict, and other social issues such as youth SE. Such is seemingly the case in some Afrocentric churches; whereas religious beliefs and the church became central features in the life of Afrocentric people (Anderson-Cole, 2017; Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020). Nonetheless, addressing social issues affecting such lifestyle was seemingly difficult based on the history of the Afrocentric culture and the social issues within Afrocentric churches (see Anderson-Cole, 2017).

**Social Issues in Afrocentric Churches**

During slavery and the civil rights movement in the United States, Afrocentric churches became a pivotal component of the Afrocentric culture (Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020). Afrocentric people, ostensibly, embraced the church as, (a) a hub for spiritual and social change through charitable and rescue work, (b) a place for advocacy for structural reform, and (c) an intervention resource for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs

within the context of family and community (Allen, 2019; Boddie & Kyere, 2021; Moore et al., 2022; Sutherlin, 2019). Subsequently, Afrocentric churches seemingly became central resource centers for direct services to Afrocentric people in challenging environments (e.g., conflict, violence, and poverty), and conduits for collaboration between Afrocentric communities and some social services entities (Bounds et al., 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). Consequently, church leaders apparently, became critical to Afrocentric churches' culture and communities as agents of spiritual and social change, by helping individuals deal with issues affecting the spiritual, physical, social, and political wellness in Afrocentric communities (Allen, 2019; Boddie & Kyere, 2021; Campbell & Winchester, 2020; Moore et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2020). Addressing youth SE in Afrocentric churches was seemingly significant because although youth SE encompasses young people of diverse ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic status, the number of youths of African descent involved in SE was ostensibly rising (Hampton & Lieggi, 2020). Such rise was seemingly due to poverty, homelessness, exposure to racism, homophobia, stigma, and discrimination; which are influential factors in youth SE involvement and predominant factors within some Afrocentric communities (Baird & Connolly, 2023; Hampton & Lieggi, 2020; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018). Moreover, Afrocentric church leaders seemingly addressed such factors within the Afrocentric church as part of the social change/help structure based on the influence church leaders seemingly have in some Afrocentric communities (see Anderson-Cole, 2017).

Leaders of some Afrocentric churches play an essential role in addressing SE, because of the influence, knowledge, concern, and cultural understanding such leaders appear to exercise (as moral voices) when assisting individuals with challenging experiences (Anderson-Cole, 2017; Nguyen, 2020; Wright et al., 2020). Such leaders also oversee numerous entities nationally and internationally, whereas, congregants and community members may be mobilized, with the potential of influencing attitudes and behaviors toward awareness and prevention training on issues such as youth SE (Campbell & Winchester, 2020). Some Afrocentric congregations embraced Afrocentric church leaders' involvement in addressing social issues such as youth SE (Stennis et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2020). Nevertheless, due to stigma and cultural perception, many Afrocentric church leaders and congregations seemingly refused to participate in addressing some issues encompassing sexual matters (e.g., SE, sexual abuse; Anderson-Cole, 2017; Boddie & Kyere, 2021; Houston-Kolnik et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2020). One way to influence behavior (resulting from stigma and cultural perception) and obtain optimal results; is to incorporate cultural and spiritual contexts into interventions and tailor intervention components to a church's organizational and cultural structures (Summer et al., 2013).

Moreover, adding spirituality may provide the structure to transform inner reflection into outward social action (Knight et al., 2022; Nsonwu et al., 2018;). Further, incorporating cultural and spiritual components and tailoring interventions to a church setting may result in some church leaders becoming prevention educators possibly resulting in, (a) decreased secrecy and stigma surrounding youth SE within some

Afrocentric congregations; (b) exposure resulting in rehearsal and practice to supplement other youth SE prevention programs; (c) leaders' increased knowledge resulting in programs and strategies to help decrease systemic factors contributing to youth SE vulnerability (e.g., poverty, runaway children, violent home environment, child abuse); (d) Leaders and parishioners' empowerment and equipping to aid vulnerable youth and youth involved in SE; (e) parishioners repeated exposure to youth SE prevention in a natural environment; (f) increased liberty for guardian-youth or leader-youth discussions about SE and other sexual issues; (g) leaders detecting children at risk and referring to relevant services; and (h) collaboration between leaders of Afrocentric churches and leaders in public, private, and other nonprofit entities to develop prevention programs and strategies (Anderson-Cole, 2017; Vigliotti et al., 2020).

Conversely, several cultural factors may routinize some churches' processes, creating difficulty in changing some congregations' attitudes and behaviors to address new social challenges (Vigliotti et al., 2020). Nevertheless, influencing some leaders' behavior with knowledge encompassing youth SE environmental and personal components may result in some leaders guiding congregations and communities toward increasing participation in youth protective action through prevention and transformational social change (Triandis, 1977). Addressing social issues such as youth SE among Afrocentric church leaders, church staff, and parishioners, seemingly requires increased knowledge and a preventive mindset (see Anderson-Cole, 2017).

## Youth SE Prevention in Afrocentric Churches

Leaders' and congregants' commitment to youth and family protection apparently resulted in some Afrocentric churches becoming potential resources for the expansion of youth protective services and for mitigating the threat of violence among some youth (Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020; Oakley et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2020). Nevertheless, complexities, global reach, the multiplicity of pathways and risk factors increasing youth vulnerability, and the reservations attached to discussing some social issues in some Afrocentric church communities, increased the difficulty some leaders of Afrocentric churches had engaging in SE protective efforts for at-risk youth (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). In relation to youth SE, seemingly, the propensity of minority youths to specific issues, such as SE, resulting from exposure to risk factors (i.e., homelessness, poverty, racism, homophobia, stigma, and discrimination) further contributed to the necessity for culturally competent prevention programs to protect some youth from SE involvement (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2022; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). An expanding number of collaborative efforts have been in place in some churches to address SE through preventive action. Nevertheless, a limited number of such efforts, (a) address youth SE exclusively and comprehensively, (b) encompass culturally competent resources to reach specific stakeholders and community members, and (c) encompass community and organizational differences and needs in youth SE prevention training development (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022; Vogel et al., 2013).

Additionally, leaders of some Afrocentric churches developed or incorporated prevention programs targeting youth vulnerability to SE; yet an increasing number of such programs focused on sex trafficking or human trafficking and encompassed resources and services for rehabilitation rather than prevention (Nurse, 2017; Oakley et al., 2019). Apparently, the absence of specificity in developing training programs targeting Afrocentric churches and communities that pinpoint youth SE prevention in an Afrocentric environment generated a gap in the literature and in the development of training resources directed to such populations (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023). Prevention actions within Afrocentric church communities are significant due to the increasing number of Afrocentric young people vulnerable to SE involvement (Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). Further, the dearth of research on SE knowledge and prevention among leaders of Afrocentric churches and Afrocentric congregations generated concerns about such leaders' apparent failure to address youth SE and youth SE vulnerability (Vieth & Singer, 2019). Moreover, the scarcity and (in some cases) absence of youth SE training may have constituted a reason for Afrocentric church leaders' limited involvement in partnerships and collaborations with other organizations to take action concerning youth SE. Such scarcity also resulted in questions about the dearth of culturally competent interventions in the Afrocentric church community (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Nurse, 2017; Oakley et al., 2019; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023).

## Culturally Competent Interventions in the Afrocentric Church

In some Afrocentric churches, social issues and advocacy had seemingly been in the forefront of the church agenda. Afrocentric churches became safe spaces for literacy

development, healing, and hope in times when black people had no rights to public services (Davis & Johnson, 2021; Stennis et al., 2015; Williams & Jenkins, 2019). In the 20th and 21st centuries, public concern increased leaders of Afrocentric churches' desire to collaborate in designing and replicating preventive interventions to address social issues (e.g., diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, mental illness, youth suicide, bullying) affecting the wellness of families and youth in Afrocentric communities. Such social issues also included matters of sexual nature involving sexual violence (e.g., SE, child abuse, domestic violence, trafficking). And although increasingly prevalent within Afrocentric communities, such issues were less discussed within some Afrocentric churches due to stigma and unawareness (Litam et al., 2023; Litam & Lam, 2021; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Walker-Descartes et al., 2021). Unoften discussions about sex and violence-related issues in some Afrocentric churches generated poor awareness and prevention efforts to address problems such as youth SE (Litam et al., 2023; Litam & Lam, 2021; Sage et al., 2021; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022).

Between 2000 and 2022, several studies encompassed research on training programs designed to influence leaders of Afrocentric churches' knowledge of violence against some youth (i.e., SE, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, sex trafficking) Such training programs seemingly increased leaders' knowledge about, (a) warning signs of sexual violence on youth, (b) ways to respond to youth who report such violence and abuse, and (c) information as to where to report such violence (Anderson-Cole, 2017. Levin et al., 2021; Nurse, 2017; Okech et al., 2018). The literature on prevention in

Afrocentric churches also included prevention science as necessary for awareness and information dissemination, particularly on church sensitive issues like youth SE (Nurse, 2017). Further insights from the literature reflected, that preventive measures for problems among large numbers of youth require multi-component interventions, generally encompassing a combination of individual and environmental change strategies across multiple settings (Davis & Johnson, 2021; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Williams & Jenkins, 2019). Additionally, change strategies may be useful for preventing dysfunction through the promotion of well-being among population groups in defined local communities like Afrocentric churches (Davis & Johnson, 2021; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Williams & Jenkins, 2019). Nevertheless, paucity of information dissemination and knowledge seemingly resulted in Afrocentric church leader's hesitance towards recognizing and responding to youth SE as a problem (Levin et al., 2021; Nurse, 2017; Okech et al., 2018). Consequently, such hesitance has ostensibly resulted in a need for some religious leaders and practitioners from other entities to collaborate in assisting leaders of some Afrocentric churches with resources and training to respond to youth SE(Timoshkina, 2020).

Studies about preventive programs in churches to address sex violence-related issues resulted in data supporting many of the paradigms seemingly ascribed to effective prevention interventions (Nurse, 2017; Summers et al., 2013). One of such paradigms, was targeting individuals at risk and a large-scale coordinated social action including a variety of tools, strategies, and actors (e.g., pastors, teachers, family members, community members) in the development and implementation of prevention

interventions (Bennett, & Kottkr, 2016; Murphy et al., 2016; Nurse, 2017). Nurse (2017) conducted a study on the influence of an adult training program on participants' knowledge about youth sexual abuse. Supporting the coordinated action premise, Nurse posited that training some individuals (such as parents, staff, volunteers, etc.) may significantly help reduce issues encompassing sexual violence against some youth (i.e., SE) because such individuals are involved in the daily lives of young people. Moreover, proximity and often exchange with youth may result in some persons being well situated to report or address early signs of sexual abuse (Nurse, 2017; Rudolph et al., 2018). Likewise, church leaders, are actors involved in the lives of young people. Such proximity may merit training church leaders to recognize factors that may potentially place youth at risk of SE, which is a form of child abuse (De Vries & Goggin, 2020; Nurse, 2017; Rudolph et al., 2018). Arguably, results from Nurses' study reflected that training geared toward large-scale coordinated social action might increase participants' knowledge and change participants' behavior toward youth sexual abuse. Yet, results from Nurse's research study were nongeneralizable to Afrocentric populations due to low racial/ethnic-religious diversity in the sample (i.e., reduced number of Afrocentric participants).

Conversely, other research studies encompassed results whereas, participants working close to youth on a regular basis often confronted evidence of sexual violence and risk factors among some youth but were unable to identify factors specific to SE due to poor training (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018). Although youth SE is a form of violence against young people, there are factors ostensibly specific to the

youth SE problem needing specialized knowledge and training (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Nurse, 2017; Okech et al., 2018). Addressing such factors with specialized training may necessitate tailored prevention programs to potentially ensure influence on participants' knowledge and skills specific to youth SE (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Rothman et al., 2021; Shipe et al., 2022). Further, targeting specific groups of participants (such as leaders of Afrocentric churches) with specialized interventions may entail developing culturally competent training programs tailored to fit participant's cultural beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Hollis et al., 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Stennis et al., 2015). Including community stakeholders in the design and implementation processes of preventive programs, may contribute significantly to promoting cultural competency, which was apparently, a significant component when targeting Afrocentric populations (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Levin et al., 2021).

In a study on an HIV/AIDS prevention program, targeting a selected group of Afrocentric churches, Griffith et al., (2010) concluded that culturally sensitive and customized prevention programs were increasingly significant when informing and raising awareness on sexual topics among Afrocentric congregations. Further arguments supported that, cultural competency was significant in Afrocentric communities' training, because church leaders and members were apparently apprehensive toward some sex violence prevention measures due to several challenges including, (a) Afrocentric community leaders and members' perception of being misunderstood or viewed as a monolithic group, (b) some community leaders' and members' distrust in practitioners

and leaders of some non-religious organizations, and (c) sensitivity to issues that are taboo in the Afrocentric church community (i.e., SE/prostitution; Hollis et al., 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023). Seemingly, such challenges increased the importance of engaging in culturally sensitive prevention practices, utilizing specific culturally considerate techniques to minimize distrust and provide a sense of empowerment and contribution from Afrocentric participants (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023). Some techniques included incorporating stakeholders and community members as part of a cultural competency strategy for prevention training program development (Hollis et al., 2021; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023). Seemingly failing to consider some stakeholders' cultural differences, preferences, needs, values, and priorities in the structural development of some youth SE programs, policies, and practices, may have been the cause for some leaders of Afrocentric churches' nominal involvement in SE prevention (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022).

Putatively, leaders of Afrocentric churches are stakeholders representing institutions and organizations with influence over some community members (Anderson-Cole, 2017; Wright et al., 2020). Increasing the involvement of such leaders in SE prevention may influence, (a) the widespread adoption of preventive activities in some Afrocentric communities, (b) the enhancements of community participation in prevention initiatives, and (c) the likelihood of program sustainability against youth involvement within Afrocentric communities (see Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022). Consequently, prevention advocates and intervention developers

recognized the need to acknowledge and incorporate leaders of Afrocentric churches' values and priorities in youth SE prevention efforts to possibly influence such leaders' knowledge and behavior toward addressing youth at risk of SE (see Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023).In addition to cultural competence in youth SE training program development, advocates and developers also realized that theory inclusiveness in program development was also significant in addressing the dearth of Afrocentric church leaders' participation in youth preventive and protective action. And moreover, incorporating theory in a prevention module could be beneficial to possibly addressing church leaders' and parishioners' stigma towards sex-related issues such as youth SE (see Anderson-Cole, 2017; Wright et al., 2020).

**Theory-Based Prevention Training**

Youth SE prevention is essential to reducing SE incidence, financial and psychological costs, and improving skills to recognize SE vulnerabilities in some youth (Greenbaum, 2020; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019; Michie et al., 2018; Summers et al., 2013). Some community efforts towards SE prevention were professionalized, whereas an increasing number of SE prevention training had been left to crisis centers' practitioners, absolving some community leaders (i.e., church pastors) from the responsibility of youth SE prevention program development (Greenbaum, 2020; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019). Youth SE is a community issue, that requires a community solution and community-level interventions encompassing a combination of individual and environmental change strategies across multiple settings (see Greenbaum, 2020; Hollis et al., 2021; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019; Michie et al., 2018). Using change strategies in the

development of interventions may be useful for preventing dysfunction through the promotion of well-being among some youth in defined local communities such as Afrocentric communities (Hollis et al., 2021; Michie et al., 2018).

Moreover, theories may be significant resources for designing interventions that incorporate specific cultural elements and address change specific strategies necessary to change behavior in a specific group of participants (i.e., Afrocentric church leaders; see Glanz & Bishop, 2010; Hagger & Weed, 2019; Michie et al., 2018; Planey et al., 2019). A theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions to predict events by specifying relations among variables (Hagger & Weed, 2019). Including theory in intervention design may generate a systematic way to understand, explain, and influence behavior (see Hagger & Weed, 2019; Michie et al., 2018; Twis & Shelton, 2018). Ostensibly, interventions encompassing an explicit theoretical foundation, or a combination of multiple theories have had significant effects on people, compared to interventions lacking a theoretical base (Hagger & Weed, 2019). Developing interventions to improve some behaviors require understanding relevant theories based on the behaviors needing change and skills to apply such theories (Michie et al., 2018).

Theory-based interventions are seemingly significant for three reasons (Hagger & Weed, 2019). First, interventions may be effective when targeting behavior determinants or behavior change; understanding such behavioral aspects may require understanding theoretical change mechanisms (Hagger & Weed, 2019; Michie et al., 2018). Second, theory testing and development through intervention evaluation may happen if such interventions and evaluations are theory-based (Hagger & Weed, 2019; Michie et al.,

2018). Third, theory-based interventions apparently, facilitate learning that generates positive results, resulting in the basis for developing workable theories across different contexts, populations, and behaviors (Michie et al., 2018). The current literature contained studies on theory-based program evaluations (i.e., HIV/AIDS, obesity, and child abuse). Yet seemingly, no research study encompassed a theory base youth SE prevention training program evaluation for leaders of Afrocentric churches (Hollis et al., 2021; Michie et al., 2018).

**Theory-Based Prevention in Afrocentric Churches**

Youth SE preventive action may be significant in Afrocentric churches due to the increasing number of Afrocentric youths involved in SE and the role church leaders seemingly have in the lifespan of members (Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020; McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Vigliotti et al., 2020). Professedly, some church leaders and staffs' role in prevention efforts was to generate awareness among colleagues and congregants that may in turn, infuse knowledge into families and individuals in some communities (Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020; McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Vigliotti et al., 2020). The apparent success leaders of some Afrocentric churches had in implementing some youth protective programs (i.e., HIV/AIDS, pregnancy prevention, suicide prevention, obesity prevention) seemingly increased the utility of Afrocentric churches as resources to help address youth SE in some Afrocentric communities (see Hays & Shepard Payne, 2020; McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Oakley et al., 2019; Vigliotti et al., 2020). As a result, youth protection advocates in some public, private, and nonprofit organizations formed coalitions with some religious leaders to develop SE preventive and rehabilitative efforts within some

church communities (McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022; Vigliotti et al., 2020). From such coalitions, leaders, and staff members in some churches developed SE programs to address youth SE involvement and prevention (McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Oakley et al., 2019; Vigliotti et al., 2020). Despite such efforts, a significant number of leaders in some Afrocentric churches seemingly struggled to respond to SE youth protective action due to, (a) poor knowledge concerning youth SE, (b) stigma concerning sex-related issues, (c) denial as to youth SE occurrence among church youth, and (d) reduced culturally competent training programs for leaders of Afrocentric churches (Abara et al., 2015). Subsequently, such absence of protective action resulted in a scarcity of services and interventions to assist SE youth at risk in some Afrocentric communities and motivated some youth protection advocates and leaders of an Empowerment Training Center in a U.S. northeastern metropolitan area) to develop the Sexual Exploitation Model (SEM). Staff members from this religious nonprofit organization developed the SEM as a training program specifically for leaders of Afrocentric churches to address youth SE awareness and vulnerabilities.

**The Sexual Exploitation Model (SEM)**

The SEM was a training webinar module developed under an instructional leadership training forum designed for leaders of Afrocentric churches to acquire knowledge and skills about various aspects of church leadership and development. Incipient stages of the forum encompassed several modules on leadership; however, apparently, no components included training to help address social issues in Afrocentric churches and communities, particularly sex-related issues. the need for a youth SE

prevention program for Afrocentric churches resulted in developers, from a religious nonprofit in a U.S. northeastern metropolitan area, designing a culturally competent intervention to address social issues involving violent sexual acts.

Low participation rate in among leaders of Afrocentric churches in youth SE prevention efforts may be a result of stigma concerning sexual acts characterizing by SE (McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Vigliotti et al., 2020). To address such dearth of participation, SEM intervention developers seemingly incorporated specific constructs from Triandis' TIB (common to some behavioral change models) to influence leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge; and in turn, possibly influence behavior (Triandis, 1977). Part of the SEM module targeted leaders of Afrocentric churches' affects (feelings); perceived consequences (potential consequences from behavior); social factors (individuals' internalization and interpersonal agreements); and facilitating conditions (objective environmental conditions conducive or not to behavior) to possibly influence knowledge based-intentions (i.e., understanding and embracing the topic); and the feasibility of change in behavior (i.e., helping youth at risk of SE; Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Litam et al., 2023; Litam & Lam, 2021; Thompson et al., 1991; Triandis, 1977). Change in leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge and behavior concerning youth SE prevention may consequently lead to increasing youth protective action in Afrocentric church communities, propagating awareness among members in Afrocentric communities; and multiagency collaboration and partnerships among church leaders and leaders of public, private, and other nonprofit organizations (Bounds et al., 2020; Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kim et al., 2022; Moss et al.,

2023). Basing the SEM module on the TIB as framework was seemingly the incipient stages of developing culturally competent awareness/prevention interventions with a behavioral change premise to address a sexual social issue.

**The SEM Theory Based Premise**

Triandis's (TIB) derived from two cognitive models Ajzen's and Fishbein's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action and Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour where intent to perform an act is a pivotal determinant of behavior (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Unlike Ajzens and Fishbeins, Triandis took into consideration other elements that seemingly intervene between intentions and argued that three dimensions determine behavior, intention, facilitating conditions, and habit (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Queirós et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 1991). Triandis's objective was to ostensibly build a synthesized model to include variables of attitudes, values, and other acquired behavior dispositions that may include different types of interpersonal behavior; subsequently, making behavior (across situations) a function deriving partly from intentions, habits, situational conditions, and constraints (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Queirós et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 1991). In his TIB model, Triandis's interest was to account for the most variance as a total, being that a small amount of variance may be socially important if the behavior is significant (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Queirós et al., 2017). Ostensibly, SEM developers used the TIB premise, to (a) develop training components incorporating factors pertaining to leaders of Afrocentric churches' social environment, feelings, and perceptions, to possibly influence such leaders' SE knowledge concerning

youth SE and SE risk factors; and (b) develop a training module as a facilitating condition to influence participants' knowledge based-intentions and subsequently their behavior toward helping youths at risk of SE (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Litam et al., 2023; Litam & Lam, 2021; Queirós et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 1991).

Triandis' TIB is a behavioral theory based on the premise that intentions along with other social factors influence the performance of behavior (Afsar & Umrani, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2012; Triandis, 1977). The TIB is a comprehensive model, based on the premise that, in some interpersonal encounters, several factors determine behavior. Such factors include (a) participants' conceptions of what is appropriate, (b) what participants learn about a behavior (i.e., some behaviors are correct and some are incorrect), (c) social pressure, (d) participants' like or dislike of a behavior, (e) consequences participants' see connected to a behavior, and (f) how much participants value such consequences (Afsar & Umrani, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2012; Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). Social settings and some aspects of participants' personalities may also modify the course of interpersonal relations (Triandis, 1977). Developers also seemed to have incorporated Afrocentric church components encompassing cultural traits from the Afrocentric church culture in the SEM design to promote cultural competency as a viable tool to influence knowledge and behavioral change.

**The SEM Cultural Competency**

The SEM module developers seemingly incorporated a culturally competent component by considering leaders of Afrocentric churches' cultural differences, preferences, beliefs, needs, values, and priorities in the structural development of the

SEM Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023). Such considerations resulted in participants' influenced SE knowledge and increased involvement in SE prevention and protective action (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022). Leaders of Afrocentric churches are stakeholders representing institutions and organizations, and exercise influence over some community members (Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022). SEM developers ostensibly also used Triandis's TIB as framework for cultural competency to address leaders of Afrocentric churches' cultural values and priorities; influence such leaders' SE knowledge; and subsequently influence behavior toward helping youth at risk of SE (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Vazquez-Rivera & Rojas-Livia, 2022). Seemingly the SEM is one of few SE awareness and prevention interventions in research encompassing the TIB as framework and inclusive of cultural Afrocentric church components.

**The SEM in Research**

Some Afrocentric church training programs addressed sex-related issues such as youth SE, HIV/AIDS, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence (Oakley et al., 2019). Apparently, few of such programs dealt with youth SE prevention and targeted leaders of Afrocentric churches (Oakley et al., 2019; Vigliotti et al., 2020). According to developers the SEM was one of few youth SE prevention training modules for leaders of a specific ethnic-religious group (i.e., leaders of Afrocentric churches), with a scope on youth SE vulnerability, and based on a behavioral theory. The SEM objectives were to influence participants' knowledge in SE and recognizing SE vulnerabilities in at risk youth. And further, to influence participants' behavior towards helping youths at risk of SE. Seemingly, to date, there were no research studies encompassing a youth SE prevention

module for leaders of Afrocentric churches based on Triandis' TIB (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Oakley et al., 2019; Queirós et al., 2017). Prevention modules such as Protecting God's Children (PGC) appeared to have components similar to the SEM; however, the focus was child abuse (Nurse, 2017).

