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Sex Trafficking: Saudi Arabian Women's Perspectives

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Jennifer O. Rowland

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Sex Trafficking: Saudi Arabian Women's Perspectives

by

Jennifer O. Rowland

MA, Northern Arizona University, 2004

BS, Arizona State University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November, 2023

Abstract

Sex trafficking is a global epidemic that affects millions of women and children from all different cultures and backgrounds. Numerous studies show that the prevalence and complexity of this of modern-day slavery is increasing, which presents unique challenges with respect to tracking and monitoring across countries and governments. These challenges are exacerbated by each culture and country presenting their own characteristics of acquisition, movement, and exploitation. This global epidemic will not cease until there is an understanding of sex trafficking in all cultures and countries. Many countries still have little to no research on the topic, including Saudi Arabia. This study aimed to understand perceptions of sex trafficking among Saudi Arabian women including their thoughts on prevalence within the Kingdom. The purpose of this study was to begin to build the research literature around Saudi Arabia and sex trafficking. This study utilized a qualitative research design with a semi structured interview approach. The underlying theory for this study was radical feminist theory. The results of this study contributes to social change by shedding light on perceptions of woman in Saudi Arabia in order to design comprehensive social education programs throughout the Kingdom.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. My husband, Scott, who is my biggest supporter and did whatever necessary to allow me the space to succeed. Without his support, this dissertation would never have been finished. I also dedicate this dissertation to my six children. I wanted to show my daughters that it is essential for women to be educated and to show my sons it is crucial to be around women who are making a difference in the world. So here is to “Team Burch” for making me a better human.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Sex trafficking is the third most profitable business in the world after illegal weapons and drugs, reportedly bringing in over \$100 billion dollars a year (Crawford, 2017, Emmanuel et al., 2022, Malarek, 2011). The statistics are unreliable and inconsistent due to the dynamic of this profession (Emmanuel et al., 2022). Most people in society have no idea these women exist or what has caused women and children to end up as victims of sex trafficking (Kara, 2017). Victims of sex trafficking are usually hidden away in brothels, locked apartments, massage parlors, and bars (Baird & Connolly, 2021, Malarek, 2011). To the people who know them, namely their pimps and clients, they are just a business transaction making their pimp very wealthy (Malarek, 2011). It is reported that there are over a million women and children trafficked across international borders each year, making no country immune to this issue (Malarek, 2011).

Historically, sex trafficking has been an ongoing issue, but the numbers are on the rise (Malarek, 2011). It is reported that the industry of sex trafficking involves 40–42 million people (Emmanuel et al., 2022). Sex trafficking brutalizes women and children and causes significant health issues to its victims (Ruiz, 2022), both physically and emotionally. Victims are often raped, tortured, exposed to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, subject to violence by both pimps and clients, and face horrific working conditions, that include lack of nutrition, and a very high risk of being addicted to drugs and alcohol (Malarek, 2011). Sex trafficked women are also 60–100 times more likely to be killed than women not involved in sex trafficking (Emmanuel et al., 2022).

No country is immune to sex trafficking. Governments may want people to believe sex trafficking is under control, but it is paramount that society has a clear understanding of what sex trafficking is and how different cultures feed perceptions and the system (Emmanuel et al., 2022). Kara (2017), in an older but thorough on sex trafficking, explained that if one were to compare sex trafficking to a disease that is infecting all of civilization, one would need to understand its molecular anatomy to eradicate the disease. Understanding the anatomy of sex trafficking allows people to have a broad knowledge of the vulnerable points and dismantle the system. The molecular anatomy of sex trafficking is acquisition, movement, and exploitation (Kara, 2017). Without this understanding, sex trafficking will continue to exist. Although this epidemic is a global problem, sex trafficking does not look the same in all countries (Crawford, 2017).