**Other Training Modules**

Protecting God's Children (PGC) was a child sexual abuse (CSA) training program for staff members and volunteers working with children in Catholic institutions (e.g., churches, schools, sports leagues, and social service agencies; Nurse, 2017). Possible similarities between PGC and the SEM were that, first, the PCG program goal was to increase participant's knowledge about a sexual social issue and risk factors about such issue (Nurse, 2017). Second, empirical testing, whereas the PGC evaluation included a pretest/posttest resulting in increased participants' knowledge about child sexual abuse (CSA) and proved participants' knowledge retention after several months (Nurse, 2017). Third, program design, the PGC focused on a specific church community (i.e., catholic institutions; Nurse, 2017). Possible reasons precluding the PGC's use as a youth SE training module for leaders of Afrocentric churches include, youth SE is a form of child abuse, yet may be a problem needing specialized focus due to factors particular to SE (i.e., possible human trafficking involvement), legal concerns due to crime considerations, and psychological differences due to violence (Hopper & Gonzalez, 2018; Li et al., 2020; Oakley et al., 2019). Further, apparently, PCG was a training module for a Catholic Church environment and a mixed group of participants (i.e., parents, staff, and volunteers), with different ethnic/racial backgrounds (Nurse, 2017).. A debate

concerning the influence of training programs developed in and by a different cultural/ethnic community and the possibility of such programs' failure to fulfill training needs and address the challenges of the receiving community, is a possible reason for needing specialized training in youth SE awareness and vulnerabilities for leaders of some Afrocentric churches (Oakley et al., 2019).

## Summary

Chapter two encompasses the literature review inclusive of information about youth SE as a social issue with significant consequences for youth development. This chapter further included (a) a historical timeline of the existence and promotion of youth SE from ancient times until the 21st century; (b) an argument concerning the apparent impact of unclear definitions of SE and prostitution; (c) highlighted consequences and risk factors of youth SE; (d) a discussion about how differences in prostitution and SE definitions could be pivotal in youth SE detection;(e) how insufficient awareness and preventive efforts in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, (particularly Afrocentric churches) could be a significant factor in youth increasing involvement in SE in the United States; (f) the history and importance of prevention when addressing social issues such as SE; (g) a description of prevention efforts in some public, private, and nonprofit organizations; and (h) a list of some existing SE prevention programs and interventions.

Ostensibly, existing prevention efforts were insufficient in cultural competency and non-specific when targeting youth SE involvement and vulnerability among some Afrocentric individuals (Bounds et al., 2020; Fedina et al., 2019; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). By researching the current literature, I found that

youth SE training programs for leaders of Afrocentric churches were scarce. Such scarcity was seemingly significant to such leaders' reduced participation in addressing and preventing youth SE (Hayes-Smith & Shekarkhar, 2010; Kemp et al., 2014; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Moreover, the focus of empirically tested efforts seemed to be on programs for youth already involved in SE. Few of such training programs encompassed ways to recognize SE and SE risk factors in vulnerable youth, and/or were not specific to influencing leaders of Afrocentric churches' knowledge in recognizing such vulnerabilities (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). The SEM was seemingly the first training module for leaders of Afrocentric churches inclusive of the TIB as a theoretical framework. The SEM needed empirical testing to confirm the program's influence on participants' SE knowledge and alignment to the TIB as theoretical framework. The present mixed methods program evaluation explanatory sequential study was conducted to evaluate the SEM influence on participants' youth SE knowledge and possibly align the TIB as theoretical framework of the training based on such influence. Chapter three contains a description of the research design and analysis processes used to conduct the present study.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

Youth SE is a social problem necessitating attention and preventive action from leaders of some Afrocentric churches (McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Oakley et al., 2019; Vigliotti, 2020). Seemingly, SE preventive action is reduced among such leaders, due to a scarcity of training programs to help increase SE knowledge and recognize SE risk factors in vulnerable youth (Greenbaum, 2020; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019). Leaders of Afrocentric churches work closely with families and confront evidence of SE risk factors among congregants but apparently lack the training to identify and address possible youth SE involvement and vulnerabilities in some youths (Greenbaum et al., 2018; McDonnell & Idler, 2020; Nurse, 2017; Vigliotti, 2020). Such church leaders' lack of SE knowledge and involvement in SE prevention involvement, resulted in the development of a theory-based training module (the SEM) to increase leaders of Afrocentric churches' knowledge in addressing social sex-related issues such as youth SE.

I used this mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory study to determine the degree to which the SEM influenced leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge and how influenced on SE knowledge aligned with the SEM's underlying theoretical framework. Program evaluation is a systematic method that enables (a) collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer questions concerning the effect of a specific program; (b) program value; and (c) conceptual clarifications for program development and refinement (Ranasinghe et al., 2016; Umucu et al., 2022). Employing a mixed methods program evaluation explanatory sequential study rendered specific outcomes and confirmed the implied theoretical premise of the SEM based on results

from two distinct phases of data collection and analyses that rendered holistic answers to the research question, and an in-depth understanding of the research problem (see Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Such mixed methods design was suitable for the present study enabling integrated findings. Moreover, the triangulation of data resulted in increased validity and robust results (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022). Chapter 3 includes an overview of components of the present mixed methods program evaluation study, the research questions and hypothesis, methodology, sampling targeting and selection, instrumentation, data collection, analysis and triangulation, threats to validity and reliability, and theoretical framework.

## Methods Overview

Research methods are tools researchers use while administering some forms of inquiry or investigation (Walliman, 2021). Researchers are responsible for selecting the appropriate research design for a specific study, ensuring that the information generated is pertinent to the subject of the research study (FitzPatrick, 2019; Flynn et al., 2018; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Hong et al., 2019; Ivankova et al., 2006; Santos et al., 2017). The present study was a mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory design encompassing two phases of data collection and analysis, a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase. Mixed methods research is a tool for investigating complex processes and systems, enabling a comprehensive degree of understanding of the research problem by combining two phases of data collection (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) occurring sequentially in particular settings (Santos et al., 2017). Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in one study enabled an increasingly robust analysis of the research

problem, taking advantage of the strengths of each method. Moreover, mixed methods enabled obtaining an exhaustive scope by investigating the issue or problem using numbers and words (FitzPatrick, 2019; Flynn et al., 2018; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Hong et al., 2019).

## Research Design Rationale

I chose a mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory research design, based on the research question concerning the SEM training module possibly influencing participants' youth SE knowledge and whether influenced knowledge aligned with the TIB as the theoretical framework of the SEM module. Mixed methods sequential explanatory is a prominent design applied in both social and behavioral sciences (Ivankova et al., 2006). The rationale for the employed approach was that quantitative data collection and analysis would render results encompassing a general understanding of the research problem through statistical data, addressing the research question through findings involving the impact of the training module on participants' SE knowledge (see FitzPatrick, 2019; Hong et al., 2019). Additionally, the qualitative data collection and analysis would render information helpful for refining, explaining, and assessing the statistical results generated from the quantitative phase (see FitzPatrick, 2019; Flynn et al., 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006). Results from each phase were useful for answering the research questions and addressing the research problem (Bloomberg, 2022; FitzPatrick, 2019; Flynn et al., 2018; Venkatesh et al., 2016). Phase 1, the quantitative phase, was an analysis of secondary data from a one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experiment. Phase 2, the qualitative phase, included a focus group with eight participants from Phase 1.

**Phase 1: Quantitative Analysis**

Quantitative analysis is the inspection, evaluation, and interpretation of numeric data, using various statistical techniques (Santos et al., 2017). The goal of the quantitative phase of this mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory study was to determine the degree participants' knowledge of youth SE was influenced after SEM participation. Such influence was measured using secondary data provided by a staff member from a partner organization and collected based on a one-group pretest and posttest quasi-experiment. A pretest posttest quasi-experiment is when a researcher selects a sample from a sample frame, administers a pretest, introduces and implements an intervention, and then conducts a posttest using the same sample (Harris et al., 2006). Quasi-experimental designs (i.e., one group pretest and posttest) are useful when ethical concerns and logistical limitations make experimental design infeasible (Alessandri et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2006). Further, quasi-experiments are generally intended to evaluate interventions without the use of randomization (Harris et al., 2006).

Researching sociological knowledge, as well as human behavior and learning processes, necessitated more than a quantitative methodology encompassing analytical control placed solely in hands of the researcher (Siegner, 2018). Considering the objectives of this study, investigating human behavior and learning processes was also necessary (see Santos et al., 2017; Siegner, 2018). Hence, a qualitative phase as an additional methodological component was appropriate based on the need to also measure participants' views and experiences that resulted in comprehensively addressing the

research question in the present study (see FitzPatrick, 2019; Flynn et al., 2018; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Hong et al., 2019; Ivankova et al., 2006; Siegner, 2018).

**Phase 2: Qualitative Analysis**

In qualitative analysis, the emphasis is on exploring and understanding the meanings individuals ascribe to a social problem (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022; FitzPatrick, 2019; Flynn et al., 2018; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Hong et al., 2019; Ivankova et al., 2006; Tarfa et al., 2023). The data collected is based on viewpoints and encompassed individuals' culture, individuality, and social justice perspectives (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022; Santos et al., 2017). Phase 2 encompassed a focus group (with eight participants from the quantitative phase) to elicit the collective experiences and expectations from church leaders participating in the SEM . Exploring participants' views in depth resulted in data about the possible influence of the SEM module on participants' knowledge about youth SE and how such influence possibly aligned with the underlying theoretical framework of the module (see Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022; FitzPatrick, 2019; Flynn et al., 2018; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Hong et al., 2019). Moreover, examining participants' views on youth SE and experiences resulting from SEM participation, was also useful in generating themes significant to linking and aligning the TIB as the underlying theoretical framework of the SEM (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022; Santos et al., 2017). Conducting the present study further involved considering the role of the researcher in both phases of the study.

## Role of the Researcher

### Quantitative Phase

The data collection for the first phase of this study solely involved members from the partner organization who contacted participants and collected the data I used in this study. After such data collection, a contact from the partner organization provided the unidentifiable data collected for my analysis. Such analysis was pivotal, being that there was seemingly a dearth of research concerning empirically measuring the influence of the SEM training module on participants' SE knowledge. Conducting empirical research to obtain scientific results on the SEM training module's influence on participants' SE knowledge was important to addressing the youth SE problem and contributing to existing research concerning youth SE training prevention modules.

### Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase of this study encompassed a focus group with eight participants from Phase 1. Such participants were selected randomly based on a range of high and low postsurvey scores. My professional and personal relationship with such participants was solely administrative and had no direct influence on participants' taking part in the focus group. Addressing such bias involved adopting the role of facilitator (taking a peripheral, rather than a center-stage role in the discussion) focusing on moderating group discussion between participants and not between the researcher and the participants, (Nyumba et al., 2018). Establishing a sampling strategy was also significant in producing results in phases one and two of the present study.

## Sampling Strategy

A sample is a portion of a population or universe that can also refer to the total quantity of things or cases that are the subject of research (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016; Obilor, 2023). Sample selection includes a variety of techniques (Obilor, 2023). Such sampling techniques may influence attributes (e.g., cost, time, and accessibility) beyond the representativeness of the sample (Obilor, 2023). Hence, the importance for researchers to determine which sample technique applies to a particular study (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016; Obilor, 2023; Sibona & Walczak, 2012). The sample for the present mixed methods program evaluation explanatory study included secondary data provided by a staff member from a partner organization who served as my contact. The data was from participants whose background related to the objective of the program evaluation (i.e., leaders of Afrocentric churches), and who had the information necessary to conduct the data collection (see Obilor, 2023). The quantitative and qualitative phases of the study involved distinct sampling strategies.

### Quantitative Secondary Data Sampling

The quantitative phase involved the use of secondary data provided by staff members from the partner organization. Secondary data is dataset not collected by the researcher. Such data may also include data that has been previously gathered and is under consideration to be reused for new questions, for which the data gathered was not originally intended (Tripathy, 2013). Sources to obtain secondary data are dependent on the research gap addressed in a study and the research questions.

The rationale for using secondary data was that I was able to efficiently conduct this mixed methods study involving the use of significant resources due to two phases of data collection and analysis. Further, the availability of such data was specific to the intervention under evaluation. Also, the usage of secondary data avoided wastage of resources and was conducive to addressing participants' sensitivities and views involving topics such as youth SE. Limitations of using secondary data included methodological issues with the data collection and instrumentation. Sampling limitations for the present study are detailed in the limitations section. I addressed such limitations by first, carefully examining the data to try to ensure that the sample dataset was adequate for the purpose of the present study. Second, by evaluating the methodology of the data collection instrumentation, period of data collection, purpose for which the data was collected, and the content of the original dataset for adequacy in answering the research question (see Johnston, 2014).

**Quantitative Phase Sampling Strategy and Rationale**

The dataset collected for the quantitative phase of the present study involved nonprobability purposive convenience sampling of church leaders, being that SEM developers' main concern was to draw inferences about the SEM program from specific participants (see Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016; Obilor, 2023; Sibona & Walczak, 2012). The purposiveness of the sampling technique (also known as judgment sampling) involved the deliberate choice of participants due to specific qualities in this case, leaders of Afrocentric churches, inclusive of bishops, pastors, ministers, trustees, and church department heads and workers (Obilor, 2023). The convenience of the sample

involved participants from an accessible database of Afrocentric churches in a regional area, enabling a fast and inexpensive selection process. Purposive convenient sampling was a versatile nonrandom technique that seemingly enabled SEM developers and data collectors to (a) involve people with particular characteristics to assist with providing the necessary information concerning the training; (b) determine what needed to be known, and find individuals able and willing to supply such information; (c) select participants from accessible sources (e.g., database, lists); and (d) conduct a cost-effective and expedited selection process (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Obilor, 2023; Sibona & Walczak, 2012).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several dynamics of the training were adjusted, including the training being offered online as a webinar instead of in-person. Hence, participants encompassed church leaders from outside of the intended specific U.S. northeast metropolitan area. Further, due to the secondary nature of the data collected, the sample size was less than what was anticipated to conduct the present study.

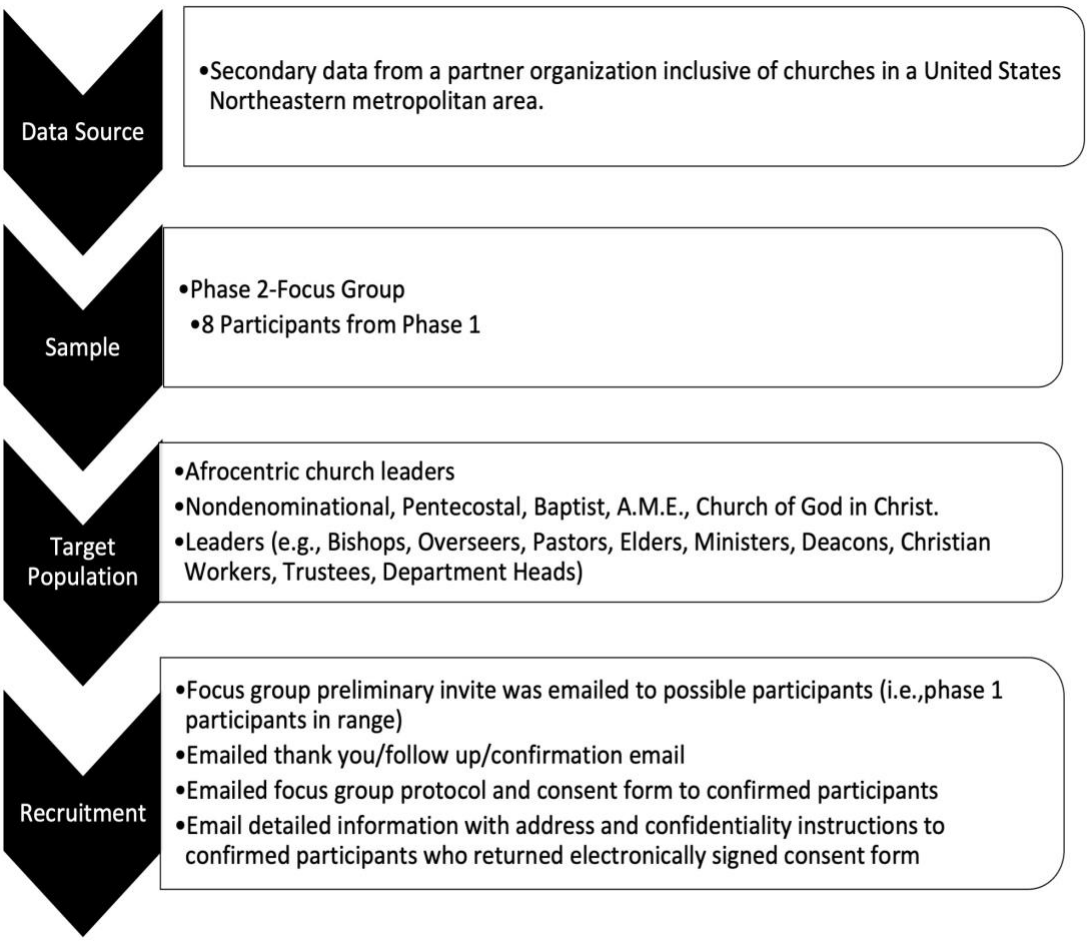
**Qualitative Phase Sampling Strategy and Rationale**

For the qualitative phase, SEM participants (whose posttest scores were within a range established for selection (mid-high scores to highest scores and mid-low scores to lowest scores) received a preliminary invite to participate in a focus group (Appendix A). The first eight participants (four within the high-range score group and four within the low-range group) that responded confirming participation were emailed a thank you with date and time information about the focus group and were asked to re-confirm their participation. After focus group candidates were re-confirmed, each participant was

emailed a consent form and asked to return the consent electronically by replying "I consent." Such reply constituted each participant's electronic signature. Upon receipt of consent, participants were emailed information about the focus group venue and privacy instructions concerning the meeting place and time of the focus group (Appendix B). Focus group participants in the qualitative phase were leaders of Afrocentric churches with similar religious denominations and ethnicities but of different cultural backgrounds. The qualitative phase sampling recruiting process is displayed in Figure 6.

**Figure 6**

*Qualitative Phase Sampling Process*



### Informed Consent

Prior to conducting the qualitative phase focus group, I emailed the informed consent form (containing information about, the research study, the extent of participants' contribution, risks and benefits, confidentiality and anonymity, data collection techniques, and participants' eligibility) to the eight focus group confirmed participants. Focus group participants were instructed to acknowledge and consent to the focus group participation electronically by replying to the informed consent email with "I consent" prior to receiving additional details about the location and instructions for participating in the focus group.

## Data Collection

### Quantitative Phase Data Collection

The quantitative phase data collection entailed measuring variables or constructs that referred to measurable attributes (see Kusurkar et al., 2011). Researchers convert concepts into variables by assigning a set of values through translating or mapping and use such variables to construct or test hypotheses (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Kusurkar et al., 2011). Variables may be distinguished analytically as dependent, independent, or control variables (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Kusurkar et al., 2011). A dependent variable (or criterion variable) is subject to change and is what the researcher studies and measures in the experiment (Kusurkar et al., 2011). The independent variable (or explanatory/predictor variable) is the construct possibly inducing the change or the explanation for the change (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Kusurkar et al., 2011). In the present study, the dependent variable was SE knowledge encompassing seven

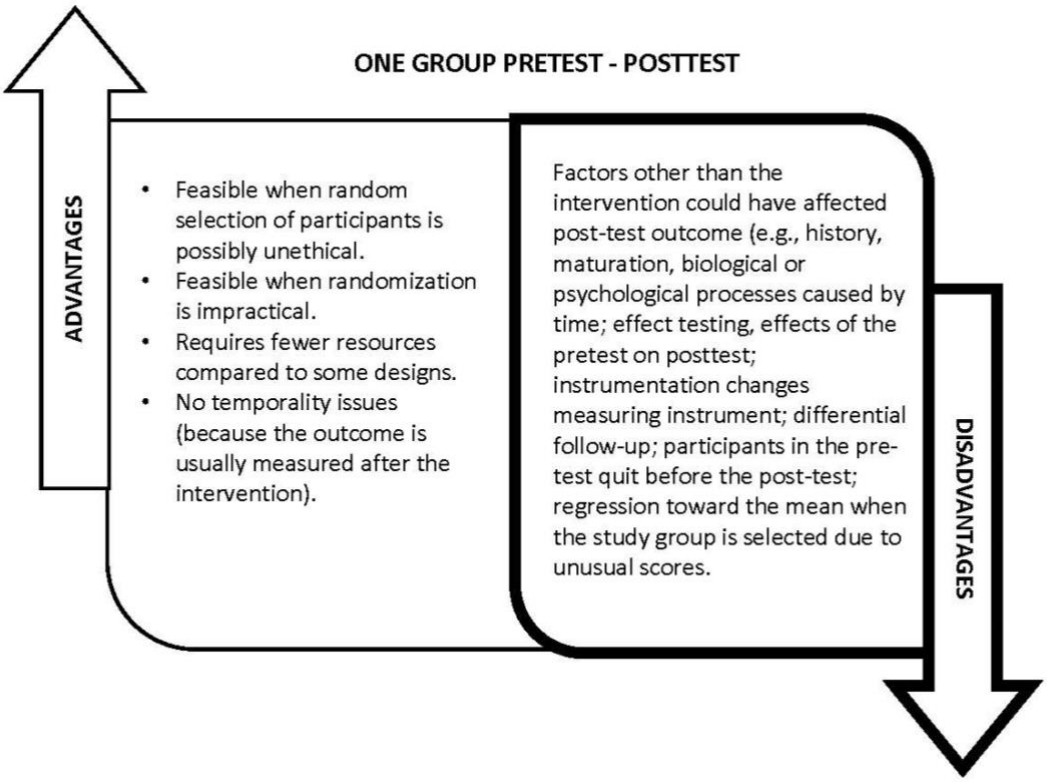
subcategories: SE beliefs, SE definition and identification, scope and demand for SE, risk factors for SE entry, SE behavior, SE laws and services, and taking action. The independent variable was the SEM training where leaders of Afrocentric churches participated for 3 hours.

The data set used for this phase was secondary data. Staff members from the partner organization used a self-developed survey (the UES) to collect data from one group of participants before and after the SEM training (see Campbell & Stanley, 2015). Quasi-experimental designs enable researchers to conduct studies in a natural setting using probability samples, which increases the external validity of a study. One-group pretest-posttest designs are widely used and are useful in behavioral research to compare participants' scores and measure degrees of change resulting from a treatment or intervention (Baker & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2013; Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Knapp, 2016; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Reid, 2019). Such designs are characterized by three major factors: (a) the group of participants receiving the intervention is selected non-randomly, making such design a quasi-experimental design; (b) there is no control group to control the outcome; and(c) the effect of the intervention is measured by comparing the pre- and postintervention measurements (the null hypothesis is that the intervention has no effect on the dependent variable).

Advantages and disadvantages of one group pretest and posttest are detailed in Figure 7. Having no control over the data collection process for this phase increased the limitations of the present study and reduced the possibility of addressing some of the disadvantages of the design. I addressed such limitations in the limitations section.

**Figure 7**

*Advantages and Disadvantages of One Group Pretest -Posttest*




*Note.* This figure contains advantages and disadvantages of a one-group pretest posttest design. The white shape & arrow (on the left) represent advantages and the bold framed shape & arrow (on the right) represent disadvantages. From "Experimental and Quasi-experimental" by D.T. Campbell & J.G., *Design for Research,* 1996, Ran McNally, Chicago, III.

## Secondary Data Use Rationale

The quantitative phase of the present study encompassed preexisting data that staff members from the partner organization collected from surveys administered before and after the SEM training. After signing a letter of cooperation granting me access to the data set and detailing the role of the partner organization in the present research study; my contact from the partner organization emailed me the data set that contained no

individual's personal identifiers to protect participants identity but was numbered to match training participants' before and after scores.

The rationale for using secondary data was that the data was based on (a) convenience in that the data was collected to address what I was addressing in this study; (b) reduced cost, time, and resources; and (c) no inconvenience to participants, avoiding ethical issues concerning participants and the sensitivity of the topic. Disadvantages of using secondary data included (a) lack of control in framing and wording the data collection instrument (i.e., survey), (b) no control over the data collection process and conditions, (c) limited sample size, and (d) no possibility for follow up with participants to collect additional data, if necessary (see Weston et al., 2019). Such disadvantages generated limitations further discussed in the limitations section.

**The Self-Developed Survey (UES)**

Staff members from the partner organization used the UES, a 5-minute self-administered electronic survey, to collect data from participants. Participants accessed such survey through a link on the conference webpage. Advantages of self-administered surveys include the validity of the data based on participants not having to share answers with an interviewer; and the lack of hesitancy from participants in disclosing sensitive information. Potential limitations of self-administered electronic questionnaires are participants' reading and comprehension levels; ability to understand the questions; and ability to maneuver through each section in an electronic environment (Fowler, 2013). The UES is a 5-minute self-administered survey that participants accessed and completed online before and after the SEM training. The pre- and postsurveys encompassed eight

sections covering aspects of the SE knowledge constructs including *beliefs, definition and identification, scope and demand, risk factors, behavior of involved youth, laws and services, intervention,* and *taking action*. Each section encompassed questions written in English and required answers based on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with some sections inclusive of yes or no answers. Likert scale values were assigned scored values as follows, *Strongly Disagree* = 1; *Disagree* = 2; *Neither Agree/Disagree* = 3; *Agree* = 4; *Strongly Agree* = 5. . . . Likert scale scores included two reversed scores (Section 1, Question 1 and Section 5, Question 3; See Figure 8). Dichotomous values were scored as Yes = 1; and No = 2. The UES included a total of four questions rendering dichotomous (Yes/No) values. The first page of the pre- and postsurveys included a thank you to participants for participating, questions requiring participants' names, leadership roles, state and province, email addresses, phone number, and for participants to check whether *attending* or *attended* the SEM webinar on the pre- and postsurveys respectively. No demographic data was requested on either pre- or postsurveys. Both pre- and postsurveys contained the same questions. Figure 8 includes survey questions and type of answers per section.

**Figure 8**

*UES Pre- and Postsurvey Questions by Section*

| SECTION 1: Minors Involved in SE-Beliefs | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. Minors who are voluntarily and involuntarily involved in prostitution should be prosecuted criminally<br>2. I believe minors who engage in prostitution come from families with socioeconomic hardships<br>3. I believe minors who are forced into prostitution are victims of child abuse<br>4. I believe minors who voluntarily participate in prostitution are victims of child abuse<br>5. I believe minors who come from a minority background are more vulnerable to SE | **Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree |

| SECTION 2: Define & Identify SE | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. I am able to define SE of minors | Yes/No |
| 2. Minors who run away and engage in prostitution as a means of survival are victims of SE<br>3. Minors who are solicited in pornographic images and videos are sexually exploited victims<br>4. Minors who voluntarily and involuntarily engage in sex for money or anything of value are sexually exploited victims | **Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree |

| SECTION 3: SE Scope & Demand | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. SE of minors is a social issue<br>2. Minors who live in Metropolitan areas are at a higher risk of being sexually exploited<br>3. Those who engage in SE of minors are predominantly males | **Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree |

| SECTION 4: Risk Factors for SE Minors | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. I know the risk factors that increase the chances of minors being sexually exploited | Yes/No |
| 2. Minors who come from dysfunctional families are at a higher risk of being sexually exploited<br>3. Minors who are verbally, physically, and sexually abused are at a higher risk of being sexually exploited<br>4. Social and behavioral issues at school are risk factors for minors being sexually exploited | **Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree |

| SECTION 5: Behavior of Minors Involved | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. Minors involved in SE are often sympathetic towards their abuser/pimp/exploiter<br>2. The majority of minors who have been sexually exploited do not identify as victims<br>3. When interviewed by law enforcement, social workers, medical personnel, and religious leaders, many sexually exploited victims feel safe and therefore are forthcoming about their experiences | **Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree |

| SECTION 6: Laws & Services | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. I can identify at least two laws in my state related to SE of minors<br>2. I am familiar with services offered by organizations in my state that are geared towards assisting sexually exploited minors<br>3. Resources are available for sexually exploited minors | Yes/No<br>**Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree<br>Yes/No |

| SECTION 7: Intervention | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. SE of minors is a social issue<br>2. Minors who live in Metropolitan areas are at a higher risk of being sexually exploited<br>3. Those who engage in SE of minors are predominantly males | **Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree |

| SECTION 8: Taking Action | SCALE TYPE |
|---|---|
| 1. I feel equipped to take action in addressing minors being sexually exploited<br>2. Because I am a leader, I feel it is my duty to take action in addressing minors being sexually exploited<br>3. I do not feel the need to take action because I am not directly affected by minors being sexually exploited | **Likert Scale**<br>Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree |

## Qualitative Phase Data Collection

In phase two (qualitative phase), the data collection method was a focus group with eight participants from the quantitative phase. A focus group is a small group of individuals with particular characteristics that a trained moderator (the researcher) brings together to explore attitudes, perceptions, feelings, and ideas about a topic (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Doody et al., 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). The aim is to use 1–2-hour group interviews (of groups of six to twelve persons) to generate an understanding of the social dynamic between participants through collecting verbal and observational data (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Focus groups are useful for exploring peoples' patterns of thinking, knowledge, and experiences; possibly revealing levels of understanding that may remain unexplored when using other data collection methods (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Doody et al., 2013). Several reasons are significant to the rationale for using focus groups.

## Focus Groups Rationale

I used a focus group in the qualitative phase of the present study because, first, in focus groups, participants provide detailed data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and impressions expressed in words (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Doody et al., 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Second, using a focus group was significantly beneficial to inquiries related to participants' understanding and experiences about youth SE and the reasons behind a particular thinking pattern (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Third, using a focus group was suitable for examining a sensitive issue such as youth SE (Doody et al., 2013). Last, employing a focus group enabled marginalized

segments of society (e.g., minorities) such as Afrocentric church leaders to express feelings about social needs and problems in a marginalized community (see Doody et al., 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Several factors were significant in using a focus group as the data collection strategy in this study.

**Focus Group Strategy**

Several factors were significant to conducting a productive focus group . Such factors include a clear objective, a suitable setting, adequate resources, appropriate subjects, a skilled moderator, practical questions, and honoring participants (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Doody et al., 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Room size, temperature, and lighting; seating; participants' view of each other in the room; interruptions; clarity as to the role of the moderator; and interview/discussion criteria were additional significant a productive data collection (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Doody et al., 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). For the present study, I conducted a 90-minute focus group, with 8 participants from phase one. Participants answered a set of open-ended questions in an interactive setting based on the research question, the purpose of the study, and the type of data required (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Doody et al., 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019; Tümen Akyildiz, 2020). The purpose of such questions was two-fold, (1) to elicit participants' understanding, experience, and perceptions of youth SE before and after undergoing the SEM module; and (2) to explore how the meaning of such perceptions related to Triandis' TIB as the possible underlying theoretical framework.

As the focus group moderator, I conducted the group interview process, (a) being non-judgmental about participants' responses, (b) respecting participants' views, (c) being

open-minded, (d) having adequate knowledge about the project, (e) exercising good observation skills, (f) showing patience and flexibility, and (g) being sensitive to participants' needs (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Doody et al., 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Further, I formulated questions to explore the possible influence of the SEM training on participants' youth SE knowledge and subsequent influence on participants' feasibility to engage in helping behavior (see Triandis, 1977; Robinson, 2010). I also explored the role each participant perceived of themselves and each participant's perceived responsibility to address youth SE based on such role. The questions were qualitative in nature, sequenced in a natural flow, non-dichotomous, participatory, and focused (going from general to specific) (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). To facilitate interaction between participants, I introduced the questions one by one, providing probes and pauses, and involving group members in discussion without expressing any value on the answers I received (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021). Appendix D contains the focus group protocol for executing the focus group interview. I tracked and subsequently accessed the data for analysis using color post-it, notes, journaling, index cards, and the ATLAS.ti software.

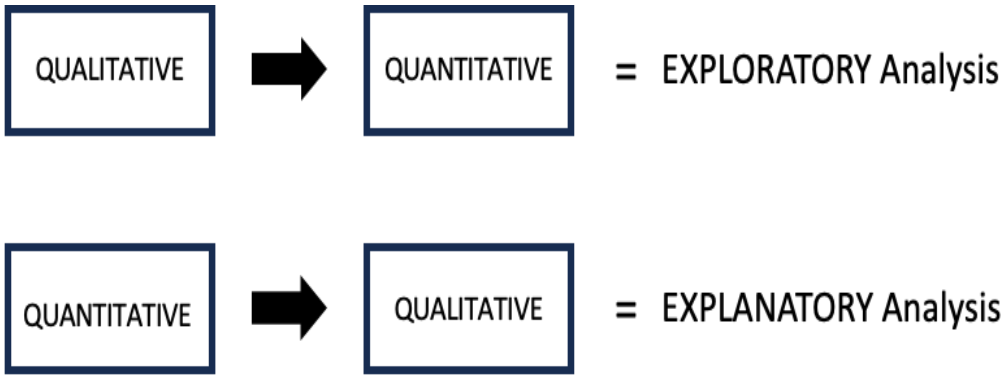
## Data Analyses

Mixed methods data analysis processes encompass combining, connecting, or integrating quantitative and qualitative data analysis strategies (Ivankova et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Venkatesh et al., 2016). Three data analysis strategies are possible in a mixed methods sequential design, sequential explanatory; sequential exploratory; and interactive sequential (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Figure 9 contains a

depiction of the phases in exploratory and explanatory data analyses. In exploratory analysis, the qualitative analysis precedes the quantitative analysis. In explanatory analysis, the quantitative analysis precedes the qualitative analysis. For the present study, I used an explanatory data analysis strategy where I conducted the quantitative analysis first, followed by the qualitative analysis (QUAN ⇨ QUAL). Then I used triangulation to relate the analysis from the two phases (Ivankova et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

**Figure 9**

*Phases in Exploratory and Explanatory Analyses*



## Quantitative Data Analysis

Phase 1 included a paired sample *t* test (also known as dependent t-test, paired t-test, or repeated measures t-test) to test the null hypothesis by comparing participants' youth SE knowledge survey mean scores before and after SEM participation to determine whether the SEM had significant influence on participants' SE knowledge. I used IBM SPSS software (version 27) to conduct the data analysis. The data set was secondary data provided by a contact from the partner organization. Such data set included SEM participants' presurvey scores and postsurvey scores coded so that the identity of participants remained concealed, yet participants' pretest and posttest scores were matched to conduct the paired sample *t* test.

## Adjustments to the Quantitative Phase Data Analysis Process

Originally the proposed quantitative data analysis for the present study involved using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), a parametric statistical technique encompassing a combination of regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Researchers use ANCOVA to compare posttest means using pretest scores as covariates inclusive of an intervention condition (i.e., the SEM), and one or more quantitative predictor variables (covariates) representing sources of variance possibly influencing the dependent variable, yet not controlled by intervention procedures (see Leppink, 2018; Wan, 2019). The process involved using primary data collected from an intervention group and a control group; however, changes in the data collection process due to institutional review board (IRB-Approval # 09-11-20-0306198) requirements and the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in changes to the quantitative data analysis process in the

present study. Due to such changes, I conducted a one-group paired sample *t* test using secondary data from a partner organization to measure the SEM's influence on participants' youth SE knowledge .

**Paired Sample *t* test Rationale**

The suitability of a paired *t* test for this study was based on researchers often using such parametric tests to compare the means of two measurements from the same individuals, object, or related units and determine if there is statistical difference between the prescores and postscores. If there are statistical differences between pretest scores and posttest scores, the null hypothesis is rejected and the researcher may determine the influence of a particular intervention (see Gerald, 2018). Paired *t* tests measurements may be (a) measurements taken at two different times (e.g., a pre-test and post-test with an intervention administered between the two time points) as was the data in phase one of this study, (b) a measurement taken under two different conditions (e.g., completing a test under a control condition and an experimental condition), and (c) measurements taken from two halves or sides of a subject or experimental unit (e.g., measuring sensation loss in a subject's left and right hands; see Gerald, 2018).

Common assumptions when conducting paired *t* test include (a) the dependent variable is continuous, measured at the interval or ratio level; (b) each participant must have two dependent observations or scores, where scores are matched; (c) data or sample was randomly selected from the population; (and d) differences between the pretest and posttest scores must be normally distributed (see Gerald, 2018).

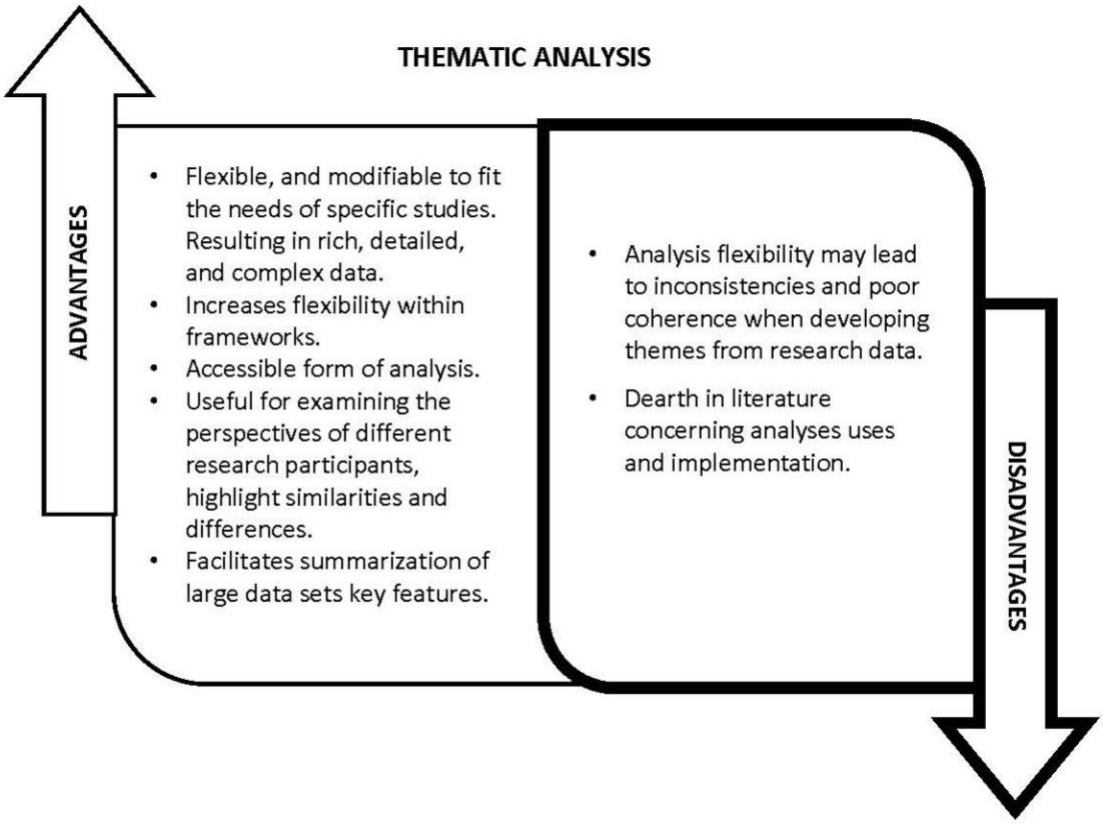
The variable used in a paired *t* test is the dependent variable or test variable, measured at two different times or for two related conditions. The dependent variable in the present study was *youth SE knowledge* composed of eight sections, (a) Knowledge on SE beliefs, (b) knowledge defining and identifying youth SE, (c) knowledge of the scope and demand for SE, (d) knowledge of the risk factors for SE vulnerability, (e) Knowledge of behavior of youth involved, (f) knowledge of laws and services to address SE vulnerability, (g) knowledge of how to intervene (i.e. a youth at risk) and (h) knowledge of being equipped to take action. After the quantitative data analysis, I conducted the qualitative data analysis.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The second phase of the present study encompassed a qualitative analysis employing a focus group. The purpose of the study and accurate recording of the focus group discussion was significant to the qualitative data analysis process (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). The qualitative data analysis involved using thematic analysis, a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes or patterns within a data set. Thematic analysis resulted in producing insightful and trustworthy results by searching data sets and finding repeated patterns or meanings. Some advantages and disadvantages of using thematic analysis are in Table 10 (Bloomberg, 2022; Sim & Waterfield, 2019).

**Figure 10**

*Advantages & Disadvantages of Thematic Analysis*




*Note.* This figure contains some advantages and disadvantages of thematic analysis. The white shape & arrow (on the left) represent advantages and the bold shape & bold arrow (on the right) represent disadvantages. From "Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings: Thematic Analysis," by L.D. Bloomberg, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: a Roadmap From Beginning to End (*5th ed), 2022, Ran McNally, Chicago, III.

**Executing Thematic Analysis**

To conduct the thematic analysis of the qualitative data, first, I prepared and organized the data I collected. Such preparation and organization included transcribing the focus group interview verbal data, non-verbal data (e.g., body language, voice tones), settings/environmental data (e.g., information about the meeting room, lighting), emotional data, and reflections data; to facilitate further analysis and establish a written record of the group discussion that may be useful for further research (see Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Second, I transcribed participants' responses using the Microsoft Office Word transcription feature. Then, I listened to the focus group recording and manually edited the transcription to increase accuracy and readability, maintaining the character of respondents' comments, even when involving grammatical issues or appearance of confusion (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Third, I familiarized myself with the data collected by reading the transcripts several times for several days to obtain a sense of the information before describing, classifying, and interpreting the data (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). I also made notes of non-verbal information pertinent to the context of the data collected. Fourth, I condensed the data into codes and main themes through a coding and labeling process by, (a) searching for main ideas and listing such ideas; (b) considering words, terms, and context; (c) examining the strength of participants' reactions and feelings. I also used ATLAS.ti computer software to assist in such process and key-word-in-context –KWIC technique, to capture the context as well as the content

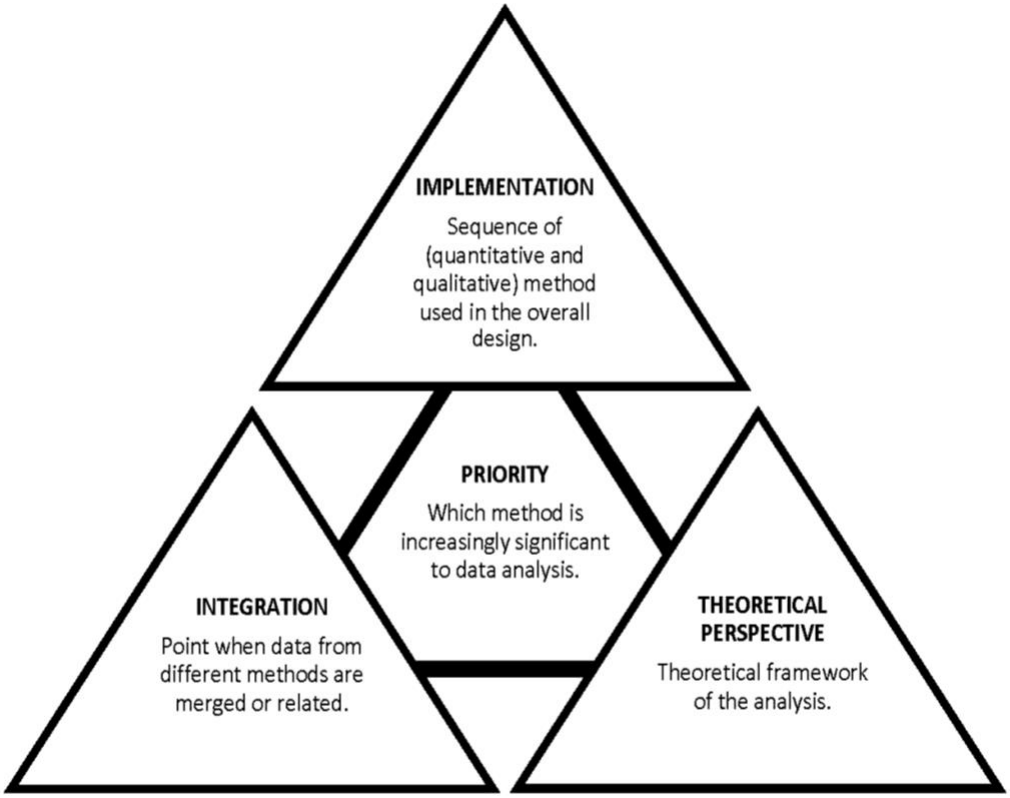
of passages of text, possibly significant to expressing the meaning of texts extracted from the transcripts (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Using ATLAS.ti computer software and KWIC technique increased the level and detail of analysis of the data collected from participants (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Last, I interpreted the data and produced a report using figures, tables, and narration.

Following a clear path of data analysis is significant to a clear understanding and documentation of the data analysis process (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Results from the qualitative phase generated information confirming the TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022). The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research question, gain an in depth understanding of the youth SE problem, and generate valuable findings to help in developing prevention efforts toward such problem, was possible through triangulation (see Fielding, 2012).

## Triangulation

For the present study, I used triangulation, a process in mixed methods research that encompasses combining two or more approaches to generate in-depth and robust results (Fielding, 2012; Venkatesh et al., 2016). Triangulation involves four criteria described in Figure 11.

**Figure 11**




*Triangulation Criteria*

*Note.* From "Methodological Triangulation: An Approach to Understanding Data," by A.K.Bechetand J.A. Zauszniewski, 2012, *Nurse Researcher* 20(2), p.40-43

*Implementation:* Is the sequence used for the overall design of the present was quantitative data collection and analysis followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. Challenges encountered during the quantitative phase of the present study increased the priority of qualitative results.

*Priority:* encompassed inconclusive findings from the quantitative phase (where pretest scores resulted higher than posttest scores) were useful for uncovering insights and rendered significant results that generated the need to delve intricately into participants' emotions, and experiences during the qualitative phase of the present study. Such in-depth investigation was useful for capturing data that was challenging to capture through quantitative surveys. Quantitative results further increased the need for an in-depth assessment of survey responses through follow-up questions, clarification, and deeper probing, providing information beneficial to gaining increased insight into church leaders' SE knowledge before and after SEM participation. And assess how knowledge aligned with Triandis TIB as possible theoretical framework of the SEM. Combining quantitative and qualitative results rendered valuable information about the research issue and theoretical framework; and generated significant findings (Fielding, 2012).

*Integration:* Quantitative and qualitative results were pivotal to the triangulation process, being that explicitly looking for disagreement or contradicting findings from different methods is as important as seeking confirmation from results (see Siegner, 2018). Exploration of results congruence or apparent “inter-method discrepancy” was pivotal to further understanding the research question and generated data for future studies to address the youth SE problem (see Fielding, 2012; Mertens & Hesse-Biber,

2012; Siegner, 2018). The integration for the present study took place during the interpretation stage, after the data analysis (Fielding, 2012; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012).

*Theoretical Perspective:* Triangulating findings from integrating results from both phases of the present study was also significant in assessing social interactions among participants, subsequently resulting in valuable information about the norms, values, and beliefs that possibly shaped participants' opinions (Buller et al., 2020). Such information was also significant in investigating and aligning Triandis TIB as a possible theoretical framework of the SEM module (Fielding, 2012; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012).

The triangulation process in this study was pivotal to integrating findings from both phases of data collection and analysis. Such integration was significant in obtaining robust results. Nevertheless, such results encompass threats to validity and reliability.

## Data Analysis Validity, Reliability, and Credibility

Validity, reliability, and credibility are significant to rendering accurate and meaningful results that researchers may use to draw valid and replicable conclusions (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018; Noble & Smith, 2015). Obtaining inconsistent results may lead to incorrect interpretations and may threaten the investigative process of the phenomenon under investigation. (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018; Noble & Smith, 2015). Each phase of the present study encompassed a process to seek ways to address validity, reliability, and credibility issues respectively.

## Quantitative Data Analysis Validity and Reliability

Validity in quantitative research is the degree to which an assessment process (e.g., test, research study) measures what such process was designed to measure (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007). Types of validity include internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is when study results are legitimate based on group selection, data collection, and analysis performance; particularly concerning whether effects observed in such study are due to the independent variable and not other factors (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). External validity encompasses generalizability of a research study, whereas conclusions or results are applicable outside the context of such study or are transferable to other groups (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The quantitative phase of the present study encompassed several validity, reliability, and credibility threats.

### Quantitative Validity Threats

The quantitative phase included the use of secondary data collected by staff members of the partner organization and as the researcher, I had no control or involvement in the data collection process. The data collection was from a one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experiment involving one group of participants (i.e., leaders of Afrocentric churches) exposed to an intervention (The SEM training) who completed the pre and postsurveys (Campbell & Stanley, 2015). A one group pretest posttest design encompasses several validity threats. However, due to the secondary nature of the data collected assessing validity threats was challenging and posed a limitation to the present study. Such threats included (a) *history*, possible events other than the training may have

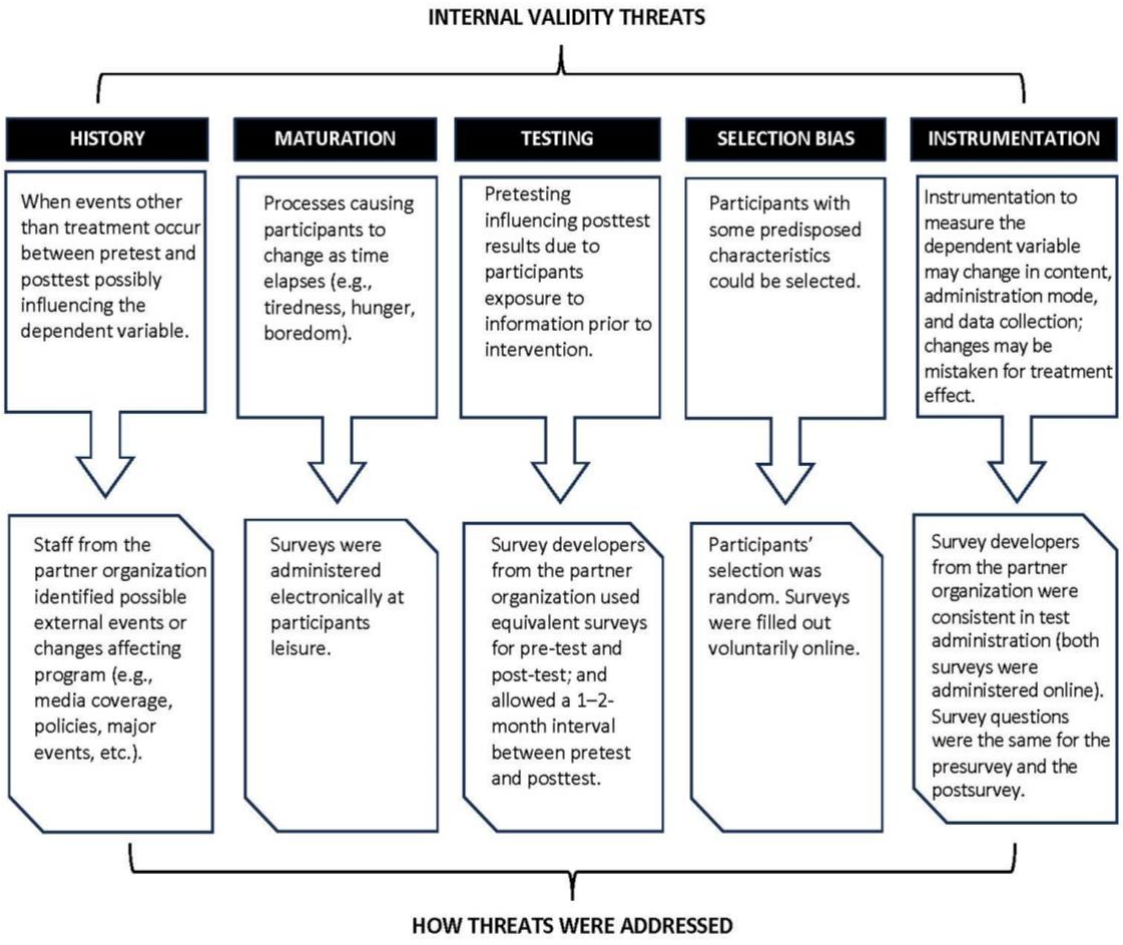
influenced church leaders' SE knowledge (e.g., previous training, research on the subject prior to the webinar, etc) subsequently influencing presurvey results; (b) *maturation,* circumstances such as the length of the training could have caused tiredness in church leaders, subsequently influencing posttest results ; (c) *testing*, participants' exposure to the presurvey may have influenced postsurvey results; (d) *selection bias*, staff members from the partner organization may have summoned specific participants to complete both surveys; (d) *instrumentation design*, the nature of the survey (e.g., electronic, layout, language, etc.) may have affected results.