Few studies and literature exist investigating sex trafficking that occurs in Saudi Arabia. Although government officials in Saudi Arabia have taken extra steps in the last few years to protect women who find themselves in sex trafficking situations, they are considered a Tier 2 country. The Tier 2 designation implies that Saudi Arabia does not fully meet the minimum standards set forth by the U.S. government in eliminating sex trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Despite the Tier 2 country designation, government officials in Saudi Arabia have made notable improvements since the last reporting period. These improvements consist of increases of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions across the Kingdom (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Additionally, more resources are available to victims, such as

interagency referrals, interpreters, and legal services (U.S. Department of State, 2021). These enhancements led to the launch of Saudi Arabia's first victim database and the country's first national campaign for sex trafficking awareness across the Kingdom (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Although there have been many improvements in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the government does not adhere to all Tier 1 guidelines. For example, the government continues to use fines, jail time or deportation for victims of sex trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Officials often misclassify trafficking crimes as labor law violations and generally fail to refer the cases to investigation (U.S. Department of State, 2021). For Saudi Arabia to be classified as a Tier 1 country, many more improvements need to happen. These include, but are not limited to, screening immigrants for potential sex trafficking when they are arrested for other violations, ensuring border guards and local police are adequately trained to identify victims, amending sex trafficking laws to ensure perpetrators receive prison time instead of only fines and pursuing prosecution of any officials who are complicit to sex trafficking crimes (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Background

A decade ago, sex trafficking was not talked about as much as it is today, but now the international community is looking at this epidemic of great proportion with not a lot of change made (Malarek, 2011). Sex trafficking is not a new concept, but the rise and speed of victims are flourishing at an alarming rate (Crawford, 2017). Root causes of sex trafficking include poverty, vulnerable genders, war-torn countries, lawlessness,

instability within a country, economic breakdown, but mostly patriarchal societies and gender inequality (Crawford, 2017). The United Nations (U.N.) Protocol identifies many reasons people are trafficked including forced labor, sexual exploitation, and organ harvesting (Crawford, 2017). Although most times victims are moved, movement is not a requirement for it to be considered trafficking (Crawford, 2017). Many victims are born into servitude, and that is considered trafficking. Most victims follow a three-step process of acquisition, movement, and exploitation that has created a sex trafficking industry (Kara, 2017).

Acquisition

To understand how sex slaves become slaves, it is important to understand the physical and emotional part of the actual acquisition of slaves and why some slaves agree to go with a trafficker. Acquisition of victims include deceit, sale by family, abduction, seduction or romance, and recruitment by other enslaved people (Kara, 2017). Deceit includes the offer of a job that does not exist, travel to another country for a false job, false marriage offers, or any other income-generating offer to acquire a slave (Kara, 2017). One of the most lucrative sources of deceiving women into becoming sex slave victims is recruitment in refugee camps (Kara, 2017). Sale by family is another source of female sex trafficking. Conditions of desperation, severe poverty, and displacement lead desperate families to sell their children into sex slavery (Kara, 2017). Many families receive money every month from the pimp for selling their daughter. Although not common, abduction does occur to acquire sex slaves (Kara, 2017). Abduction is more difficult because the woman will try to escape since they did not agree to the terms of

transport, whereas a woman who has agreed to a false marriage proposal or a job that is too good to be true is less likely to escape because she agreed to the transport. Another effective way to lure women into the sex trade is through promises of love (Kara, 2017). “*Loverboys*” are agents who look for vulnerable and attractive young girls and offer them their love with expensive gifts, promises of a better future, and their undying love (Kara, 2017). They transport the women to a rich country using illegal paperwork and having a friend meet them in their new country. The “*loverboy*” promises to meet them soon but never shows up. By the time the young women realize what has happened, they cannot escape (Kara, 2017). Recruitment of new slaves by former slaves is another tactic (Kara, 2017). To understand this concept, it is important to understand the psychology of sexual enslavement. Former slaves feel this is the best they deserve after years of being enslaved, are often addicted to drugs and alcohol, and become allies with their slave owners to recruit other women or young girls (Kara, 2017). These women appear in their home villages wearing the most expensive clothes and accessories, are given a great deal of money, and are given a commission for the young girls they return with (Kara, 2017).