Staff members from the partner organization used a modified instrument (the commercial sexual exploitation of children questionnaire) originally developed for Child Protective Services (CPS) employees and not leaders of Afrocentric churches (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). Adapting the CSEC questionnaire to test a different population posed a risk and increased possible instrumentation threats to validity. Further, participants who took part in the SEM training reportedly took more time to return completed postsurveys. Such delay may have had an impact on the quality of the data set, subsequently affecting results (see Campbell & Stanley, 2015). Despite such challenges to validity, assessing and addressing some validity threats was still possible. Figure 12 contains a depiction of internal validity threats, and survey developers from the partner organization addressed such threats (C. Lendore, personal communication, December 2021). The present study also encompassed several threats to external validity including population validity, time validity, and environmental validity.

Figure 13 contains a depiction of external validity threats and ways such threats were addressed in the present study (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

**Figure 12**

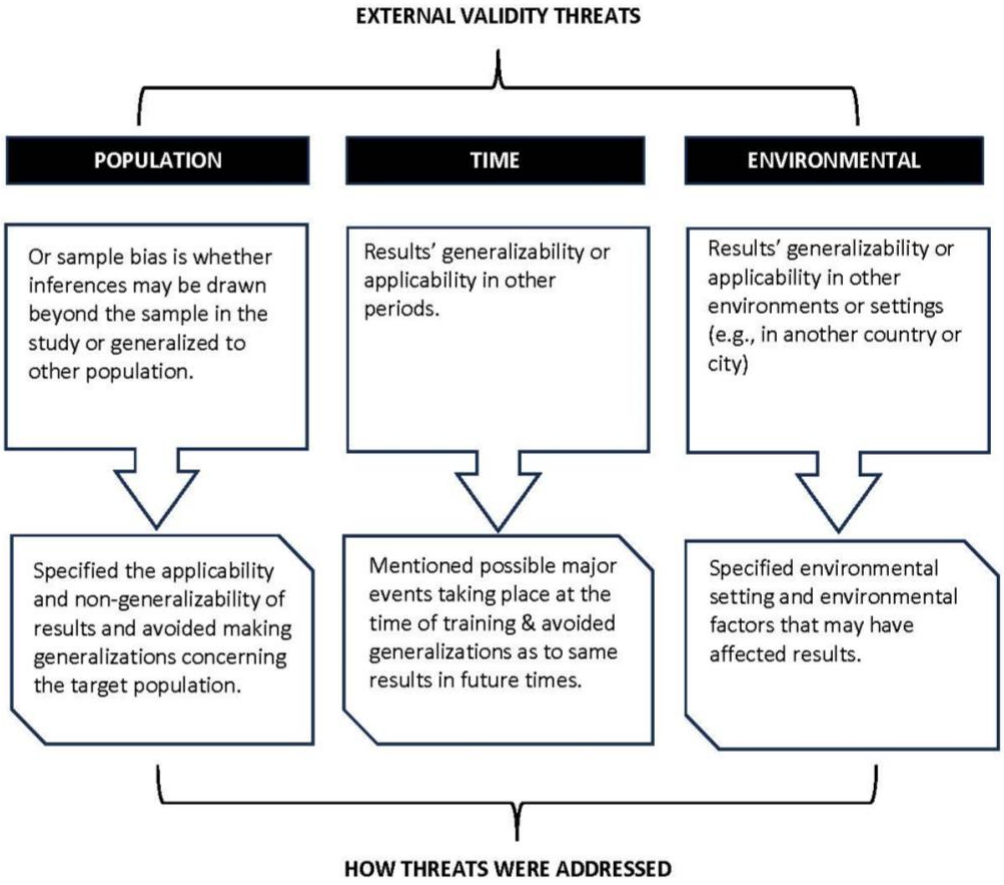
*Quantitative Phase Internal Validity Threats Solution*




*Note.* From "Two Criteria for Good Measurements in Research: Validity and Reliability," H.K. Mohajan, 2017, *Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series*, 17(4), p. 59-82.

**Figure 13**

*Quantitative Phase External Validity Threats and Possible Solutions*




*Note.* From "Two Criteria for Good Measurements in Research: Validity and Reliability," H.K. Mohajan, 2017, *Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series*, 17(4), p. 59-82.

## The UES Survey

Staff members from the partner organization used the UES as the data collection instrument to test participants' knowledge before and after the SEM training. The UES was a five-minute self-administered electronic survey participants accessed through a link on the conference website. Advantages of the UES self-administered surveys included the validity of the data based on participants not having to share answers with an interviewer, and the lack of hesitancy from participants in disclosing sensitive information. Some potential limitations included participants' reading and comprehension levels, ability to understand the questions, and ability to maneuver through each section in an electronic environment (Fowler, 2013).

The UES encompassed eight sections covering aspects of the SE knowledge constructs including *beliefs, definition and identification, scope and demand, risk factors, behavior of involved youth, laws and services, intervention,* and *taking action*. Each section encompassed questions written in English and required Likert scale answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with some sections inclusive of true or false answers. The UES had several threats to validity and reliability significant to the results of my research study (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013).

### *The UES Validity and Reliability Threats*

Validity and reliability are important factors when developing and testing any instrument for use in a study. Validity is the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it intends to measure. Three common types of validity are content, construct, and criterion validities (Mohajan, 2017; Salmond, 2008). Reliability is the

degree to which an instrument yields consistent results (Mohajan, 2017; Salmond, 2008). Developers from the partner organization used the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) questionnaire (with modifications) as the basis for developing the UES pre and postsurveys. The CSEC questionnaire was a self-reported instrument developed by McMahon-Howard and Reimers (2013) to evaluate a child welfare training program for Child Protective Services (CPS) employees. The CSEC questionnaire was specifically developed to determine if the goals of the training (*to improve CSEC attitudes, knowledge, and appropriate referrals*) were achieved (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). Although such study was appraised as *good* based on Downs and Black's (1998) Checklist for Measuring Study Quality, the CSEC questionnaire was rendered weak in validity based on, Leung et al., (2012) - Psychometric Grading Framework (PGF). The PGF is a framework developed to evaluate the strength of self-reported instruments' content validity, construct validity, and internal consistency (Fraley et al., 2020). The CSEC was also rendered low in reliability due to inconsistencies in response rates (Fraley et al., 2020; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). Subsequently, the inability to take part in the UES development process and ascertain whether modifications to the CSEC questionnaire further affected the validity and reliability of the UES surveys' development, constitutes a significant limitation to the present study. Future research will be needed to further explore such instrumentation challenges.

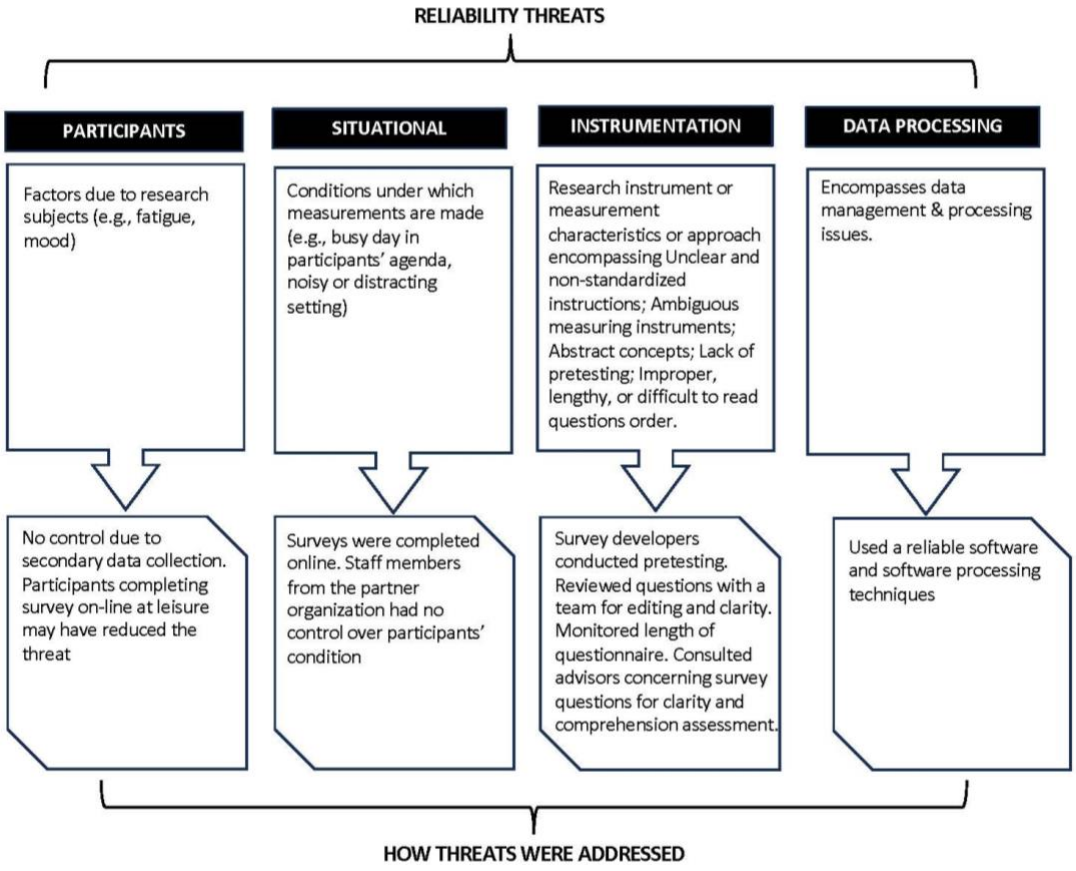
**Quantitative Reliability Threats**

Quantitatively, reliability generally refers to consistency in measurement over time accurately representing the population under study (Golafshani, 2003; Ihantola &

Kihn, 2011). Reliability may also involve reproducing or replicating a research study under a similar methodology (Golafshani, 2003). When reliability is inexistent, there is a random error, subsequently resulting in difficulty testing hypotheses or making inferences about relations between variables (see Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Reliability includes (a) the degree to which a measurement is repeatedly applied and remains the same, (b) a measurement's stability over time, and (c) similarity of measurements within a certain period (Golafshani, 2003). Stability is a significant factor in reliability. Increased stability indicates increased reliability (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Overall reliability threats include random sources of error such as typos, mistakes in data analysis, and data saving. The present study encompassed several reliability threats depicted in Figure 14 (see Golafshani, 2003; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011).

**Figure 14**

*Quantitative Phase Reliability Threats and Possible Solutions*




*Note.* From "Two Criteria for Good Measurements in Research: Validity and Reliability," H.K. Mohajan, 2017, *Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series*, 17(4), p. 59-82.

## Qualitative Phase Validity and Reliability

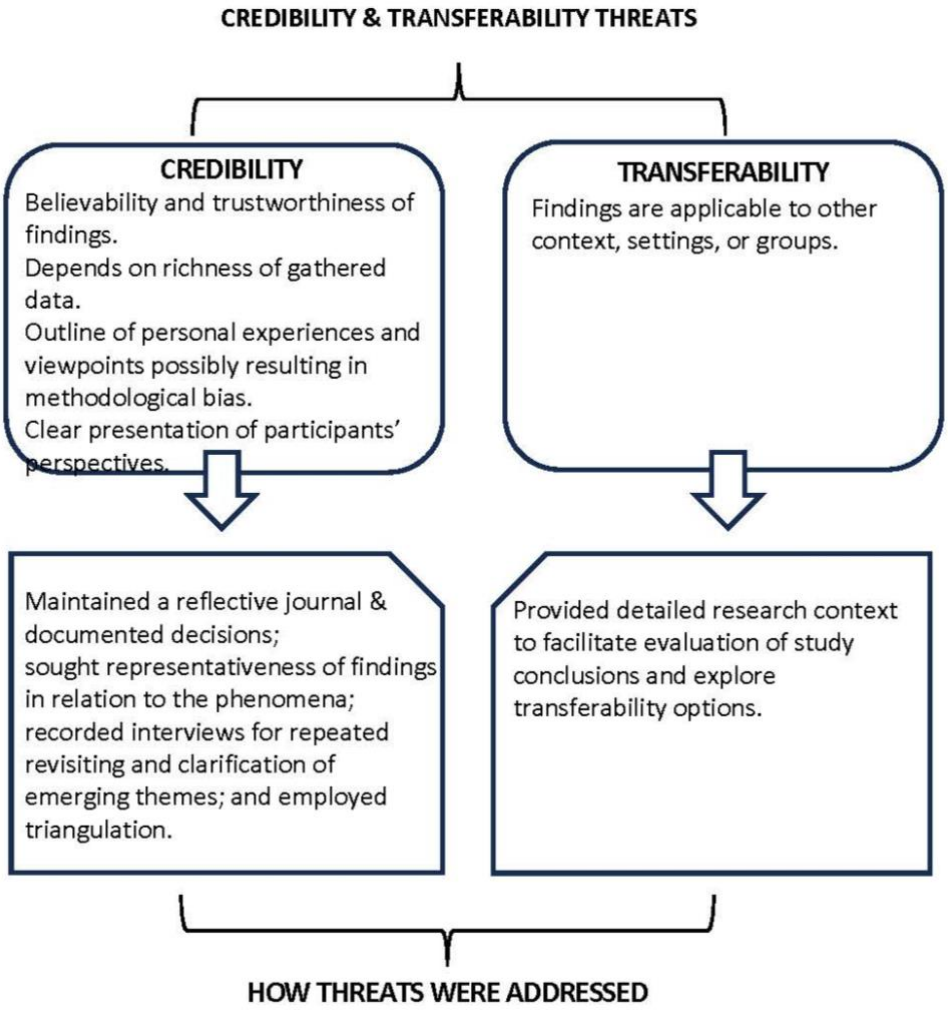
Like the quantitative phase, the qualitative phase of the present study also encompassed threats to validity and reliability; however, the terms depicting such threats in quantitative research are inapplicable in qualitative research and require different strategies (see Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). The use of reliability (or consistency) and validity (or trustworthiness) is common in the quantitative paradigm and rooted in a positivist perspective. Applying reliability and validity in qualitative research requires a redefinition of terms to fit the naturalistic nature of the qualitative paradigm (see Leung, 2015). Such redefinition encompasses incorporating concepts such as credibility (truth value), dependability (or consistency), confirmability (or neutrality), and transferability (or applicability). Such concepts are essential criteria and increase transparency in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Leung, 2015).

### Qualitative Credibility and Transferability

In qualitative research, validity means appropriateness of tools, processes, and data. Such appropriateness includes the validity of research questions for the desired outcome, the design's validity for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis suitability for the study, and the results' validity and applicability to the sample and context of the research (Golafshani, 2003; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Leung, 2015). The terms for validity in qualitative research are credibility for internal validity and transferability for external validity (Leung, 2015). The present study protocols appeared reliable. Figure 15 contains definitions of credibility and transferability threats and how such threats were addressed in phase two of the present study.

**Figure 15**

*Qualitative Phase Credibility and Transferability Threats and Solutions*




*Note*. From "Issues of Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research," by: H. Noble and J. Smith, 2015, *Evidence-based Nursing, 18*(2), 34-35.

### Qualitative Dependability and Confirmability

In the qualitative paradigm, dependability is what reliability is to quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Leung, 2015). Dependability is an evaluation of the quality of integrating the processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation to ensure the replicability of the processes and results of a research study (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Leung, 2015). The essence of dependability in the qualitative paradigm is in consistency and credibility (Golafshani, 2003; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Leung, 2015). Confirmability involves others corroborating the results of a study possibly decreasing inappropriate biases impacting data analysis (Leung, 2015). The present study encompassed several dependability and confirmability threats. Such threats and solutions are depicted in Figure 16. (Golafshani, 2003; Noble & Smith, 2015). Addressing validity and reliability threats is increasingly significant to ensure transparency. Similarly important is to have a theoretical framework (see Prabawanti et al., 2015).

## Theoretical Framework

Theories are principles or systems of ideas, intended to explain practices, activities, or phenomena (Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Such theories include interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of events or phenomena by specifying relations among variables, for explaining and predicting events or situations (Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Theories are useful in, (a) explaining behavior or attitudes and suggesting ways to achieve behavioral change; (b) planning, implementing, and

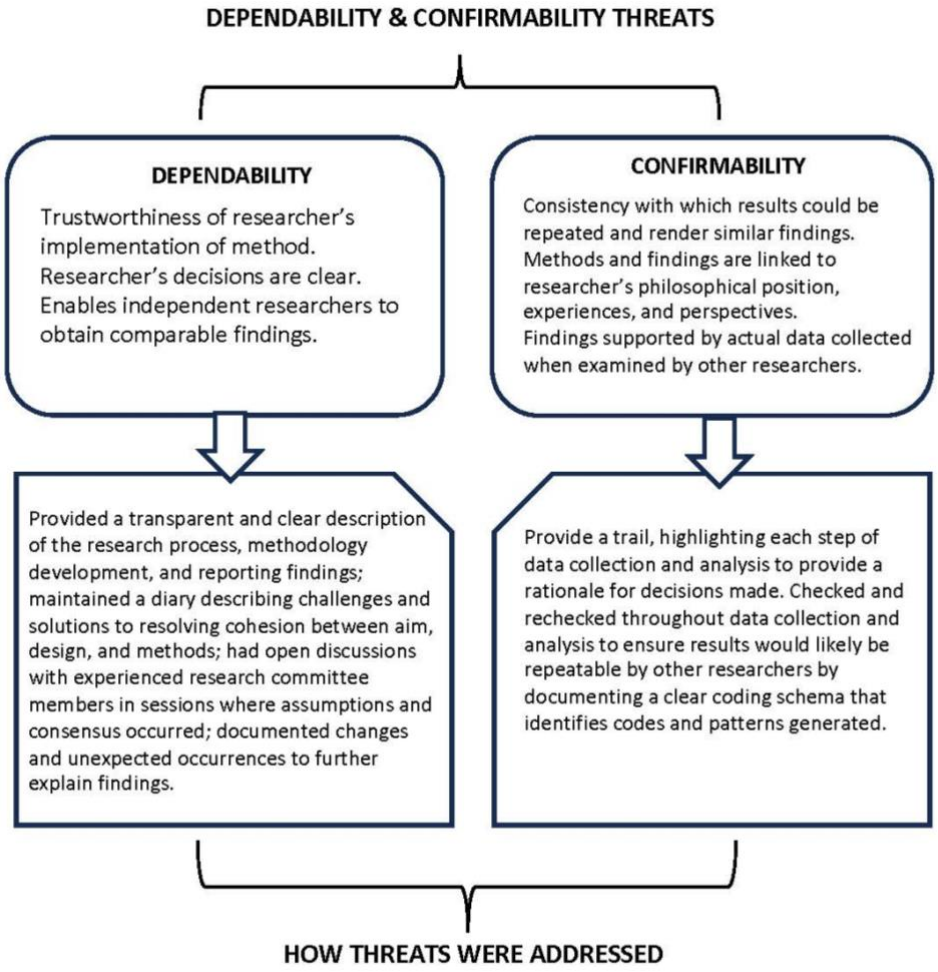
evaluating interventions; (c) pinpointing necessary knowledge before program intervention development and organization; (d) providing insight into shaping program strategies to reach participants; and (e) identifying what should be monitored, measured, and compared in a program evaluation (Prabawanti et al., 2015). For the present mixed methods study, I used Triandis' Theory of Interpersonal Behavior as the theoretical framework for this mixed methods study.

**Trandis' Theory of Interpersonal Behavior (TIB)**

Triandis' (TIB) is a model derived from two cognitive models Ajzen's and Fishbein's (1975) theory of reasoned action; and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. In both of these theories, intent to perform an act is a pivotal determinant of behavior (Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Unlike Ajzen and Fishbein, Triandis took into consideration other elements that intervene between intentions and argued that three dimensions determine behavior, intention, facilitating conditions, and habit (Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Subsequently, behavior (across situations) is a function deriving partly from intentions, habits, and situational conditions and constraints (Li et al., Thompson et al., 1991). Triandis' TIB model encompasses the most variance as a total, since a small amount of variance may be socially important if the behavior is significant (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020). As a comprehensive model, the TIB includes aspects of the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) models and additional components. Such inclusions and additions seemingly add to the TIB predictive power and explanatory value (Limayem et al., 2004; Woon & Pee, 2004).

**Figure 16**

*Qualitative Phase Dependability and Confirmability Threats*




*Note*. From "Issues of Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research," by: H. Noble and J. Smith, 2015, *Evidence-based Nursing, 18*(2), 34-35.

The TIB has been useful in explaining and gaining an understanding of complex human behaviors; predominately behaviors influenced by social and physical environments (Reece et al., 2006). Moreover, such model has been functional to researchers for (1) guiding data collection (whereas researchers may know what variables to study), (2) establishing relationships between measures of concepts within a study, (3) summarizing many studies within a single framework, and (4) describing similarities and differences in the way individuals think of social behavior (Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Triandis, 1977). Triandis' TIB has also been used in behavioral research to address, social, sexual, and health behavior (Bamberg & Schmidt, 2003; Boyd & Wandersman, 2006; Kim & Lee, 2012; Reece et al., 2006; Yildrim et al., 2009); consumers' behavior (Domarchi et al., 2008; Lee, 2000); technology and internet use (Cheung et al., 2000; Pee et al., 2008; Ramayah et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 1991; Woon & Pee, 2004); executive information systems use (Bergeron et al., 1995; Peñarroja, 2019) enterprise resource planning (Chang et al., 2022); and telemedicine adoption (Gagnon et al., 2003). Such uses and applications in different areas of research were based on the TIB premise.

**The TIB Premise**

In the TIB, Triandis (1977) proposed that in any interpersonal encounter, behavior is determined by, (a) an individual's perception of what is appropriate in a particular situation; (b) what an individual learns about such behavior (i.e., some behaviors are correct or incorrect); (c) peer pressure (what others pressure such individual to do); (d) an individual's like or dislike of such behavior; (e) consequences an individual may see

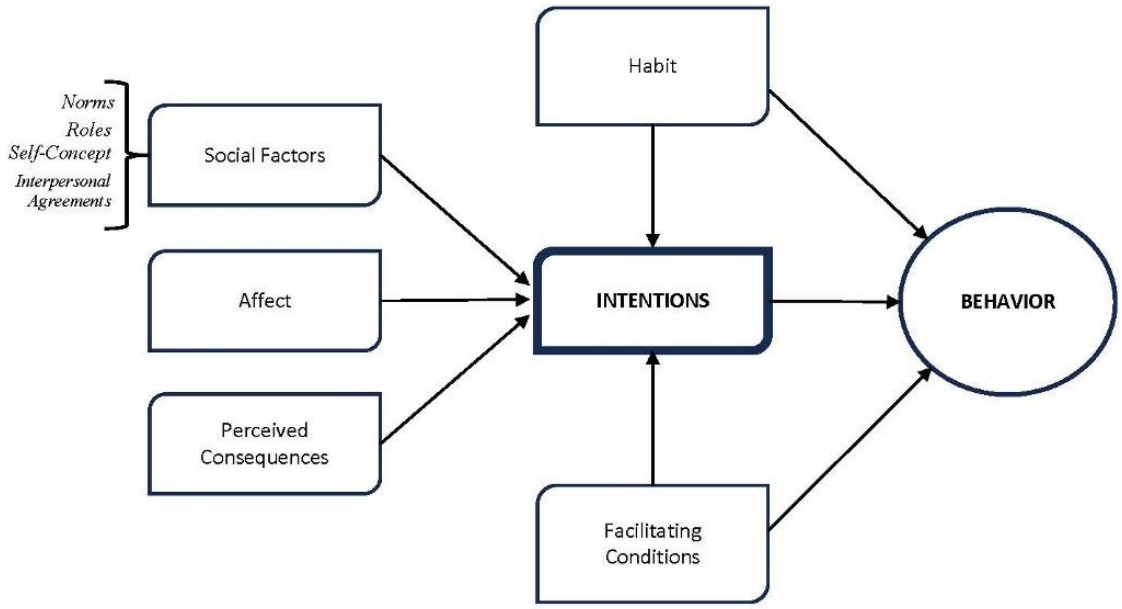
connected to the behavior; and (f) how much an individual values such consequences. Social settings and some aspects of an individual's personality may also modify the course of interpersonal relations (Robinson, 2010). Triandis further argued that intentions are formed as a result of social factors and emotions and that behavior is primarily a function of the intention to engage in the act comprised of perceived consequences, affect, and social factors; habits (frequency of past behavior); and facilitating conditions (present situational constraints and conditions conducive or nonconductive to a particular behavior; see Figure 17).

### *Helping Behavior*

In many cases, helping behavior is an altruistic type of interpersonal behavior involving giving a resource or a service (see Gagnon et al., 2003; Prabawanti et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 1991). Based on Triandis' TIB, many factors determine the probability that a specific behavior (e.g., helping behavior) will occur (Triandis, 1977). Moreover, three factors are significant for helping behavior to occur, (1) person A recognizing the grave situation and consequences affecting person B (who is in trouble), (2) person A being aware of the moral norms that support helping people in general, and (3) person A believing and embracing the responsibility to take action (Robinson, 2010; Trinadis, 1997). Whether a person engages in helping behavior to assist another person (who may be in distress or at possible risk) depends on an individual's behavioral intention (Kim & Lee, 2012) and various factors known as helping behavior determinants (Robinson, 2010). Such social factors are, affect, perceived consequences, and facilitating conditions.

**Figure 17**

*Triandis Theory of Interpersonal Behavior*




*Note.* This figure encompasses Triandis' TIB components that have indirect and direct influence on intentions and behavior. Bold arrows represent direct influence. From "Interpersonal Behavior", by H.C. Triandis, 1977, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

### *Social Factors*

Social components influence helping behavior and are significant to an individual's intention at a social level. Such social components include norms, roles, self-concept, and interpersonal agreements (Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). Norms are rules governing the correctness, morality, appropriateness, and acceptability of a behavior (Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). Moreover, norms are a function of the societal group of an individual; may differ among cultures and situations; may change as individuals interact; and may be shaped by the actions of a significant number of individuals (Kim &

Lee, 2012; Robinson, 2010). Self-image is an individual's idea of personal identity or self-image (Robinson, 2010). Such idea includes self-esteem, self-value, and conceptions about behavioral correctness, appropriateness, or desirability (Robinson, 2010). Interpersonal agreements are when an individual embraces the responsibility to help and such feeling results in helping someone else (Triandis, 1977). The perceived *social pressure* individuals experience affects such individuals' intention to engage in helping behavior (Kim & Lee, 2012; Robinson, 2010).

### *Affect*

Positive or negative, strong, or weak emotions (e.g., joy, elation, pleasure, depression, distaste, discontentment, or hatred) an individual feels when thinking about a particular behavior is what Triandis (1977) considers as affect (Kim & Lee, 2012; Robinson, 2010). If an individual's emotions are positive toward a helping behavior, such individual is seemingly prone to help (Triandis, 1977). An individual's perception of an issue may influence such individual's emotions or *affect* and hence intentions to engage in helping behavior.

### *Perceived Consequences*

Are individuals' perception of the consequences of helping (Kim & Lee, 2012). A person may be willing to help based on the belief that such helping behavior may benefit others (Triandis, 1977). Additionally, the other person's degree of need may also have significance in a person's desire to help (i.e., as the need increases, the desire to help increases; Triandis, 1977).

***Facilitating Conditions***

Are environmental factors that increase the probability of helping behavior, circumstances facilitating taking action, and a means that enhances a person's ability and knowledge to engage in helping behavior (e.g., training programs; Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). When facilitating conditions are not conducive to an individual's engagement in helping behavior, intentions may have limited relevance (Robinson, 2010). A person's desire or will to help depends on such individual's ability or skill to carry out such help (Robinson, 2010). Triandis' TIB premise is that facilitating conditions have a direct influence on intentions and behavior (Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). In Triandis' applied model (Figure 18) SE knowledge are the antecedent of helping behavior (taking action) and represent (a) an individual's possible cognitive plan to engage or take action in helping, (b) the degree of an individual's knowledge to try a helping behavior, or (c) the knowledgeable effort an individual is willing to exert to perform a helping behavior (Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). Factors influencing knowledge-based behavioral intention include (a) social factors, (b) affect concerning such behavior, (c) perceived consequences of helping, and (d) facilitating conditions to gain knowledge and provide such help (Koklič, 2016; Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). Subsequently, such factors may determine helping behavior (Triandis, 1977).

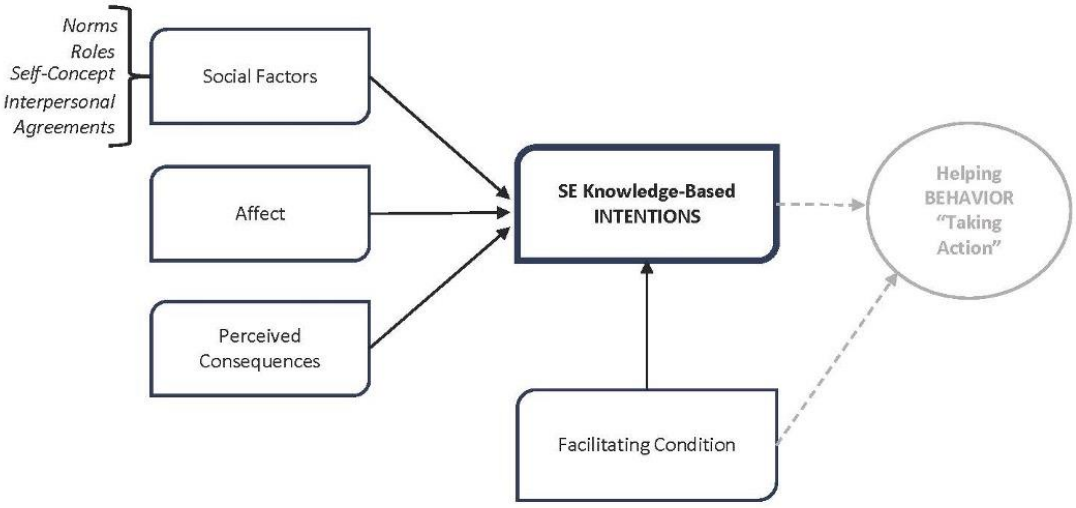
Figure 18 is a depiction of Triandis' TIB incorporating components SEM developers seemingly incorporated to possibly influence leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge subsequently increasing the feasibility of such leaders' engaging in helping youths at risk. Additionally, depicted is the SEM training as a facilitating

condition possibly having a direct influence on leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge. Afrocentric church leaders' minimal engagement and need for training to respond to youth SE may indicate such leaders' lack of SE knowledge concerning the needs of youth at risk of SE and the consequences of not addressing such needs. The SEM developers seemingly incorporated aspects of SE awareness, youth SE vulnerabilities, and other cultural components (i.e., social factors) to address church leaders' lack of SE knowledge, and possibly influence the way such leaders perceive helping or not helping some youths at risk of SE.

The focus of my research was solely on the SEM's degree of influence on church leaders' SE knowledge. Possible influence on such leaders' helping behavior will require further research. Habits may also influence SE knowledge and helping behavior occurring; however, when behavior is new or unlearned (such as knowledge about youth SE), such influence is seemingly generated by facilitating conditions as long as such facilitating conditions support the execution of the targeted behavior (see Robinson, 2010; Triandis, 1977). Examining factors possibly influencing youth SE knowledge and the influence of a TIB-based prevention module such as the SEM may be significant and increasingly beneficial to existing and future research about SE awareness and prevention (Krieger et al., 2022; Nichols et al., 2023).

**Figure 18**

*Triandis' TIB Applied Via Qualitative Findings Using Triangulation*




*Note.* This figure encompasses Triandis' TIB components that have an indirect, direct, and feasible influence on SE knowledge and behavior. Bold arrows represent influence. Dotted grayed arrows and the gray circle represent feasible influence. From "Interpersonal Behavior," by H.C. Triandis, 1977, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

## Benefits to Future Research

Further studies will be needed to assess the influence of the SEM on leaders of Afrocentric churches' helping behavior. Nevertheless, the present study addressed the influence of the SEM on Afrocentric church leaders' youth SE knowledge. Researching the influence of the SEM resulted in information that contributed to determining the influence of a culturally competent theory-based module as a facilitating condition directly influencing church leaders' SE knowledge and feasibly helping behavior. Moreover, results from the present study added to the dearth of information concerning youth SE prevention in the Afrocentric religious community and generated information to assist developers with culturally competent interventions to address the youth SE problem in Afrocentric communities. Additionally, secondary data analysis using a data set from an instrument developed for Afrocentric participants resulted in information to help developers with the use of instruments among specific populations. The instrument used to collect the secondary data I used for this study, may be further developed to target members of different ethnic groups in other nonprofit religious sectors. Such use may provide additional information to (a) help enhance the usefulness and applicability of such instrument; (b) assist in capitalizing on the apparent strength of faith-based organizations, possibly increasing partnerships and collaboration between practitioners in other organizations and church leaders for increased cultural and spiritual sensitivity and appropriateness in program design and implementation; (c) assist in understanding the structure of how religion, family, and society, may influence helping behaviors toward youth SE; and (d) increase the understanding on how members of the targeted population

perceive youth SE cause, course, and prevention (Campbell et al., 2007). Moreover, results from this study may be the basis for subsequent studies on youth SE prevention and involvement.

## Summary

Chapter 3 included an overview of the methodological design, the sample and sampling strategy, and the data collection and analysis processes for each phase of this mixed methods program evaluation explanatory study. Included further are threats and weaknesses of employing the chosen design and ways to address such threats and weaknesses. This chapter also includes an explanation of the theoretical premise and framework, as well as how such theory applies to the present study. Addressing youth SE through preventive action is significant due to the increase of Afrocentric youth involvement in SE, the dearth of knowledge among some leaders of Afrocentric churches about the problem, and the reduced number of studies about preventive SE programs in some Afrocentric church communities. Utilizing a mixed methods program evaluation explanatory design produced results useful to inform preventive action among leaders in Afrocentric communities' and may contribute to collaborative and partnering efforts to address the possible increase of SE involvement among vulnerable populations (e.g., Afrocentric youth).

# Chapter 4: Results

Youth SE is a form of sexual abuse and a crime that hampers youth development and disrupts the moral, social, and economic order of communities (Barnert et al., 2017; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). Identifying SE risk factors in youth at an early age is pivotal to safeguarding practices and youth's resilience to SE involvement (Bounds et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Lack of training among some leaders in Afrocentric churches recognizing risk factors in some youth vulnerable to SE generated the need to develop a training program to equip church leaders concerning youth SE knowledge. The purpose of this mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory study was to determine the degree to which a youth SE preventive training module influenced leaders of Afrocentric churches' youth SE knowledge, and how influenced knowledge aligns with Triandis' TIB as theoretical framework of such module. Chapter 4 encompasses the quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis processes, as well as results from the present study.

## Data Collection and Analyses

### Quantitative Data Collection

Phase 1 of the present study was the quantitative data collection involving a secondary data set provided by a contact at a partner organization (a religious nonprofit that provides training to leaders of Afrocentric churches in three U.S. northeastern states). The data set included pre- and postsurvey scores staff members from the partner organization collected from church leaders before and after the SEM training. Such data

was coded for pairing participants' pretest and posttest scores for comparison. Participants were invited to take part in the training by email and mail and were asked to fill out a presurvey electronically as part of the training registration process 1 month prior to the training. Immediately after the SEM training, the same group of participants completed an electronic postsurvey.

**Quantitative Data Collection Adjustments**

IRB requirements and the COVID-19 pandemic affected significant aspects of this study's design. As a result of the impending spread of the coronavirus, public officials closed all public gathering facilities which resulted in a secondary data collection instead of a primary data collection, encompassing one group of participants instead of two groups. Changes in data collection resulted in changes in the data analysis from ANCOVA to a paired sample *t* test that was appropriate for a one-group design. The COVID-19 pandemic further affected the secondary collection due to participants not being able to meet in person, making conducting the training and data gathering cumbersome for the partner organization staff members. Further, participation was limited to an online setting, and communication with participants was restricted to phone and email. Staff members from the partner organization were working from home and using electronic communications. Necessary adjustments to remain operational and develop alternatives to conduct the training module took precedence over collecting survey responses and providing the necessary data needed for this phase of the present study. As a result, representatives from the partner organization were only able to provide limited data from participants who responded by completing both pre and postsurveys.

While limited, the obtained data set was useful for researching the SEM training webinar's influence on participants' youth SE knowledge. Such adjustments constituted a threat to internal validity referred to as history, where events and circumstances other than the training possibly influenced church leaders' SE knowledge.

**Demographics**

The number of participants surveyed before and after the training was 55. All 55 participants were leaders of Afrocentric churches and of Afrocentric descent (i.e., Black). No additional demographic information was provided by my contact at the partner organization. The data set solely encompassed participants' pre- and postsurvey scores.

**Instrumentation Fidelity: The Uncovering Exploitation Survey (UES)**

Determining the optimal reliable standardized assessment tool to administer for pre and post interventions is pivotal to a research design. Assessing the purpose of an intervention is essential to selecting the appropriate tool to measure specific areas to identify (Holosko, 2010). The data collected for phase one was secondary data provided by a contact at the partner organization. Staff members from the partner organization collected the data using the UES to assess the seven areas of youth SE knowledge before and after the SEM training (see McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). UES developers used a modified version of CSEC questionnaire, as the basis of the UES. The CSEC questionnaire was a self-reported instrument McMahon-Howard and Reimers (2013) developed to evaluate a child welfare training program for CPS employees. The CSEC questionnaire was specifically developed to determine if the goals of the training - *to improve CSEC attitudes, knowledge, and appropriate referrals* - were achieved

(McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). In a systematic review of research studies encompassing youth SE educational interventions McMahon-Howard and Reimers' (2013) study was appraised as good (based on ratings ranging from poor, fair, good, and excellent); however, the CSEC questionnaire was appraised as weak in validity and reliability based on inconsistencies in survey response (Fraley et al., 2020; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). The nonstandardized nature of the UES generated threats to validity and reliability, as well as limitations that are further discussed in the present study.

**Comparison of Pre and Post SE Knowledge Measures**

The first phase of data analysis included using secondary data emailed by a contact at the partner organization. The data included pretest and posttest knowledge measures in two separate Excel documents (i.e., pretest survey scores and posttest survey scores). I transferred both data sets into the IBM SPSS statistics, version 27 program for analysis. After transferring the data, I made sure there were no missing values and proceeded to reverse scores as needed according to questions in the pre- and postsurveys. Once the data was reversed, I added each participant's total scores (excluding dichotomous values) to create two variables PreTraining and PostTraining.

I used a paired sample *t* test to statistically compare leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge mean scores (dependent variable) before and after exposure to the SEM training (independent variable). A paired sample *t* test was appropriate because this study was a within-subject design, where one group of participants (leaders of Afrocentric churches) were exposed to the same intervention and assessment (see Roni &

Djajadikerta, 2021). Researchers use paired sample *t* test to compare the means of two sets of observations from one group of participants with a pair of measurements (such as a before and after score), resulting in pairs of observations. This test is an inferential statistic procedure because it uses samples to draw conclusions about populations (Roni & Djajadikerta, 2021). Underlying assumptions for a paired sample *t* test include (a) there are two scale measurements per participant, (b) the difference scores are independent of each other, (c) the difference scores are normally distributed in the population, and (d) the cases represent a random sample of the population (Roni & Djajadikerta, 2021). After checking for such assumptions to be met, using SPSS, I ran a paired sample *t* test to test the null hypothesis by comparing SEM participants' pre- and postsurvey mean scores to determine whether the mean change for such pairs was significantly different from zero. Researchers often used paired sample *t* tests to compare two measurements from one group of participants and determine if there is a statistical difference between the pre- and postscores means. If there are statistical differences between pre- and postscores means, the null hypothesis is rejected and the researcher may determine the influence of a particular intervention (Green et al., 2005; Hedberg & Ayers, 2015; Staffa & Zurakowski, 2020).

**Qualitative Focus Group Data Collection**

The qualitative phase of the present study encompassed a focus group with eight participants from the quantitative phase. Setting aside personal biases as the primary instrument in the data collection, was significant to this phase of data collection. I sought to address such biases by first acknowledging the difficulty in setting aside preconceived

notions concerning the present research. I further documented feelings and thoughts related to the present study in a journal to separate my experiences from the focus group participants' experiences (see Flynn et al., 2018; Nyumba et al., 2018).

**Focus Group Participants' Selection and Inclusion Criteria**

Focus group participants included eight church leaders from Phase 1. My contact at the partner organization provided emails of participants that met the inclusion criteria (i.e., participants that fell within a high score range of 71-56 and low score range of 55-29) and I emailed such participants about taking part in the focus group. The first four participants within each range that responded were selected for the focus group. I emailed such participants a consent form to be signed electronically prior to the focus group. After receiving the signed consent forms, I sent each participant information with the location, date, and time of the focus group, along with instructions concerning confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. The focus group was held in a conference room (behind closed doors) where participants were instructed concerning the purpose of the focus group and reminded of confidentiality parameters and that participation was voluntary. I also made participants aware that the meeting was being audio recorded and that I was taking notes. During the focus group, I took field notes to capture changes in tone of voice and body language and clarified statements or answers from participants. Some of the questions were asked out of the order of the focus group protocol to keep the content of the conversation flowing between focus group participants. The focus group duration was two hours, due to one participant being late and such participant giving answers to questions that the group had already discussed. At

the end of the focus group, I thanked participants for their participation and reiterated the confidentiality parameters of the discussion. A few participants mentioned that they would like to read the "finished product." I informed participants that a summarization of the report would be made available upon request. Once the focus group concluded, I transcribed the recordings and saved the data in both a Word document on my password-protected computer and on a USB drive kept in a locked box in a file cabinet with key. To increase the accuracy of the transcriptions, I played the recording repeatedly and followed the data collection protocol outlined in Chapter 3.

**Recording and Transcribing Focus Group Data**

I used Microsoft Word "dictate" software to transcribe the focus group interview. Then I read and reviewed the recordings against the material transcribed to add any missing information and correct mistakes generated by the electronic transcribing software. I also checked for responses to correspond to the right participants by listening to the audio several times while reviewing the transcribed material. Two advantages of recording interviews are the accessibility to review audio for any missed information and the ease of transcribing responses using the audio recording (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Winke, 2017). I saved the data collected and transcribed in an electronic form on a removable media device (e.g., USB). The data will be stored in a secured, fireproof box in my home office for 5 years to ensure confidentiality. After 5 years, I will shred all documents, and delete any data stored electronically.

After transcribing and organizing the transcript, I used ATLAS.ti to categorize the data. I further coded the data employing thematic analysis using In Vivo coding for the

first coding process and values coding for the second coding process. In Vivo coding encompasses terms participants used verbatim, capturing the meanings inherent in people's experiences (Saldaña, 2021). Values coding is the application of codes that reflect participants' values, attributes, and beliefs, representing participants' worldviews (Saldaña, 2021). In addition to data from the focus group transcripts, I also incorporated additional notes and personal reflections journaled as a control system to reduce bias (Bloomberg, 2022). I further employed manual coding using color post-it and color highlighters to assess additional themes, incorporating the additional data from my journal and research logs. Transcripts, categorized notes by themes, and research logs, are useful for analyzing multiple sources of data for emerging themes employing a comparative method (Bloomberg, 2022; Nili et al., 2020; Sevilmis & Yildiz, 2021).

## Quantitative Analysis

The purpose of this mixed methods program evaluation sequential explanatory study was to first determine the degree to which the SEM influenced leaders of Afrocentric churches' youth SE knowledge by testing of the hypotheses in the quantitative phase. The second part of the research question was to determine how influenced knowledge-based intentions aligned with the TIB as the SEM's underlying theoretical framework by analyzing focus group data in the qualitative phase.

### Quantitative Research Question and Hypotheses

The first part of the research question was to determine the degree to which the SEM training influenced leaders of Afrocentric churches' (i.e., bishops, pastors, elders,

ministers, deacons, evangelists, trustees, department directors, and coordinators) youth SE knowledge. The null and alternate hypotheses were:

$H_0$: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$ There are no significant differences in church leaders' SE knowledge before and after SEM participation.

$H_1$: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$ There are significant differences in church leaders' SE knowledge before and after SEM participation.

If the *p*-value was less than the significance level (0.01) the null hypothesis was rejected, meaning that there was sufficient evidence to support that there were significant differences between participants' knowledge before and after SEM training participation. Failing to reject the null hypothesis would mean that the sample did not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that an effect existed, and more research will be needed. Rejecting or failing to reject the null hypothesis rendered results to answer the first portion of the research question concerning the degree of influence of the SEM training program on participants' SE knowledge.

Answering the first portion of the research question, encompassed performing a paired sample *t* test to compare pretest and posttest scores from a total of 55 ($n$=55) leaders of Afrocentric churches. The sample size for the present study was within the accepted parameters for this type of statistical test - generally 30 pairs of scores (Roni & Djajadikerta, 2021). Prior to conducting the *t*-test analysis, I examined the assumption of normally distributed scores difference. The assumption was considered satisfied, as the skew and kurtosis levels were estimated at 0.4 and 0.3, respectively which is less than the maximum allowable values for a paired *t* test (see George & Mallery, 2019; Hair et al.,

2017). Results (Table 1) reflect a statistically significant difference between the scores before the SEM training ($M$ = 57.95, $SD$ = 9.58) and after the SEM training ($M$ =50.35, $SD$ = 9.68); $t$ (54) = 4.96, $p$ = <0.01. Based on such results, the null hypothesis of no significant differences in church leaders' SE knowledge before and after SEM participation was rejected, meaning that there was sufficient evidence to support that there were significant differences between participants' knowledge before and after SEM training participation (see Roni & Djajadikerta, 2021). Such results rendered answers to the first portion of the research question concerning the SEM training program influencing participants' SE knowledge.

**Table 1**

*Paired t-Test Results Comparison of Participants' SE Knowledge Scores*

| | | | Paired Difference | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *SE* | *t* | *df* | *P* |
| PreTraining | 57.95 | 9.589 | 7.600 | 11.342 | 1.529 | 4.969 | 54 | .000007 |
| PostTraining | 50.35 | 9.686 | | | | | | |

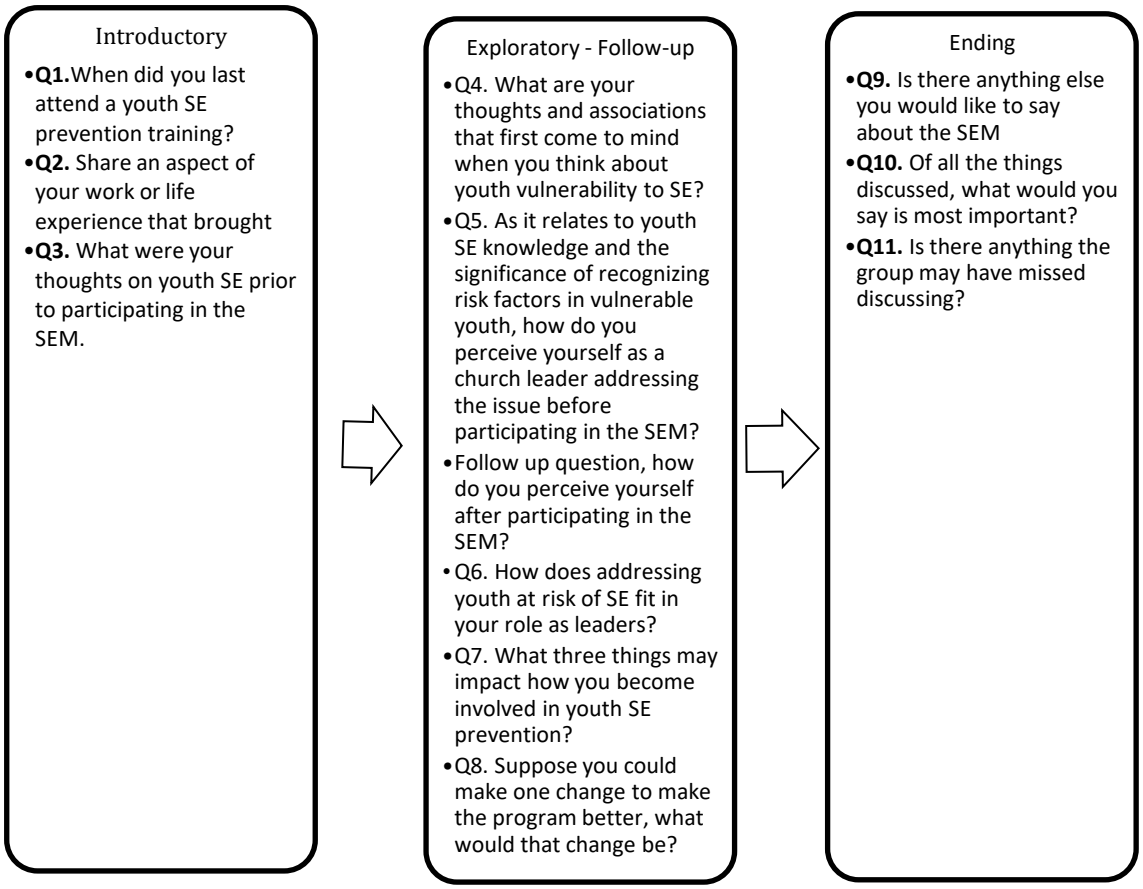
Note. $p$< = $p$ value lower than 0.01.