Movement

Movement for sex slaves in international sex trafficking occurs from their home countries to a destination country. The same pattern of movement occurs for slaves who are being moved within the same country: origin, transit, and destination (Kara, 2017). The purpose of movement is not only to bring the slaves to already existing sex business but to also break the slaves’ spirit. It is easier to control a slave if they accept the new life they have been brought into. Slaves who have been mentally beaten down are less likely

to try to escape once they reach their final destination (Kara, 2017). Kara (2017) observed in his travels and research that a two-step process was often used to break the spirit of the slave. Traffickers would move the victim from the rural village to a bigger city in the same country. Once the slave owner felt that she had been broken and would cooperate, the women would then be moved internationally without knowledge of where they are going, the language, or the law. Women are moved by car, train, bus, airplane, boats, ferries, and even rafts (Kara, 2017). Bribes are paid to border patrol, false paperwork including passports are made, and many of the women during transport are drugged with opiates (Kara, 2017).

Exploitation

Exploitation is a common theme throughout the entire process of movement (Kara, 2017). Slaves are tortured, raped, starved, drugged, and humiliated during transportation and once at arrival (Kara, 2017). Disobedient slaves are also murdered in front of other slaves to ensure the slaves stay in line and do not try to escape (Kara, 2017). Most women in sex slavery are in one of six types of venue: brothels, massage parlors, clubs, hotels, apartments, and street walking (Kara, 2017). Women rarely try to escape because they do not typically know the language of their destination country, have no paperwork or passport, and are often told their families back home will be harmed if they are disobedient (Kara, 2017). Additionally, police are not a reliable source of support because they are often customers or they have been paid off (Kara, 2017).

Fate of Sex Slaves

Laws in most countries for offenses such as homicide, torture, and rape carry more punishment than sex trafficking, making the outcome for women in sex trafficking grim (Kara, 2017). Most women end up with sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, or suffer from drug and alcohol addiction (Kara, 2017). As a result, the majority have been shunned by their communities and families and have no way to take care of themselves due to lack of skills and education (Kara, 2017). This explains why victims generally do not survive past their 30s (Kara, 2017). Cultural values also play a pivotal role in trafficking. For example, a strong sense of obligation to parents keeps slaves in the business because they send money back to their parents. Most women who do escape end up back in sex trafficking because they cannot survive on their own (Kara, 2017).

Problem Statement

Sex trafficking is a global issue that appears to be growing uncontrollably. There are ample research studies available regarding sex trafficking but few agree on the prevalence of sex trafficking throughout the world (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Prevalence is key in understanding the scope and size of the problem (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Antitrafficking advocates, researchers, and organizations have made understanding prevalence the top priority within the field (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Despite such calls, there is still not a reasonable understanding of the amplitude of this global epidemic (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022).

In Saudi Arabia, where there is no known research about sex trafficking, it is imperative to understand what is actually occurring. Although sex trafficking can have

similar characteristics across different countries, each country will have their own way of committing these crimes (Emmanuel et al., 2022). There is a need to clearly understand the driving force of the supply and demand market that is enslaving millions of women and children throughout the world (Kara, 2017). In order to start to tackle this salient problem, there is a great need to understand Saudi Arabia's patterns regarding acquisition, movement, and exploitation.

The first step to gain information about prevalence is to understand the country's perceptions of sex trafficking. Do the citizens of Saudi Arabia know what sex trafficking is? Would they be able to identify sex trafficking if one were to witness it? If a woman finds herself in a sex trafficking situation would she be able to report it? If the answers are "no" to these questions, then understanding prevalence is not achievable. Sex trafficking cannot be eradicated if prevalence is unknown due to needing to understand the scope and size of the problem (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022).

Since women tend to be the victims of sex trafficking throughout the world, one can assume it would be the same in Saudi Arabia. Understanding the voices of women who live in Saudi Arabia is paramount to understanding perceptions of sex trafficking within the Kingdom. The perceptions of these women will be the foundation of what steps need to be taken in Saudi Arabia to help eradicate sex trafficking.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines perceptions of sex trafficking among Saudi Arabian women, including their thoughts on prevalence within the Kingdom. Understanding perceptions is essential when trying to eradicate sex trafficking, which is the ultimate goal. One must

understand the anatomy of the dysfunction to eradicate the epidemic that affects the entire globe (Kara, 2006). Furthermore, a deeper understanding will provide insight into how sex trafficking operates and functions within a patriarchal culture. Once vulnerabilities are exposed and there is a clear understanding of the operational structure within the Kingdom, then the government can begin to dismantle this epidemic.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do Saudi Arabian women perceive sex trafficking?