## Qualitative Focus Group Data Analysis

The purpose of the qualitative phase of the study was to align the TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM. The focus of the data collection was to provide insight on how factors within the TIB module influenced SE knowledge, possibly leading to helping behavior. The data during this phase was primary data gathered employing a focus group with a convenient sample of eight participants from the quantitative phase. Focus group participants consisted of eight leaders of Afrocentric churches, four males and four females ranging between ages 25-71. All participants were of Afrocentric descent (i.e., Black) and held titles or positions of leadership within their church/ministry (i.e., bishop, minister, deacon, and credential holder). One participant was late to the focus group due to a family emergency. The conversation was audio recorded with participants' consent. During the focus group, I addressed the research question under investigation, *how does influenced knowledge help a the align TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM?* Figure 19 includes the questions and sub-questions used to guide the focus group.

**Figure 19**

*Focus Group Questions*




Based on Triandis (1977) TIB, several factors affect SE knowledge including social factors, affect, perceived consequences, and facilitating conditions; subsequently, such factors may affect helping behavior. Results from the focus group discussion rendered categories and codes assigned to a priori main themes. Using In Vivo coding and thematic analysis, I assigned categories to initial codes then a priori codes that led to main a priori themes in order of salience as follows: Main Theme 1: Facilitating conditions based on a priori codes; Main Theme 2: Social factors; Main Theme 3:

Helping Behavior; Main Theme 4: Perceived Consequences; and Main Theme 5: Affect based on a priori code *SE feelings*. A priori codes and themes were established based on the TIB premise and are factors that could influence SE knowledge and potentially helping behavior. Figure 20 contains the coding process inclusive of codes, main themes, and snippets used to generate from the focus group discussion. In this section church leaders are addressed as "participants" and identified by number as P1, P2, P3, P4 and so forth. Further, SE knowledge is referred to as SE knowledge.

**Main Theme 1: Facilitating Conditions**

*Are there environmental conditions or factors that make an act easy to perform* (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis 1977). Facilitating conditions was an a priori theme encompassing five main codes *awareness/knowledge, education is important, feeling equipped, preventive maintenance, and the SEM evaluation*. Such codes were increasingly discussed amongst participants as significantly influential to SE knowledge and potentially helping behavior. Throughout the focus group discussion, participants indicated that awareness was increasingly important to understanding youth SE and SE prevention.

***Awareness/Knowledge***

Consisted of understanding and belief that youth SE exist. Participants expressed that awareness at all social levels (individual, corporate, and community) was pivotal to helping and "not turning a blind eye" to addressing youth SE. Several participants expressed that, as individuals, becoming aware helped open their eyes to pay attention to signs of SE vulnerability. One participant (P6) interjected that it was equally important

for parents to become aware to avoid depending solely on the education system to help prevent youth from SE involvement. Participants also shared that awareness made people "more accepting" (as it relates to helping), "more exposed," and help people "gain a better understanding" as a community. Further discussion addressed incorporating "other platforms" as a pivotal means of influencing church leaders' willingness to help. Participants also expressed that SE awareness in the education, governmental, and nongovernmental systems could help with collaborative efforts that may encourage people to "say something" or "do something" to address youth SE. P6 stated,

> Uh I think in the home environment whether it's two parents or one, the consciousness of the parents has to really be in a place where they are aware of what could happen. I can't just depend on the school system or wherever they go to educate them. I have to do my part as well. And if I don't do my part, then I'm depending on totally on the system.

P2 said.

> After the seminar … any time I go outside now like I'm always double checking like you know, I have, I bring my maze with me now...I'm with my daughter …we go to the store and I'm like I'm always looking around … 'cause before I can say I wasn't aware …but like now, I'm thinking like well it can happen during the day as well. So, it's important to be preventative as well, and then have the information.

P3 responded:

> Maybe it's just more awareness more awareness and more education for the kids and the parents … it's just these…this awareness of both parties like you gotta teach the kids you yourself as an adult in our communities have to be more aware. You gotta care about other people sharing the same situation and not just your kids. You know, don't turn a blind eye because it's not your situation.

***Education is Important.***

Encompassed information about youth SE. Was also recurringly discussed by participants as a facilitating condition. Participants' overall sentiment was that education was "essential;" "very vital;" "really, really good;" and "really big" to influencing participants' feeling knowledgeable and equipped to effectively address youth SE as "church leaders", and "responsible citizens". Most participants expressed that helping a youth at risk of SE without the "proper education" was "hard" because "you might help them wrong" or "really do nothing for them." Further comments also reflected that being "properly educated" or having a better understanding on the subject was helpful. Participants further expressed that education was significant to "knowing where to send them" and how to help by "passing it on" to someone else better equipped or "professionally trained" who could help.

***Feeling Equipped/Trained.***

*Were perceptions of having enough information to increase knowledge and possibly help.* Knowing who to help and how to help was also part of what participants discussed. Some participants expressed the importance of knowing what to do, "being well versed," and "sense it better than before" to "handling the situation. For many

participants, the SEM training was significant in “feeling equipped.” P5 commented, “I think that the seminar itself helped educate me about some things I was definitely not aware of, and it built my confidence in being able to identify and dive in a little bit more into it.” P8 expressed feeling equipped to “knowing where to send them” but not feeling equipped to help directly. P8 said, “After the seminar I realized I'm not equipped right, I'm not equipped. I'm not equipped to assist… I'm equipped with knowing where to send them who to tell them to get help from.” P5 conveyed how the training built their confidence “in being able to identify and dive a little bit more into it.” Other participants expressed feelings concerning being equipped and how such feelings influenced how to engage in helping youth at risk of SE,

> You shouldn't even deal or attempt to deal with it…unless you understand exactly what you're doing and if you're not conscious that you need more help and you're trying to cover it over you're going to hurt yourself and them. (P3)

P7 added:

> It's hard 'cause if you don't know what to do if you are not well versed or if you don't have the right answers or the right education, you still can't help them. I would say it's hard all around. And for me, truthfully, speaking, I'll pass it on to someone else because that responsibility of trying to help someone that is vulnerable like that … Sorry it's not easy…. You have to be able to say the right things to somebody to help them…But if you don't really help them. Then you know. You don't really do nothing for them.

P1 replied:

> I can just be that person to listen, see identify the vulnerability and listen to what's happening and maybe pass it on to somebody else, but this webinar has made [me] realize how important it is to be educated and knowledgeable in this situation.

***Preventive Maintenance.***

Most participants expressed concern about being prepared within the context of prevention. For all participants, the overall consensus was exercising "preventive maintenance" to address youth SE involvement. Obtaining information in advance "before a situation occurred" was one of the main focuses of the discussion. The question "does prevention really work?" also emerged; whereas some participants expressed that prevention (as it relates to youth SE) was challenging because of the apparent perks of SE involvement (e.g., money, fancy vehicles, travels, fast life, etc.) and such perks being a deterrent to some youth seeing the long-term damage generated from SE involvement. Seven participants agreed that regardless of the possibility of prevention being ineffective, it is something they "must do as leaders" and eventually it will work. Two participants emphasized that regardless of the outcome "spiritual leaders" should engage in prevention because people need help and "getting ahead of it before it happened" is important to influencing knowledge to subsequently help.

> I was asking myself what can you do to prepare a child or anyone to be conscious of the tactics that would be employed? I think it would be something that you would have in your arsenal at least if it does happen, it won't be you walking into something ignorantly, but you have something to work with. (P7)

P6 replied.

> Yeah, I don't think that you're going to get 100% performance or dividends; but I think it'll be beneficial…Because if I'm a leader, I'm in this in order to offer something to people that would be effective for them... I have to do something… I have to do because people are still going to need help.

***The SEM Training Evaluation.***

Encompassed participants' views, perceptions, and suggestions to better the SEM training. Such suggestions included, adding a more cultural focus, include in church curriculum, more about child abuse/molestation, spiritual components, in-person, more webinars. During the focus group, participants shared thoughts about the SEM webinar and gave suggestions to enhance future webinars. Two participants referred to their webinar experience in the context of before and after. P5 said:

> So, I learned before the seminar I would have considered myself knowledgeable… After the seminar I realized I'm not equipped right, I'm not equipped…I'm not equipped to assist." Participants also shared that participating in the webinar gave them information they were unaware of, including signs of risk factors in vulnerable youth, tactics used to involve vulnerable youth, the scope of SE in the United States, and the resources available to assist.

P3 said:

> Before attending the webinar [my thoughts] were that…All of this exploitation was an international overseas thing …So so I never thought of it like on the home

front…So hearing how much happens over here, like I would have never known prior to attending this webinar that it was so prevalent…amongst our own.

P2 replied:

I didn't realize the tactics and methods being used just from the stories that the webinar presenters were telling us. Something that [the Webinar presenter] had mentioned too, with the little video that she showed I really can't remember but with the young girl speaking and the tactics of like friends being used to pull other people in and yeah that that kind of stayed with me.

P7 added:

Prior to the webinar I heard about this sexual exploitation, but It being right in some of the neighborhoods, that's the scary part …you know you hear about it; you watch movies. You see your kind of documentary, but you never think. It's right where you live.

Participants also discussed how the SEM webinar "activated something" to continue learning and to gain "more sense" of youth SE; and that after participating in the webinar, helping would involve referring SE vulnerable youth to "somebody else" "more equipped" that could help. P2 said:

So, wrestling with myself after the webinar has activated something in me to continue to learn more and educating myself…I think after the webinar, I can probably pick up or sense it better than before or in terms of handling the situation myself. I do agree with P7's sentiments. I do agree with some of the things P3 was saying, I don't have to be a person to take the charge and kind of find a

resolution to the situation. I can just be that person to listen, see, identify the vulnerability, and listen to what's happening and maybe pass it on to somebody else but this webinar has made realize how important it is to be educated and knowledgeable in this situation.

P4 interjected:

I just want to say quickly. Prevention is a very good approach. That's, that's being brought to the forefront and the fact that you're targeting the churches is excellent just for the simple fact that churches where lives are supposed to be transformed. So, I think that's just a good place to start if we you know, add it to the church curriculum. I think that's an excellent place for it would be effective from the beginning, from the onset.

Further comments included ways to make the SEM webinar "better." Suggestions included, (a) incorporating the webinar in the church curricula, (b) incorporating youth as the target group, (c) involving parents, (d) having the conference in person, (e) adding break-out sessions, (f) adding a spiritual component,(g) being honest in presenting the facts (e.g., perks and repercussions of SE), (h) involve more SE survivors (true stories), (i) have consistent trainings, and (j) incorporate more cultural perspectives.

**Main Theme 2: Social Factors**

*The social normative that may influence an individual's SE knowledge and encompassed the following codes: norms, roles, self-concept, and interpersonal agreements*. Such codes were generated based on focus group participants' discussion as follows:

***Norms***

Are beliefs about what behavior close family, friends, and peers feel is correct (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis, 1977). Initial codes used to generate this priori code include, *as a professional, as a parent, as a leader, as an adult, as a responsible citizen, and as military.* Under a priori code "norms", participants expressed their belief that "learning about sexual exploitation was important" and "beneficial" based on their situation or position in their families. Two participants shared their experience with young family members who had either been sexually abused or sexually exploited and expressed the importance of being aware or "conscious of the tactics" and believed that as parents and family members it was pivotal to give adequate information "prior to something occurring." Other participants expressed that knowing the "tactics or the signs of sexual exploitation" was important and knowledge on such tactics was expected from them as professionals working with youth.

> I entered that at school so for me. My degree is in counseling school counseling. So, I feel like working in this position [is] important to understand or you know the tactics or the signs of sexual exploitation when working with kids"

P1 added " …and I've been in rooms where they kind of focus on like legislation aspect and like how to be preventive on the legislation aspect so like how to advocate for laws that can help regulate or kind of decrease that the act of sexual exploitation.

***Roles***

Set of behaviors considered appropriate based on a person's position in a group (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis, 1977). Roles encompassed initial

codes including *working with children*, *working with family and friends*, and *working with other entities*. "Roles" was a constant and resurging code among participants. There was an expressed responsibility amongst participants based on feelings that their roles as family members (e.g., parents, caregivers, etc.); community members (e.g., professionals, responsible citizens); and church leaders, dictated a personal and professional responsibility to be aware and knowledgeable in order to help. From the parental role perspective, some participants expressed their beliefs that being a parent generated the desire for "very strong awareness." P3 said, "Yeah. Yeah, you know as adults with younger kids you should be able to tell the difference of behavior of their children." P6's perspective was that being in the role of a parent obtaining knowledge through education and becoming well versed on the SE issue was significant.

> …this education thing is really big to me, you know. It really…uh helps me to think 'cause I'm a parent. It helps me to think of how well-versed parents have to be…I think parents now have to be more well versed with the multitude of things that goes on. The consciousness of the parents have to really be in a place where they are aware of what could happen… so parents' maturity is vital… I have to do my part as well.

P5 interjected that roles are beyond parents in the home and should extend to people in the community.

> So, I think this goes beyond parenting I think this, think this has to go towards… people, you know… I believe black lives matter, but I also believe all lives matter and I believe that that we, as a community need to invest more in our children and

> that we, as if we want to be deemed as responsible citizens. Then we need to do our part. We need to do our part. (P5)

Participants also made emphasis on their role as church leaders and on the fact that "leaders care" and have access to people's lives. Because of such responsibility, helping others is expected. Obtaining SE knowledge about what is going on in the community and in the world in order to help, was also part of what participants expressed was a church leader's responsibility.

Participants also expressed that offering help in some capacity to assist a youth exposed to SE was also an expected obligation in the religious arena. P6 said, "…because people are still going to need help" and helping is expected from religious entities (i.e., church); it is what leaders "have to do," P6 added. One participant said that SE knowledge and helping behavior is something leaders are supposed to do P8 said, "that's where I'm coming from when I'm talking. I'm like everything that we're saying is like we're already supposed to be doing this kind of thing." P5 further shared that, "as a church leader I want to learn how to identify and how to help the people that I serve." Conversely, some participants argued that not all church leaders are willing to help and that a person is more likely to help based on what they know and do professionally. P3 said, "well regardless there are gonna be leaders who are not gonna do that [help]; because like I was saying … there's no absolutes. There are gonna be a few people who will turn a blind eye."

***Self-Concept***

Are how individuals perceive themselves and how such perception is self-attributed to help (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis, 1977). This code encompassed initial codes including *knowledge before/after training, confidence after training, sensitivity after training, feeling equipped/aware, and knowledgeable after training.* Much discussion was dedicated to "self-concept" amongst focus group participants. There was a general agreement that perceiving themselves as "good parents" and "responsible leaders" and "responsible citizens" was significant to influenced knowledge and possibly to helping some youth at risk. Further discussion on self-concept involved participants' self-perception before and after the training, with a few participants not feeling equipped, yet expressing feeling some increase in their knowledge about youth SE. P8 said:

> Before the seminar, I would have considered myself knowledgeable. After the seminar, I realized I'm not equipped… right, I'm not equipped. I'm not equipped to assist. I'm equipped with knowing where to send them, who to tell them to get help from but in my own… like personal interaction with them… I know that's not my area.

P5 added:

> I think that the seminar itself helped educate me about some things I was definitely not aware of. And it built my confidence in being able to identify and diving a little bit more into it. After the conference about researching like who to help and then talking to people about it.

P4 interjected:

> So, I think after the seminar the conference that I could now look for things beyond whether just withdrawn. I can look at do they have an expensive jewelry or you know something that the conference brought to my attention to add to the vulnerabilities that I would normally see so I think that was a difference at the conference.

P6 replied:

> After the seminar, I evaluated what I was doing. How it was being done and saw what could be done to broaden the scope. Of what is being on the table to give them an opportunity to shift. There's no guarantee that anyone is going to buy into it, but you have to make it available to them.

***Interpersonal Agreements***

Are specific relationships that an individual has made with others in specific social situations (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis, 1977)**.** "Interpersonal agreements" was the least discussed a priori code within social factors, and incorporating one initial code, *need other platforms*. One participant addressed aspects of interpersonal agreements by discussing the need for other entities to intervene,

> That's why I think you need other platforms you need other entities where these young people can get help... So, I'm all for other entities and that that really want to make a difference… So, what I've done since the seminar is incorporated other people that are more well versed in their craft. (P6)

**Main Theme 3: Helping Behavior**

*Helping behavior is usually altruistic and involves giving a resource or a service characterized by associative acts* (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis, 1977. The theme "Helping behavior" comprised codes *taking action, passing it on,* and *need to help.* The consensus amongst participants was that taking action was to "pass it on." Participants expressed that as leaders, referring a youth at risk of SE to someone "more versed" or "equipped" was the responsible thing to do, because "passing it along to somebody else" is helping them too "cause at least you're not like ignoring it." One participant disagreed, "Yes, no, I think it's necessary as leaders for us to do more rather than just pass on…I would like to do more" (P1).

Participants also expressed that addressing youth SE was "serious" and "hard" and that not being properly equipped, educated, or prepared to take action could be harmful if a person lacks the necessary knowledge to handle the situation. Further, taking action also involved investing more in children's wellbeing, "doing our part," "doing something," and "getting ahead of it" through prevention. P2 said, "But you know, passing it along to somebody else is helping them too, 'cause at least you're not like"…[P4 interjected … "ignoring it"]. P2 continued, "Well, I know you said pass it along but passing it along, is what you do 'cause you don't have the resources you know. ..you give them to somebody else who has resources." P3 interjected, "that's what leaders do." P2 added, "That is helping them!"

**Main Theme 4: Perceived Consequences**

*Are the subjective probability that certain consequences will result from helping behavior and the outcome of such behavior will have a positive or negative value to participants* (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis, 1977). Theme 4, "perceived consequences" generated from codes *SE negative effects* and *SE repercussions on youth*. Most participants perceived that consequences such as "trauma that carries on," "having a lot of damaged people," and "affecting one's life," would result if "something isn't done." Participants further expressed that SE is "nothing to play with" and that seeing youth going on a "downward spiral" or perceiving that "something is happening that is bringing vulnerable youth down" Is enough to try to help. Such perceptions were seemingly influential to participants' knowledge. One participant emphasized on loss and long-term damage as additional perceived consequences of not helping a youth at risk, "because if nothing is done, we're gonna lose a lot of children that are going to be adults one day, but they're gonna be damaged if we ever find them again." (P6)

**Main Theme 5: Affect**

*Are feelings or emotions participants felt toward helping* (Elciyar & Şimşek, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Triandis, 1977). Affect was a theme generated by codes "SE feelings" and the initial codes, *trauma that carries on, feeling unequipped, passing it on is helping*. Participants' discussion concerning affect was intense. Most participants expressed that youth SE is not something easy to deal with. Participants also expressed feelings of inadequacy concerning being equipped to help. One participant said that

helping was “hard all around” and that they were “not equipped to assist.” Others expressed having a lack of “the proper knowledge” or a good understanding of the issue to “deal with it.” P6 said, “If you’re not conscious… You're going to hurt yourself and them.”

Along with feelings and emotions concerning not being able to deal with helping young persons at risk of SE, participants’ consensus was that “passing it on” to someone with more knowledge and experience “is helping them too.” Further emotions and feelings were displayed when the discussion encompassed having proper resources to help. Several participants said that they felt that by letting someone else handle a young person at risk is helping too. P2 said, “at least you're not like ignoring it” because “passing it along, is what you do 'cause you don't have the resources.” Another participant shared that there were other resources or methods of approach, where one finds someone who is educated and can help push a young person at risk in the right direction. P3 said, “I realize …that you don't necessarily have to be the person to help them like, that's fine.” The group’s discussion focused on the fact that one doesn’t have to be the person to find resolution to the situation, but “can just be that person to listen, identify the vulnerability, and refer the young person to someone else more equipped to help” (P1).

Another salient feeling among participants was that it was important to be educated and knowledgeable in youth SE to know what to do. One participant said that part of the feelings of noninvolvement stemmed from a personal perspective on youth involved in SE. P8 said, “my perspective still needs to be changed a bit… I have a perspective about

sexual exploitation and it doesn't always necessarily line up with how everyone else sees it."

**Figure 20**

*Qualitative Phase Focus Group Salient Themes, Codes and Snippets*

| CODES | THEMES | SNIPPETS |
|---|---|---|
| • Awareness/Knowledge<br>• Education is Important<br>• Feeling Equipped/Trained<br>• Preventive Maintenance<br>• The LUE-SEM Evaluation | **FACILITATING CONDITIONS** | "This education thing is really big"<br>"But if you're not well versed in it you still can't help them."<br>"Passing it along to somebody else is helping them too."<br>"After the session that we had my antennas were activated."<br>"Have multiple ones because the word has to go out." |
| • Roles<br>• Norms<br>• Self-Concept<br>• Interpersonal agreements | **SOCIAL FACTORS** | "When working with kids."<br>"Because we're military…"<br>"I would say that being a parent…"<br>"As a church leader …"<br>"To be deemed as responsible citizens."<br>"Working in this position is important to understand."<br>"I think after the webinar, I can probably pick up or sense it better than before."<br>"After the webinar has activated something in me to continue to learn."<br>"That's why I think you need other platforms you need other entities where these young people can get help." |
| • Taking Action.<br>• Need to help.<br>• Passing it on. | **HELPING BEHAVIOR** | "I have to do my part as well."<br>"What can I do."<br>"Passing it on is helping too" |
| • SE Negative Effects.<br>• SE Repercussions on youth. | **PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES** | "I feel guilty."<br>"And if we don't do something, you have a lot of damaged people." |
| • SE Feelings.<br>• Feeling Unequipped.<br>• Trauma that carries on.<br>• Passing it on is helping. | **AFFECT** | "This is trauma that carries on."<br>"If you're not conscious… You're going to hurt yourself and them". |

Results from the qualitative phase reflected, three TIB factors influential to SE knowledge significantly salient among participants during the focus group discussion: *facilitating conditions*, *social factors*, and *perceived consequences*. Helping behavior was also highly discussed during the focus group, however, the focus of the present study was SE knowledge. Nevertheless, findings concerning helping behavior (referred to in the present study as *taking actio*n) may be considered for future behavioral change studies. *Facilitating conditions* was most salient in that participants referred to "being educated", "equipped/trained", "having influenced awareness", and "engaging in preventive maintenance" as pivotal to influenced SE knowledge and increasing the feasibility of such taking action by helping vulnerable youth at risk of SE. Participants also discussed influenced SE awareness and knowledge after training participation and how such awareness and knowledge (although influential to taking action) would involve indirectly helping youth at risk by referring or "passing it on" to someone "more knowledgeable or experienced".

The second salient TIB factor was *social factors*, mainly *roles* (as church leaders) *and self-concept*. Participants' discussion encompassing social factors highlighted the fact that being in the roles of church leaders, responsible citizens/community members, and parents, was pivotal to influenced SE knowledge and the potential to possibly helping youth at risk. The third salient factor was *perceived consequences*, where participants expressed that something needed to be done to address the issue of SE before more youth are "hurt" or "damaged" and the knowledge of such perception was also influential to participants' influenced SE knowledge. Another salient factor was *helping behavior* that

involved discussions generated from the concept of “taking action”. Participants’ discussion highlighted the significance of helping a young person at risk of SE and such help involved “passing it on” to someone “more equipped or knowledgeable.” Figure 21 is a word cloud including a word frequency generated from the focus group discussion. Salient factors from word frequency were coded and assigned to initial codes, followed by a priori codes, and then assigned to a priori themes based on Triandis’ TIB.

**Figure 21**

*Qualitative Phase Focus Group Salient Themes Word Cloud*

## Coherence of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Findings from both phases of the present study are relevant in that both phases rendered results significant to confirming and understanding the potential influence of a culturally competent theory-based intervention (the SEM training module) on participants' SE knowledge. Findings in the quantitative phase although inconclusive (due to the secondary nature of the data), were useful to gaining insights to further explore the potential influence of the SEM training (as a facilitating condition) on church leaders' SE knowledge and to investigate the possibility of such training potentially influencing participants feelings and desires to engage in helping a young person at risk of youth SE (taking action). Both phases of research rendered significant information reflecting a culturally competent theory-based intervention, as a significantly salient factor influencing church leaders' SE knowledge corroborating Triandis' TIB premise about facilitating conditions directly influencing intentions and possibly behavior. Findings in both phases were also pivotal to addressing the gap in research concerning youth SE prevention training modules (a) developed for religious leaders (specifically Afrocentric churches), (b) encompassing a theoretical framework, (c) empirically tested, and (d) specific to youth SE prevention Franchino-Olsen, 2021; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017.

Quantitative and qualitative results were generated from data collected from participants as well as information from journals documenting my biases and challenges during the data collection and analysis. Including such journaled information was

necessary to address issues of trustworthiness encountered during the data collection and analysis processes.