RQ 2: How do Saudi Arabian women perceive the occurrence of sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia?

Conceptual Framework

This study used radical feminist theory as its conceptual framework. Radical feminist theory focuses on structures of inequality opposed to individual agency (Grosser & Tyler, 2022). Radical feminist theory was significant for this study because it offered not only a critique of gender hierarchy, but also social formations of male dominance (Grosser & Tyler, 2022). Radical feminist theory allows for opposition of the patriarchy/male dominance as well as conceiving a new system in which women are better off (Grosser & Tyler, 2022).

Several tenets that are identified in radical feminist theory are male dominance, male supremacy, the central organizing system of society in male patriarchy, that women are in an oppressed class, and that sexuality is fundamental to a women's submission (Grosser & Tyler, 2022). As Crawford (2017) suggested, the root cause of sex trafficking is gender inequality. This research involved interviewing women outside the influence of

patriarchal structures in a safe place where they could speak freely, openly, and honestly (Grosser & Tyler, 2022).

Another theory that could possibly explain why it is relatively easy to commit the crime of sex trafficking, and why the world struggles to get this crime under control, is displacement theory (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Displacement theory is used by law enforcement to help develop strategies for criminal investigation (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Displacement theory helps investigators understand how sex traffickers get away with their crimes. There are five displacements this theory holds for sex trafficking (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). First, the sex trafficker will always change their location patterns using different cities and different countries as soon as the coercion has been committed (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Secondly, the trafficker will always change cities to get victims in case rumors are spreading in the town of what is happening (Kara, 2017). Third, traffickers are continually changing their tactics to secure victims. One week the trafficker is advertising for models and the next he is advertising for nannies. Fourth, the trafficker will change his targets even if that means changing countries, and lastly, the trafficker will aim to stay unpredictable so he cannot be traced (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). With all this unpredictability, it is easy for a sex trafficker to remain undetected in countries that are actually trying to stop sex trafficking. In countries of mass corruption, the sex trafficker can often operate with impunity (Kara, 2017).

Nature of the Study

To address the research questions, a qualitative study was used to conduct face-to-face interviews as a mechanism for participants to describe their lived experience within

the population being studied. The first research question focused on the lived experiences of female Saudi Arabians and their perceptions about sex trafficking. Additionally, a second research question addressed the perception of female Saudi Arabians with respect to sex trafficking occurring in the Kingdom. Semistructured interviews with female Saudi Arabians was the primary framework I used to ask questions and collect data in the study. Mwita (2022) indicated that small sample sizes are adequate for qualitative studies for saturation; more participants can be added, if one feels that saturation has not been met. I aimed to interview eight to 10 participants for this research, but flexibility was used if saturation had not been met (Mwita, 2022).

Definitions

Sex trafficking: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means or threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, or of a position, of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor services, slavery, or practices like slavery, servitude, or the removal or organs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

Patriarchal societies: A social system in which power is held by men, through cultural norms and customs that favor men and withhold opportunity for women (Malik, 2019).

Sex slavery: Slavery for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual slavery may involve single-owner sexual slavery or forced prostitution (Trafficking in America Task Force (n.d.)).

Slave work operators: Individuals who deceive, use force, and coerce girls and women to do sexual activities, and constrain their livelihood for their benefit (Huda et al., 2022).

Assumptions

Assumptions are a common challenge in qualitative studies. In this study, I assumed that the Saudi Arabian women I interviewed were honest in their answers. It was also assumed that the participation in the study was of free will and without fear of consequences to their current standing in their communities, families, and place of employment.

Scope and Delimitations

The participants in this study were required to be female, a Saudi Arabian national, between the ages of 18 and 50 years old, and English speaking. The reason for the English requirement was due to confidentiality. The topic of sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia is a taboo and would be more difficult to recruit participants if there was another person in the interview translating. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the risk was limited for prospective participants by recruiting those who speak English. The reason for the age restrictions was due to cultural differences. Local Saudi women encouraged me not to engage older Saudi females because they felt Saudi Arabian women who are over

the age of 50 years old would have found it difficult to trust an outsider asking questions that is considered a taboo topic in the Saudi culture.