## Trustworthiness of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Trustworthiness is the extent to which the findings or conclusions of a study are accurate, reliable, and credible. Increased trustworthiness is pivotal to gaining credibility and enables other researchers to scrutinize, replicate studies, or build upon existing knowledge (Leonard et al., 2022). Several factors contributed to establishing trustworthiness in the present mixed methods study, validity and reliability of quantitative results and credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative results.

### Validity and Reliability of Quantitative Results

Validity is the extent to which research results reflect the true state of the phenomenon being studied. Validity is pivotal to ensure that research results are useful to the accuracy of research conclusions. Reliability is the consistency or stability of measurements or data collection methods used in quantitative studies, whereas a research study renders the same results when repeated under the same conditions (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023). The data analyzed in the quantitative phase of the present study was secondary data from staff members from the partner organization collected from participants through a pre and postsurvey before and after the SEM training. Subsequently, establishing the validity and reliability of results in this quantitative phase was a limitation because I had no control over the data collection process and no knowledge about how the data collection was executed (see FitzPatrick, 2019; Sotto-

Santiago et al., 2023). Another limiting factor to the reliability of results was not knowing whether the instrument was administered in a standardized manner according to predetermined procedures.

**The LUES Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are important factors when developing and testing any instrument for use in a study (Mohajan, 2017; Salmond, 2008). Validity is the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it intends to measure. Three common types of validity are content, construct, and criterion validities (Mohajan, 2017; Salmond, 2008). Reliability is the degree to which an instrument yields consistent results (Mohajan, 2017; Salmond, 2008). Developers from the partner organization used the CSEC questionnaire (with minor modifications) as the basis for developing the LUES pre and postsurveys).

The CSEC questionnaire was a self-reported instrument developed by McMahon-Howard and Reimers (2013) to evaluate a child welfare training program for Child Protective Services (CPS) employees. The CSEC questionnaire was specifically developed to determine if the goals of the training - to improve CSEC attitudes, knowledge, and appropriate referrals - were achieved (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). Although such study was appraised as *good* based on Downs and Black's (1998) Checklist for Measuring Study Quality, the CSEC questionnaire was rendered weak in validity based on the Psychometric Grading Framework (PGF), a framework developed to evaluate the strength of self-reported instruments' content validity, construct validity, and internal consistency (Fraley et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2012). The CSEC was also

rendered poor in reliability due to inconsistencies in the response rates (Fraley et al., 2020; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). Subsequently, the UES non-standardized nature; possible modifications; and data collection process inconsistencies (by staff members of the partner organization) were significant limitations to the present study. Future research will be needed to further explore instrumentation issues as well as the dearth in literature about standardized instruments designed to measure youth SE knowledge in leaders of Afrocentric churches.

I was able to address reliability and validity challenges by obtaining as much information from my contact at the partner organization and by conducting further research concerning the instrument and the data collection process (without violating any ethical standards encompassing participants' identity) to (a) establish that the pretest and posttest measured the same construct, (b) that the same instrument was used for the pre and posttests, and (c). the instrument administered had been validated for the population being studied (Chico & Montaño, 2022; FitzPatrick, 2019; Leonard et al., 2022; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Weston et al., 2019). I further, included copies of correspondence encompassing any data-access statement and a detailed explanation of how I used the data in the data collection section (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Weston et al., 2019).

**Trustworthiness of Qualitative Results**

Trustworthiness of qualitative results refers to the credibility, dependability, and authenticity of the research findings. It is a measure of the researcher's ability to accurately represent the participants' experiences and to draw valid conclusions from the data. Trustworthiness is achieved through a variety of methods, including using a

qualitative methodology that is sensitive to the cultural context of the research, using a rigorous research design, and ensuring that the data are accurately recorded and analyzed (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Leonard et al., 2022). Trustworthiness of the qualitative results in the present research study encompassed employing several methods to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as follows:

***Credibility***

Relates to the representation of data fit with the views of research participants and assesses if the tools, processes, and data used to conduct research were appropriate. To promote credibility, I maintained a reflective journal with notes about biases, documented notes about decisions and observations from focus group participants to aid (e.g., nonverbal communication, particularities about certain interactions, etc), and used triangulation to address my biases and the possible influence of my personal perspectives during the data analysis. I further recorded the focus group session for repeated revisions and clarification of emerging themes. I also followed ethical standards to conduct my research and handle participants' information by adhering to the established protocol for conducting the focus group interview and storing the information collected.

***Transferability***

Is the applicability of research findings to other specific settings. I promoted transferability by providing details of the study setting, context, recruitment process and description of participants, and collection to enable readers to evaluate for which target groups the study provides valuable information. I further provided a detailed research context to facilitate the evaluation of study conclusions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Equally important is to note that findings from a small sample of participants cannot be generalized to other populations and situations hence results from the present study may not be applied to other populations with similar results due to the peculiarity of the circumstances surrounding the execution of the present study and specific characteristics of focus group participants (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tümen Akyildiz, 2020).

***Dependability***

Is whether the process of research was logical, traceable, and documented, particularly on the methods chosen and the decisions made by the researcher. To promote dependability, I provided a concise description of the research process, methodology development, and findings reporting by, (a) illustrating participants' experiences verbatim, (b) promoting a valid and grounded interpretation of the data by maintaining a critical stance and honesty through self-reflection and self-scrutiny, (c) reading transcripts several times during different time frames, (d) using various coding methods to generate codes, categories, and themes (Petersén & Carlsson, 2021).

***Confirmability***

Is the extent to which findings are grounded in the data and are qualitatively confirmable by other researchers. Confirmability is significant to increased transparency and accountability to the research process and may enable researchers to replicate studies and validate conclusions (Johnson et al., 2020; Li, 2022). For the present study, I promoted confirmability by, (a) employing triangulation collecting information from different perspectives and through various means such as a focus group interview,

observations, and surveys; (b) maintaining a journal with notes describing personal biases as well as challenges, and solutions to resolving cohesion between aim, design, and methods; (c) having open discussions with experienced research committee members in sessions where assumptions and consensus occurred; and (d) documenting changes and unexpected occurrences to further explain findings (Ishita et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

## Summary

Phase 1 of the present study encompassed a quantitative analysis of secondary data to determine the influence of the SEM training on participants' SE knowledge. COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions (i.e., closure of public venues, social distancing, quarantining, staff working from home without direct supervision, etc.) affected how the SEM training was conducted (i.e., online instead of in person) subsequently affecting the fidelity of the data collection and transference process. Due to such unusual circumstances, even though the hypothesis was fully tested, the RQ could only be partially answered. Statistically, the null hypothesis for the knowledge construct was rejected, yet the research question on whether the SEM training influenced participants' SE knowledge was partially answered due to the unreliability of the secondary data provided by the partner organization. Further research will be necessary to answer the research question in depth. Phase 2 encompassed a focus group with eight participants from Phase One. Focus group results reflected facilitating conditions (including feeling equipped), participants' roles as church leaders, and perceived consequences of SE involvement, as significant factors influencing participants' SE knowledge. Chapter 5,

includes a discussion on how such results align with Triandis' TIB as the underlying framework of the SEM training and how results from the quantitative phase of the present study, although inconclusive, are significant to answering the research questions guiding this mixed methods study, adding to the body of research concerning developing culturally competent theory-based interventions.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Youth SE is a social problem affecting families and communities. Ostensibly, existing prevention efforts are insufficient in cultural competency and are nonspecific when targeting youth SE involvement and vulnerability among some Afrocentric individuals (Fedina et al., 2019; Franchino-Olsen, 2021). By researching the current literature, I found that youth SE training programs for leaders of Afrocentric churches are scarce, and such scarcity is ostensibly significant to such leaders' reduced SE awareness and participation in addressing youth SE through prevention (see Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Yang et al., 2020). The SEM was the first culturally sensitive theory-based training module developed to target leaders of Afrocentric churches inclusive of the TIB as theoretical framework. The current mixed methods program evaluation explanatory sequential study was to empirically address the SEM influence on leaders of Afrocentric churches SE knowledge and possibly align the TIB as theoretical framework.

The research question was twofold: (a) to determine the influence of the SEM training on leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge about youth SE and (b) to align Triandis' TIB as possible theoretical framework of the SEM training. The present study included a quantitative analysis encompassing a paired *t* test using secondary data from 55 SEM participants and a qualitative analysis encompassing a focus group of eight participants from the 55 SEM participants used for the quantitative analysis. Focusing on the degree of influence of the SEM on leaders of Afrocentric churches' (church leaders) SE knowledge was significant to conducting further studies on the possibility of such

knowledge-based intention subsequently influencing church leaders' engagement in helping behavior (i.e., helping youth at risk of SE). Discussion of findings, limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research are included in this chapter. The present study has useful informational value from both practical and theoretical perspectives.

## Summary of Key Findings

Findings in the present study reflected significant difference in participants' pretest and posttest knowledge scores. However, such difference was in pretest scores being higher than posttest scores, deeming quantitative results partially inconclusive when assessing the SEM's influence on leaders of Afrocentric churches' (church leaders) SE knowledge. Detected changes in church leaders' SE knowledge scores rendered to the argument that any possibility of change in knowledge increases the feasibility of the SEM training influencing church leaders' SE knowledge-based intention, potentially increasing the feasibility of such leaders helping a young person at risk of SE (Kenny et al., 2020). Further, findings from the qualitative phase of the present study contributed to aligning Triandis TIB as framework of the SEM. Results reflected that church leaders' SE knowledge (motivation toward the performance of a behavior) was possibly influenced by a facilitating condition (objective factors in the environment instrumental in performing or engaging in a specific behavior); social factors (norms, roles, and values that socially influence an individual's intention to perform a particular behavior); and perceived consequences (participants perception of repercussions for taking or not taking action). Additionally, results about the SEM content being relevant to participants' role as

church leaders, and overall satisfaction with the module was favorable. Findings also reflected a heightened sense of participants' understanding of SE in several areas, possibly leading to feasible behavioral change toward youth at risk of SE. My focus was solely on the influence on SE knowledge. Further research is needed to examine changes in behavior based on influenced SE knowledge. In the present study, participants (leaders of Afrocentric churches) are also referred to as church leaders, SE knowledge as SE knowledge, and helping behavior as taking action.

## Interpretation of Findings

Prior to my study, the examination of influenced SE knowledge (i.e., knowledge-based intentions) using a theory-based culturally competent training module within the Afrocentric religious community has been insufficient in research (see Franchino-Olsen, 2021; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). The purpose of this mixed methods program evaluation study was to fill such gap in research by assessing the influence of a culturally competent theory-based SE training module on leaders of Afrocentric churches' youth SE knowledge, and how influenced knowledge aligned with Triandis' TIB as theoretical framework. While other studies encompassed the examination of the influence of child sexual abuse and child SE training modules, and the use of Triandis' TIB in various sectors (i.e., marketing, technology, social sciences); seemingly, no exploration has been done to gain insight on a youth SE prevention training model within the religious sector, targeting leaders of Afrocentric churches using the TIB as theoretical framework (see Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Huang, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2018; McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013).

Findings from my study reflected that some church leaders' SE knowledge may be influenced by a culturally competent training program and such training program could potentially influence church leaders' helping behavior. Nevertheless, my research solely encompassed investigating influenced knowledge-based intention. The feasibility of changes in church leaders' behavior will require further research. Additionally, findings from the present study confirmed results from a study where participants' knowledge about child abuse was increasingly influenced by a training program, and subsequently such influence resulted in changes in participants' behavior (Nurse, 2017). Such research study, by Nurse (2017), although similar in some respects to the present study, differed in that (a) the evaluation was of a training module focusing on child abuse and not youth SE (even though youth SE is a form of child abuse), (b) the training was developed for parents and not church leaders, (c) the study encompassed a non-Afrocentric sample, and (d) the training was not based on Triandis' TIB as theoretical framework (Nurse, 2017). My research study is one of the first to examine a youth SE preventive training program based on Triandis TIB as framework and developed for leaders of Afrocentric churches. Subsequently, findings from this study may aid in understanding the effects of theory-based culturally competent interventions from an empirical and theoretical standpoint.

**Influenced SE Knowledge-Based-Intentions**

Knowledge is a structural property of attitudes that is a function of a person's beliefs and experiences (Fabrigar et al., 2006; Herzog et al., 2013; Venkataramanan et al., 2020). Researchers have been interested in knowledge because of the assumption that

increases in knowledge are associated with influencing intentions to perform behavior (Davidson et al., 1985; Fabrigar et al., 2006; Herzog et al., 2013; Venkataramanan et al., 2020). Intentions are better predictors of behavior when such intentions are based on high amounts of knowledge versus little knowledge (Herzog et al., 2013; Venkataramanan et al., 2020). One explanation is that increased knowledge is likely to lead to increasingly stable attitudes and attitudes resistant to change (Fabrigar et al., 2006; Herzog et al., 2013).

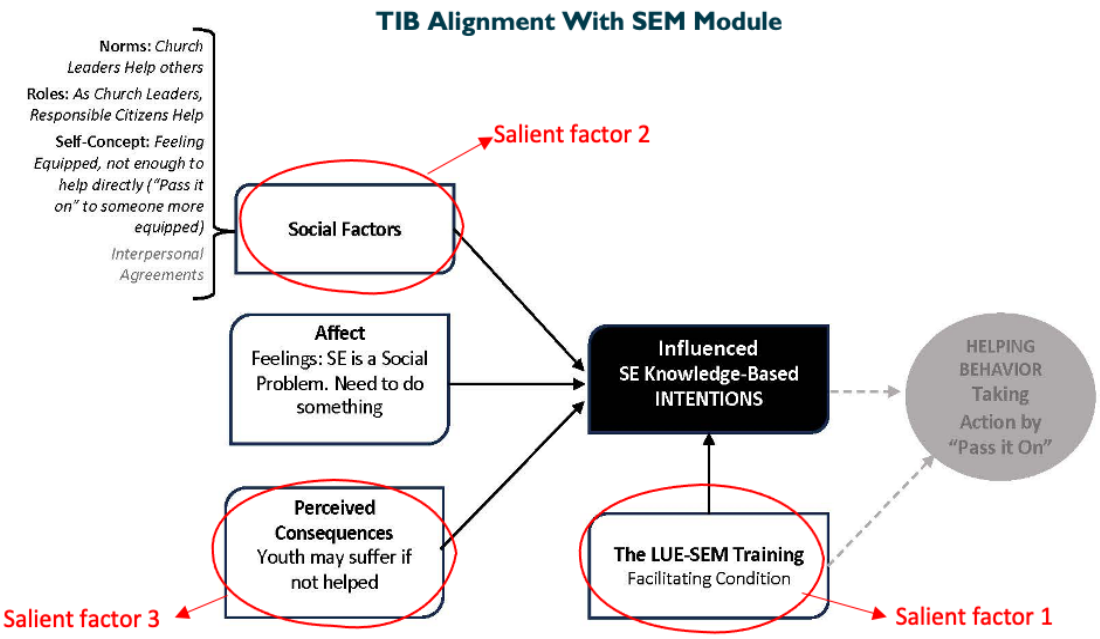
Findings from my study give basis to align Triandis' TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM. Such confirmation was generated from results reflecting factors influencing church leaders' SE knowledge and subsequently such influence increasing the possibility of such leaders' engaging in helping youth at risk of SE. Factors influencing church leaders' SE knowledge included (a) facilitating conditions (objective environmental conditions conducive or not to helping behavior), (b) social factors (inclusive of norms, roles, and self-concept), (c) perceived consequences (conception of repercussions from engaging or failing to engage in helping behavior), and (d) affect (feelings about youth SE). The SEM training was the facilitating condition that directly influenced church leaders' SE knowledge. Social factors encompassed participants assessing the SEM content as relevant and overall favorable to their role as church leaders, parents, and responsible citizens and such role being the catalyst to potentially desiring to help youth at risk of SE. Perceived consequences included church leaders acknowledging the repercussions of failing to help youth at risk of SE. Lastly, affect was

reflected in church leaders' feelings of SE being a problem in "their backyard" needing increased attention.

Church leaders also reported a heightened sense of understanding in several areas in which their behavior could potentially change because of participating in the SEM. Such potential behavioral change was reflected in such leaders expressing intentions to indirectly help youth at risk through referral by "passing it on" to someone else "more experienced" or "more equipped" to help. Figure 21 contains a depiction of Triandis' TIB model corroborating the SEM module based on qualitative findings and triangulation. Such findings reflect the SEM training as the facilitating condition that possibly had a direct influence on church leaders' SE knowledge; subsequently increasing the feasibility of church leaders' possible engagement in helping (taking action). Such helping behavior, however, involved an indirect interaction with helping youth at risk of SE through referral (i.e., "passing it on" to someone "more equipped"). Further research would be needed to address the possible effect of the SEM training as a facilitating condition on church leaders' helping behavior. Social factors, affect, and perceived consequences were also factors incorporated in the SEM training that influenced participants' SE knowledge, with participants' roles as church leaders seemingly being the salient social influencing factor. Additionally, perceived consequences and affect were seemingly influential to church leaders' SE knowledge with less saliency than facilitating conditions and social factors.

**Figure 22**

*TIB Alignment With the SEM Based on Qualitative Research and Triangulation*




*Note.* This figure reflects findings from the present study depicting TIB factors with influence on SE knowledge and behavior. Bold black arrows represent direct influence. Dotted gray arrows and gray circle represent feasible influence. From "Interpersonal Behavior," by H.C. Triandis, 1977, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

**Facilitating Conditions Influence on SE Knowledge-Based Intentions**

Facilitating conditions was the strongest factor influencing participants' SE knowledge. In Triandis' TIB, facilitating conditions are factors in an individual's environment that make a behavior easy to perform (Triandis, 1977). Facilitating conditions are one of two factors directly affecting SE knowledge (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Triandis, 1977). Such facilitating conditions may encompass two dimensions: situational, including helpful external conditions such as the right settings, or access to resources and internal, encompassing self-efficacy involving both an individual's skills and the judgment of what such individual may do with such skills (Bergeron et al., 1995; Kim & Lee, 2012; Peñarroja, 2019). An individual's self-efficacy is harder to manipulate (Kim & Lee, 2012).

In my study, the SEM training was the facilitating condition with situational and internal dimensions that influenced participants' SE knowledge. Results reflected that Afrocentric church leaders' knowledge of SE risk factors, and SE laws and services (where to refer a youth at risk) were significantly influenced by the SEM. Ninety percent of church leaders expressed gaining more awareness and understanding of youth SE after participating in the training and conveyed feeling "more equipped" to indirectly "handle the situation" or "help a young person at risk" by "passing it on" to someone "more qualified." Church leaders' feelings of internal efficacy, although significantly influenced by the SEM training, were seemingly insufficient for leaders to perceive themselves as equipped enough to handle a youth at risk directly and expressed that "passing it on" or referring a young person at risk of SE was "helping too." Findings from my study

concerning facilitating conditions, support previous research suggesting that participants who felt more knowledgeable about a particular subject or equipped enough to help, felt positive about engaging in helping behavior. Participants who felt less knowledgeable or not equipped enough to help felt less positive about helping (see Barnert et al, 2017; Pee et al., 2008).

**Social Factors Influence on SE Knowledge**

Results also reflected social factors (inclusive of norms roles, self-concept, and interpersonal agreements) to also be influential to church leaders' SE knowledge (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2023; Triandis, 1977). Social factors encompass the culture of individuals' reference groups as well as unique interpersonal agreements between such individuals (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Triandis, 1977). Such factors should be examined and predicted by a combination of three criteria: norms, roles, and self-concept (Ibrahim et al., 2018). In my study, results confirmed that church leaders' knowledge was influenced by the SEM in that participants expressed learning that youth SE was a problem they were fully unaware of and that they were unconscientious of the consequences of youth SE involvement. Results further confirmed that perceived social pressure (in this case, participants' roles as church leaders) was significantly influential to SE knowledge. Participants recognized that as church leaders (a) they were being confronted with a problem that had serious consequences, (b) that social norms called for people in their roles to help, and (c) they had the personal responsibility to help after SEM participation. Participants further expressed that addressing youth SE was "their job" and responsibility as church leaders.

Further, most church leaders denoted feelings of possibly changing their helping behavior by taking action or "doing something" as a means of helping a young person at risk of SE after SEM participation. Results also reflected church leaders feeling that their SE knowledge was influenced, and subsequently, their desire to help increased. However, such increase was for indirect engagement with youth at risk of SE. Such results relating to social norms coincide with results from other research studies, where participants who were normatively susceptible were inclined to have a favorable attitude towards a positive behavior (i.e., helping); indirectly increasing the possibility of change (see Golob et al., 2019; Koklič, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). Moreover, results also reflected that after SEM participation, church leaders were increasingly sensitive to perceived external and self-generated social expectations, where they perceived their moral roles as religious leaders to be the catalyst to helping a young person at risk of SE. Such results line up with results from other research studies where perceived external and self-generated social expectations had a strong influence on participants' intentions to engage in a particular behavior (Bamberg & Schmidt, 2003; Taherdoost, 2018).

Additionally, participants' roles as parents and responsible citizens also influenced their SE knowledge. Further studies on the level of influence of each role could be instrumental in enhancing and developing future interventions to target such groups of participants based on social factors. Moreover, although church leaders' social roles were a factor directly influencing SE knowledge, seemingly the level of such influence determined the degree to which such leaders would possibly engage in helping youth at risk of SE. Further research is needed to explore levels of SE knowledge versus

levels of engagement (i.e., direct or indirect) in helping behavior (Limayem et al., 2004; Taherdoost, 2018). Results from my research study rendered significant findings related to influenced SE knowledge among leaders of Afrocentric churches exposed to a theory-based intervention. However, obtaining such findings encompassed several limitations.

## Limitations of the Study

My study had several limitations. The main limitation was not having control over the data collection process which resulted in a relatively small sample size. Having a small, convenient, and nonrandom sample of leaders of Afrocentric churches limited the generalizability of findings, deeming results inapplicable to the general population of leaders of Afrocentric churches in the specified metropolitan area (Almalki, 2016). Moreover, executing a mixed method was costly and time consuming, whereas, conducting data collection, data analysis, and reporting results for two distinct methods (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) was challenging (see Johnson et al., 2007).

Additionally, COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions (i.e., closure of public venues, social distancing, quarantining, staff working from home without direct supervision, etc.) affected how representatives from the partner organization conducted the SEM training (i.e., online as a webinar instead of an in-person conference), subsequently affecting the data collection and data transference processes. Further, using secondary data gathered by a contact at a partner organization posited significant limitations including limited control over the data collection process and the validity of study results due to multiple treatment interference (see Campbell & Stanley, 2015). The original research design encompassed a primary data collection process; however,

Walden IRB concerns and recommendations resulted in data being obtained from a secondary source (in this case a partner organization). The quality of the data sets may have been compromised due to (a) the nonstandardized nature and low validity and reliability of the data collection instrument, (b) time constrictions during the postsurvey data collection, and (c) poor postsurvey response rate. Participants were given 10 minutes after the SEM training to complete the postsurvey and many participants failed to complete the survey at such time. Subsequently, participants were contacted by staff members from the partner organizations several times to obtain postsurvey responses after SEM participation. Poor follow-up may have generated skewed results because some participants responded to the follow-up between 6-12 months later at various points in time. Such circumstances may have negatively affected postsurvey results possibly compromising the accuracy and quality of the data.

Additional limitations from using secondary data included threats to internal validity including history, maturation, testing, statistical regression, selection, differential mortality, contamination effect, Hawthorne effect, experimenter bias, interaction effects, and instrumentation (see Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Campbell & Stanley, 2015). Further, potential threats to testing due to modifications to the instrument design and administration also added to the secondary data collection challenges and the limitations to the present study. Staff members from the partner organization developed a data collection instrument (the UES) specifically for the SEM by modifying a non-standardized self-reported instrument (the CSEC questionnaire). Such modifications seemingly posited validity and reliability challenges addressed further in this study.

Using a standardized instrument is recommended for future research to increase the validity and reliability of the data (see Almalki, 2016; Salmond, 2008). The data provided by my contact at the partner organization was from randomly selected participants, yet I had no influence in selecting such survey participants. Such circumstances in addition to changes due to IRB requirements and having a limited data set, resulted in changes in my data analysis from an ANCOVA to a one-group *t* test, increasing challenges to the robustness and reliability of results. The lack of a control group posited limitations whereas using a control group may have enabled assumptions of the general equality of the external environmental factors and provided a reliable experimental paradigm for future research (see Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Queirós et al., 2017). Lastly, the researcher's bias in determining what is observed, what is recorded, how it is recorded, and how it is transcribed for analysis also added to the limitations of my study (see Queirós et al., 2017).

Despite various limitations (cost and time efficiency, the ability to secure the minimal amount of data required, addressing ethical concerns raised by Walden IRB, addressing the challenges of securing and working with secondary data, and navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic-related setbacks to the quantitative data collection process) using secondary data was the best option for conducting this study despite its drawbacks. Repeating this study with adjustments in the data collection process, data analyses, and identifying alternative means to obtain more consistent reporting may increase the reliability and add to the empirical strength of my research study.

## Recommendations

The present study was to determine the degree of influence the SEM training had on leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge and how influenced knowledge aligned with Triandis TIB as theoretical framework of the training model. The empirical investigation of the SEM influence on participants' SE knowledge is the first research study evaluating the influence of a culturally competent theory-based youth SE training module on leaders of Afrocentric churches, rendering interesting findings generating several areas for future research. There is ample opportunity for further research from my research study.

Replicating this first attempt by using a quasi-experimental design with primary data incorporating a control group to test the influence of the SEM, could strengthen the empirical value of results and comprehensively determine the extent of the module's influence on participants' SE knowledge. Replicating the present study may render findings significantly useful to training module developers. Findings could be useful to increasing the influential impact of the model rendering data to aid in the development of future training modules to respond to issues encompassing violence against some youth (e.g., youth SE). Moreover, further studies encompassing leaders of Afrocentric churches' perceptions and behavior based on social factors (particularly their role as church leaders) are necessary. I suggest the use of qualitative research to explore and possibly determine whether additional segments are needed within future training modules to address limitations in participants' attitudes and behavior toward helping youth at risk of SE. Similarly, future studies may be needed to explore the SEM training

(as a facilitating condition) that may help church leaders feel equipped to directly help youth at risk of SE.

Further, an in-depth exploration of the influence of perceived consequences on knowledge-based intention is recommended to help broaden the understanding of how church leaders' knowledge-based intention may be influenced by their understanding of possible consequences of having sufficient vs. insufficient knowledge to directly engage in helping behavior. Although participants expressed "feeling equipped to help" a young person at risk, their perception of "causing more harm than good" significantly influenced their intention toward direct involvement. A deeper understanding of direct involvement vs indirect involvement may be helpful to possibly incorporating components in the SEM and other SE training modules that may encompass elements or information directed to targeting participants' perceived consequences as a means to heighten the influence on knowledge-based intention and possibly increase participants' direct engagement in helping behavior. Additionally, since attitudes do not always translate into behavior, future mixed method research is recommended to investigate how SEM trainings affect church leaders' as well as congregants' beliefs, practices, and behaviors. Researchers may consider validating the research model with data samples from various religious and organizational sectors. People within the religious sector and across organizations have different characteristics and cultural dynamics; therefore, differences may be found in terms of influenced knowledge. Such differences may be important to developing comprehensive and culturally sensitive interventions and may

contribute to the development of multi-agency interventions to address youth SE and other issues affecting youth and community development.

Moreover, results reflecting Afrocentric church leaders' willingness to engage in helping behavior (by referring youth to someone more qualified) may be useful for conducting further research using a qualitative approach that may render in-depth data to aid the quality and quantity of information included in future training models to significantly influence participants knowledge on how to identify youth SE risk factors in vulnerable youth and respond to risk cases through referral. Investigating the inclusion of such information could strengthen some training models' equipping power by enabling the development of policies highlighting a number and/or combination of specific risk factors and guidelines to help identify SE at risk youth as cases warranting referral and/or further investigation. Findings could also aid in developing new collaborative avenues between nonprofits (religious and non-religious), public, and private organizations so that some youth SE prevention and specialized services could be directly accessible to church leaders with curtailed guidelines for responding and referring youth at risk within religious organizations. Future research will be helpful in pinpointing if implementing specific referral guidelines and policies would result in influenced knowledge.

Furthermore, given the apparent lack of research evaluating the effectiveness of theory-based culturally competent youth SE training programs, replicating this study could also establish an avenue for studies to further investigate the influence of the SEM training or similar training modules that could be developed in other religious nonprofit organizations. Additionally, a further in-depth exploration of the effectiveness of an

online webinar training versus an in-person training (same model, different settings) may help fill additional gaps in literature concerning theory-based training models targeting specific cultural settings, ethnic groups, and social platforms. Such exploration may also assist in the development of effective interventions within the religious sector to bring awareness and equipping in some issues not often addressed in some religious communities due to their sexual nature. More in-depth research in this area may also create new collaborative avenues between practitioners and intervention developers within religious nonprofit, nonreligious nonprofit, public, and private organizations to enhance the provision of services and resources to respond to youth SE and other issues involving violence against youth (see Barnert et al., 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Gerassi et al., 2017; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kim et al., 2022; Winters et al., 2022).

Using Triandis' TIB as framework for the present study has the benefit of moving beyond the individual psychological focus seen in many behavioral science theories. The development of sensitive interventions and training modules to help in areas of awareness and knowledge regarding social issues needing increasing attention within some communities (i.e., Afrocentric churches) and populations (i.e., church leaders) depends on focusing future studies on the application of theory within such sectors and amongst such populations. Developing, implementing, and evaluating SE services provided by leaders and professionals within religious organizations who encounter youth at risk of SE require more in-depth focus (see Barrows, 2017; Graw Leary, 2018; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Conducting qualitative deductive research focusing on the use of

interpersonal and other behavioral theories in training modules could render valuable data to aid in developing such needed services. There is currently no empirically supported theory-based youth SE-specific intervention strategy for churches. The development of awareness, prevention, and rehabilitation services for church leaders, congregants, and community members (particularly youth) should be a top priority for church leaders and practitioners in the religious sector.

Additional empirically based research is also required to increase understanding of youth SE in the religious sector. To gain such understanding of the problem more research into the prevalence and risk factors of youth SE is particularly needed (see Barnert et al, 2017; Felner et al., 2017). Specific forms of youth SE research would be beneficial to identifying specific risk factors that could contribute to leaders in religious sectors' understanding of youth SE vulnerability, subsequently providing information to curtail prevention efforts. More research is also needed to determine the most successful means to detecting, safeguarding, and supporting vulnerable young people. Additionally, acceptable strategies for teaching religious leaders, parents, young people, community members and other professionals to recognize and respond to SE vulnerability are also needed (see Barnert et al, 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Kim et al., 2022).

Lastly, the length and online webinar platform of the SEM training module may have prevented significant influence on participants' SE knowledge. Church leaders' views on how the training may be improved reflected feelings of possibly benefiting from longer, in-person, more in-depth, specialized training. The replication of the current study on a module involving a lengthier in-person setting, with live presentations and

conversations with trainers, service providers, and SE survivors, may be significant to fill the gap effectively and significantly in research concerning the lack of preventive theory-based youth SE training programs within the church community. More research is needed to determine whether longer, in-person modules would result in increased influenced knowledge.

Efforts to detect and respond to youth SE are increasing; yet many of such efforts are unfunded, uncoordinated, and unevaluated (Barnert et al., 2017; Krieger et al., 2022). Progress is needed to understand youth SE as a type of child abuse encompassing specific challenges, traumas, and repercussions (see Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2023; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Gaining such understanding will require the development and implementation of competent SE training programs specific to participants' cultural, social, and ethnic settings. Several initiatives exist to address SE youth involvement; yet empirically established SE theory-based training modules specialized to address youth SE prevention are still scarce (Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Training programs' developers may need to consider incorporating theories as frameworks to attain or increase program effectiveness (see Barnert et al., 2017; Krieger et al., 2022).

The present mixed methods explanatory program evaluation study is one of the first attempts to evaluate a youth SE culturally competent training module for Afrocentric church leaders using Triandis' TIB. Results from the current study add information to the current research that differs from previous studies encompassing the use of Triandis' TIB in a variety of settings. Yet not as framework on a training module developed for a group

of trainees in a specific social, cultural, and organizational setting. Several research studies encompassed the evaluation of SE trainings, but such trainings did not target church leaders within an Afrocentric church setting (Barnert et al., 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). Findings from my research study reflected significant influence of the SEM training module on leaders of Afrocentric churches' SE knowledge, and such influence provided the basis to further align Triandis TIB as the module's theoretical framework. Such results encompassed methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications, increasingly significant to social change and fills the gap in research adding empirical information useful to church and nonprofit leaders, behavioral science theorists, policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders.

**Empirical and Methodological Implications**

Findings from the present study were useful to training program developers and researchers, yet limitations should be noted. Suggestions for the direction of future research from a methodological and empirical standpoint may be significant to increase the existing knowledge. First, due to constraints of time, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Walden IRB ethical concerns the present mixed methods explanatory study encompassed a one-group pretest posttest design. To increase empirical reliability and validity, future studies may encompass a quantitative component inclusive of a two-groups approach for the quantitative phase of the research using primary data and a parametric procedure encompassing intervention conditions, and one or more quantitative predictor variables (covariates) representing sources of variance possibly influencing the dependent variable,

yet not controlled by intervention procedures (e.g., ANCOVA; Huitema, 2011; Leppink, 2018). Further, employing a grounded theory approach for the qualitative phase may further render valuable information concerning the training module's influence timeline on church leaders' increased knowledge possibly resulting in a more in-depth assessment of Triandis' TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM or a similar module.

Secondly, the sample used for the quantitative phase of the study was secondary data from a partner organization inclusive of 55 leaders of Afrocentric churches in a U.S. northeastern metropolitan area. The SEM training module could be tested further using leaders from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds to compare results, being that results from the present study reflected social factors (specifically norms, roles, and self-concept) as influential to church leaders' SE knowledge. Further research encompassing church leaders of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds may provide robust testing of additional influential factors, rendering useful information on the training modules' cultural competency.

Thirdly, previous research findings underscore the significance of people and people-related factors as critical to influencing knowledge processes within some organizations. A variety of factors may exist within religious organizations that may potentially influence SE knowledge. The present research encompassed examining some of such factors within a specific ethnic, cultural, and geographical setting, encompassing a limited number of denominational backgrounds. Since research on culturally based theoretical SE training modules within religious communities is scarce, many avenues may be open for future research about comparing the influence of modules such as the

SEM along with other factors that may potentially be influential to church leaders SE knowledge. Such factors may include (a) age, education, and working experience; (b) denominational beliefs; (c) leaders' personal cultural beliefs and practices; (d) leadership styles; (e) church affiliation beliefs and practices; and (f) church geographic, cultural, and political settings. Taking an in-depth look at such factors may reveal significant dynamics in influenced knowledge among leaders within religious entities and may assist in developing effective theory-based interventions (see Kim & Lee, 2012).

Further, the present study only encompassed testing the SEM training module's influence on church leaders' SE knowledge. Further research using a grounded theory approach may be useful for an in-depth look at how theory may be used to frame interventions that may influence SE knowledge and potentially bring change in helping behavior within religious organizations as well as other nonprofit, private, and public organizations (Flórez et al., 2020).

**Implications for the Religious and Non-Religious Sectors**

Religious organizations are seemingly pivotal grounds for interpersonal interactions, whereas religious leaders wield significant influence over congregations composed of parents/guardians, family members, young people, and stakeholders. However, church and some religious organizations are often neglected in collaborative efforts that may address a variety of social issues inclusive of youth SE. Some religious leaders are likely to encounter youth at risk of SE in several settings besides church (i.e., domestic violence or homeless shelters, child advocacy centers, group or foster homes, family counseling sessions, or medical settings). Such leaders have the potential to

provide critical support but may lack knowledge about youth SE or the proper training to respond to the possible traumas and challenges a youth at risk of SE may experience (see Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; White Smith, 2020). There is a need for some church leaders to learn about recognizing SE risk factors in vulnerable youth to aid in preventing youth SE involvement, particularly in Afrocentric communities (see Bounds et al., 2020; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019). Thus, greater resources and enhanced efforts toward training church leaders about the youth SE problem are essential to addressing the SE propagation amongst Afrocentric youth. Findings from my research study may be instrumental in generating such resources and in the development of empirically tested interventions to address such needs.

Additionally, church leaders, practitioners, and service providers may use results from this mixed methods study to develop, implement, and evaluate theory-based training modules to bring awareness and equip staff members, parishioners, and community members to deal with controversial issues such as youth SE. Moreover, such development, implementation and evaluation efforts may lead to collaboration between religious and non-religious nonprofits, public, and private organizations (see Barnert et al., 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2023; Krieger et al., 2022; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017).

**Contributions to Social and Behavioral Science**

Triandis TIB is a behavioral theory researchers and interventions developers have used to research individuals' behavior across various platforms and within different organizational settings (i.e., technology, behavioral science, health). Using the present

mixed methods program evaluation is the first attempt to address the use of Triandis' TIB as framework of a SE prevention training module developed for leaders of Afrocentric churches. Aligning the TIB as theoretical framework of the SEM module may contribute useful information to the theoretical baseline in the social sciences platform. Such contribution includes, (a) enabling moving beyond the individual focus seen in some social behavioral science theories and (b) giving leeway to evaluating the influence of a theory-based intervention on participants' knowledge within an Afrocentric church setting and possibly in other ethnic and cultural settings.

My research study is the first encompassing the exploration of such dynamics and rendered results that some social behavioral scientists may use to aid in comprehending, assessing, and evaluating specific groups of individuals' attitudes and behavior influenced by specific interventions and factors. Results may further aid theorists' decisions to target one or more ethnic, cultural, and/or organizational groups in future interventions; and promote research on the development and use of targeted theory-based interventions (such as the SEM) to address specific problems like youth SE.

**Implications to Leaders, Practitioners, and Policy Makers**

Additional approaches to preventing youth SE should be identified and evaluated. Approaches should be increased efforts to educate the public, particularly church leaders, congregants, parents, youth services professionals and young people who may be unaware of youth increasing vulnerability to SE involvement (see Krieger et al., 2022; Mathews, 2017; McDonnell & Idler, 2020). More efforts are required so that protection, prevention, and intervention efforts may be empirically informed and increasingly

successful (see Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Gerassi et al., 2017; Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). Moreover, influenced knowledge and the possible relationship of such influence with helping behavior may be useful to improving multi-sector and interagency collaboration and cooperation among entities in the development of prevention interventions and services tailored to cultural and organizational contexts. Sexual exploitation is a complex form of child abuse and a social problem that many sectors, disciplines and areas of practice should understand and address (Barnert et al., 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Kim et al., 2022; Krieger et al., 2022). The need for increased coordination and communication among multiple entities and those in a position to detect adolescents at risk, including nonprofit organizations, private human service organizations, and state and local entities remains (Gerassi et al., 2017; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Many scholars advocate for the formation of multidisciplinary teams. Such teams are comprised of social service agencies, school personnel, psychologists, law enforcement officials, juvenile officers, physicians, and immigration specialists to address the multifaceted nature of SE as a domestic and international issue (De Vries & Farrell, 2023; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Yakushko, 2009). However, churches are often neglected as part of team efforts to address many social problems. Results from this study may render information useful to initiating collaborative efforts between the church community and other entities. Churches are instrumental and influential in the social lives of people in communities and may be useful advocates in addressing some social issues such as youth SE (see Hounmenou & O'Grady, 2019; Moore et al., 2022).

**Local and Global Implications**

Additionally, results may assist in greater coordination and collaboration between governments, international and nongovernmental organizations. National, state, local, tribal, and territorial jurisdictions may develop laws and policies to redirect some resources toward awareness and prevention through culturally competent training and equipping (see Krieger et al., 2022). Importantly noteworthy is that while some professionals agree in providing services to youth who meet certain SE risk factors criteria, others argue that such services dehumanize some youth's vulnerable state and highlights proneness as potential victims (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Winters et al., 2022). As a result, no policy consensus has been achieved on how to handle this issue. Results from the present study may encourage looking at the youth SE problem from a multilevel perspective (inclusive of churches). Study findings may also contribute to the development of interventions requiring the exploration of a wide range of local and global socio-political circumstances leading to youths' abuse and neglect (e.g., poverty, inequality). Results may also contribute to policy reforms to better safeguard some youth. Collaboration at such levels would require contributions from various sectors including religious national and international organizations. Findings from my research study may also be useful for the development and implementation of such collaborative culturally competent theory-based intervention efforts specifically dealing with issues related to sex violence against youth. With proper collaboration, development, implementation and quality controls in place, future studies based on findings in the present study may be beneficial to participants and future multidisciplinary research

efforts in regions where youth SE is increasingly affecting community development locally and globally.

## Future Exploration

Finally, findings in the present study are useful for future exploration of theory-based training webinars within the religious and non-religious nonprofit, public, and private sectors to address youth SE and other issues encompassing some violence against youth. In recent years, webinars have gained increased attention for training and program development objectives, primarily because webinars enable a synchronized online environment that learners can access from anywhere with internet availability (see Gergenfurtner & Ebner, 2019; Gergenfurtner et al., 2020; McKinney, 2017). Future studies on evidence-based webinar delivery recommendations are critical to increasing digital training programs' effectiveness. Webinars are tools that program developers and trainers may use in conjunction with in-person training modules to bring awareness and prevention involvement. Such use could result in hybrid or blended learning training models to supplement in-person presentations.

## Conclusion

Although SE is a problem that continues to gain increasing attention, there remains a need for awareness and preventive measures to address the SE problem prior to youth involvement (see Barnert et al., 2017; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2023; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Families in Afrocentric communities regularly come to churches in search of spiritual and other personal support and services. Many church leaders and congregants may fail to identify some youth as

vulnerable to SE due to a lack of awareness and knowledge As a result, many youths remain exposed to a possible threat that could negatively affect their life development and subsequently bring challenges into families and communities (see Chisolm-Straker et al., 2019). Hence, for church leaders to receive effective training that will equip and provide them with youth SE prevention and awareness resources is pivotal. Developing culturally competent theory-based intervention for leaders of Afrocentric churches is significant to creating a pathway to awareness and prevention within the Afrocentric community where youth SE involvement is increasingly prominent and prevalent.

The present study integrated quantitative survey data and qualitative focus group data in a sequential mixed method study to evaluate a 90-minute training module developed using Triandis TIB as theoretical framework. Results reflected that the SEM module had some influence in church leaders' SE knowledge and such influence rendered data that aligned Traindis' TIB as theoretical framework of the model. Based on such results one may argue that any change in knowledge could potentially (a) lead to helping a young person at risk, (b) create pathways for future research, (c) help fill the gap concerning SE preventive interventions research within the Afrocentric religious community, and (d) help fill the gap in research concerning theory-based culturally competent interventions in the nonprofit religious sector. Moreover, results from this study highlights the need for more studies of this nature to help aid in the development of more interventions to address promoting the prevention of youth involvement in a social issue that negatively affects the lives of youth once involved. "Prevention is better than rehabilitation" is the needed modus operandi amongst organizations to address the youth

SE. This study findings may help leaders and practitioners in nonprofits, private, and public organizations design, develop, and implement theory-based culturally competent interventions to address youth SE, an increasingly social problem affecting youth development in local and global communities.

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# Appendix A: Focus Group Preliminary Invite

You are invited to take part in a research study about youth sexual exploitation prevention.

The researcher is inviting leaders of Afrocentric churches who participated in the Conference 2020 - SEM module to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named (NAME), who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher, but this study is separate from that role and is not connected to (THE PARTNER ORGANIZATION). The focus group will take place on (DATE) – (TIME), at (Location).

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore participants' views and experiences about the SEM module to determine any increase in knowledge concerning recognizing SE risk factors in vulnerable youth and asses the theoretical framework of the module.

**Procedures:**

This study involves the following steps:

Participate in a focus group composed of 6-12 participants (60-90 minutes)

Engage in a audio recorded group interview, in a group setting; facilitated by a m oderator (the researcher)

Discuss your experience participating in the SEM and its influence on your knowledge about youth sexual exploitation.

**Here are some sample questions:**

1. What are your thoughts and associations that first come to mind when you think about youth vulnerability to SE?
2. As it relates to your knowledge about youth SE and the significance of recognizing risk factors in vulnerable youth, how do you perceive yourself addressing youth SE before participating in the LUE2020 Conference?
3. How do you perceive yourself after participating in the LUE2020?
4. Suppose you could make one change to make the program better, what would that change be?
5. What three things may impact how you become involved in youth SE prevention?
6. How does addressing youth at risk of SE fit in your role as a leader?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So, everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. You will be treated the same by the researcher whether or not you join the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The researcher seeks six to 12 volunteers for this study.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study could involve some risk of minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as the possibility of other participants repeating what is

said in this meeting and the possibility of data being linked to participants. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by increasing prevention efforts among Afrocentric churches concerning sexual crimes against some youth (e.g., sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, sexual abuse, domestic violence) and assist in incorporating behavioral theories as part of prevention program development.

**Payment:**

You will receive no compensation for participating in this research study.

**Privacy:**

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. The researcher will not disclose participants' names when reporting research results. The researcher is only allowed to share your identity or contact info as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect your privacy) or with authorities if court-ordered (very rare). The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the researcher is required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by password protection, lock and

key, and the use of codes in place of names. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You can ask questions of the researcher or by phone at. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the rese archer or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your c onsent by replying to this email with the words, "I consent".

Again, Thank you for your participation.

Ph.D. Student

Appendix B: Focus Group Participants' Acceptance Email

Dear Participant,

Thank you for accepting to be a part of a 60–90-minute zoom focus group discussion with 6-12 participants from the Leaders Uncovering Exploitation.

The focus group will be held on (**Date).** Please confirm your participation by replying to this email. After confirming your participation, you will receive a link to a consent form to be filled out and submitted electronically prior to participating in the focus group; you will further, receive instructions to connect to the focus group.

**As a reminder, participating in the focus group is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the participants' pool and the study at any time. Feel free to reply with any questions.**

Once again, thank you for being a part of this research study.

Kindly,

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

**1. Welcome and Introductions:**

*Script: "Good Afternoon and welcome to this focus group session. My name is (NAME) and I will be facilitating this session today. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to be here today."*

**2. Overview of the Topic**

- Your input is needed for…
- Results will be used for…
- You were selected because….

Script: *"The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you about the SEM youth sexual exploitation prevention module. I will use such information to assess the module's influence on your SE knowledge and suggested theoretical framework. You were invited because you are a leader in an Afrocentric church and you participated in the SEM training. This session will be approximately 90 minutes, with two breaks (5-10 minutes). Restrooms are located…."*.

**3. Guidelines**

- Establish the facilitator's role.
- The moderator will be asking open-ended questions…
- Inform that session will be audio recorded and note swill be taken
- Encourage in-depth discussion…
- No right or wrong answers…
- Encourage participants to interact with each other, not only with the facilitator.

- Determine how participants will address each other (e.g., first name, etc.).
- Establish parameters of respect even when there are disagreeing opinions.
- Clarify focus group expectations
- Instruct participants to refrain from taking information discussed during the forum outside the meeting session

Script: "*In a few moments, I am going to ask you some open-ended questions (explain open-ended meaning). Please exchange information you are comfortable sharing with the group. This session is not intended to bring resolution to an issue or resolve a problem, but to enable discussion among you based on the questions I ask. Feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. If you want to follow up, agree, disagree, or give an example on something that someone said, feel free to do so. Keep in mind that I am just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times negative comments are helpful. Have a conversation with one another about these questions; you do not have to respond to me all the times. Please respect each other's ideas, by avoiding comments on, offering advice, or making judgments about what someone else said. As the facilitator, I am here to facilitate your interaction on the questions and to make sure everyone has an opportunity to share. So if you are talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance to speak; and if you aren't saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure that I hear from all of you.*

*"I will be recording this session and taking notes, because I do not want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in discussions such as this one and I*

*am unable to write fast enough to notate all. I ask that no one other than me record this session. Confidentiality is paramount; therefore, this focus group will be on first name basis today and I will not use names in my report. Be assured that I will keep your responses confidential; however, there is a risk that someone may share what is said in this room being that is a group setting. I ask that you don't. Please refrain from sharing the identity or anything participants say, outside of this meeting. Keep this discussion "in this room." Make sure your cell phones are off or on vibrate and put them away. If you need to answer a call, do it discretely by stepping out of the room and try to be back as soon as possible. You may take a break if necessary, or help yourself to food or drink (if provided). If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting or need to leave, you may do so at anytime. There are no consequences for leaving; your participation is voluntary."*

*"Before I begin, I have placed name cards in front of you to help remember names. Remember only first names. Are there any questions or concerns? If there are no other questions or concerns, I will begin."*

*"Let's begin by learning something about each other (icebreaker)"*

**5. Turn on Recorder**

**6. Start Asking Questions**

- One question at a time
- Use judgment to move on to next question
- Watch time

**7. Questions**

- **Introductory/Engagement questions**

  **Q1.** Today the topic is youth sexual exploitation (SE) prevention and the Compass Empowerment Training-Sexual Exploitation Model (SEM). When did you last attend a youth SE prevention training?

  **Q2.** Share an aspect of your work or life experience that brought you here today.

  **Q3.** What were your thoughts on youth SE prior to participating in the SEM

- **Exploration questions & Follow-up questions** (*e.g., what do you mean when you say "X"? - Can you give a few examples? - Can you say anything else about that? - Can you build on the point [Name] just made?)*

  **Q4.** What are your thoughts and associations that first come to mind when you think about youth vulnerability to SE?

  **Q5**. As it relates to youth SE knowledge and the significance of recognizing risk factors in vulnerable youth, how do you perceive yourself as a church leader addressing the issue before participating in the SEM? Follow up question, how do you perceive yourself after participating in the SEM?

  **Q6.** Suppose you could make one change to make the program better, what would that change be?

  **Q7.** What three things may impact how you become involved in youth SE prevention

  **Q8.** How does addressing youth at risk of SE fit in your role as leaders?

**Ending Questions**

**Q9.** Is there anything else you would like to say about the SEM

**Q10.** Of all the things discussed, what would you say is most important?

**Q11.** Is there anything the group may have missed discussing?

**8. Conclusion**

Script: "*This concludes this focus group. Thank you for coming and participating."*