Limitations

There were several possible limitations in conducting this study. The most critical limit was not being able to outwardly recruit participants due to the sensitive nature of the research and the country being studied. Talking openly about sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia, and perhaps being negative about the country, was risky. As a result, recruitment was by word of mouth only since there was no traceable documentation used in this study to protect the participant and researcher. Secondly, the women who were willing to participate in the study were educated women who most likely would have been educated in the Western culture, where there is more exposure to the topic of sex trafficking. Since one of the requirements was that the women who participated must speak English, this narrowed the population that could be used to highly educated women. Therefore, results of this study will not be generalized to the entire population of women in Saudi Arabia.

Several study challenges are worth noting, primarily associated with limited access to the Kingdom and cultural norms. First, the replication of findings is limited due to researchers' inconsistent access to Saudi Arabia and the Saudi female study population. A second challenge was female interviewees not being honest or forthcoming with their answers due to the sensitivity of the topic. Cultural expectations and norms dictate that Saudi females should "conform" and not necessarily express or share emotions, especially with non-family members. Finally, there is no baseline to compare this study's results as the research is limited to sex trafficking in Middle Eastern cultures.

The Saudi Arabian government does not publish any data about sex trafficking in the Kingdom. Furthermore, if data were published, prevalence is often underreported and inconsistent given societal norms.

Significance

The significance of this study is paramount. While numerous sex trafficking research studies exist in Asian countries, there is virtually no sex trafficking literature that examines the perceptions of women in Saudi Arabia. This is significant to increase the understanding of perceptions of Saudi Arabian women on sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia and ultimately advocate for positive change. The significance of this study was to increase the understanding of perceptions of Saudi Arabian women on sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia.

Summary

To create a society that denounces sex trafficking and holds perpetrators accountable, citizens must first understand what sex trafficking is and its negative impact on victims, victims' families, and the larger society (perception). The understanding of sex trafficking perceptions is virtually nonexistent in Saudi Arabia. More research will significantly contribute to a greater understanding of sex trafficking among Saudi Nationals. Gathering data on sex trafficking perceptions also provides a foundation for understanding the problem through the lens of Saudi females and provides a general framework for further research. The female perspective is essential because females are the victims in patriarchal societies. While sex trafficking is getting widely noticed by countries around the world through media, agencies, and governments, victim numbers

are still increasing at a concerning rate. This patriarchal design that fuels the sex trafficking epidemic and creates insurmountable challenges for helpless, unsupported victims must be stopped.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the last decade, the brutality of sex trafficking has become increasingly evident (Malark, 2011). This epidemic affects people in all countries and is so large scale that its challenges seem insurmountable. Despite numerous laws created in the international community, human rights advocates highlighting the truth of this human disgrace, government leaders vowing to stop this enslavement, and academic research on the root causes of sex trafficking, very little progress has been made to improve this situation (Malarek, 2011). This literature review will examine scholarly research on the history of sex trafficking throughout the world, the U.N.'s response to the epidemic, and the patriarchal societies that propel the business of sex trafficking.

Literature Strategy

To develop a structure for this research study, peer-reviewed academic studies, and books of people's firsthand experiences as a victim or an investigative journalist were analyzed through the lens of sex trafficking trends and root causes, patriarchal societies, religion in patriarchal societies, and current laws about sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia. The scholarly literature research process involves searches using academic databases including the Walden University online library. Other searches were completed using SAGE, EBSCO, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The following subject-based specific inquiries included:

- sex trafficking
- sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia
- sex trafficking in the East

- sex trafficking and root causes
- sex trafficking and purity culture
- sex trafficking and Muslim culture
- female expectations and Saudi Arabia culture
- patriarchal societies and expectations of women or girls

The literature reviewed for this study ranged in publication dates from 2009 to 2023. The oldest work included in this literature review was that of Kara, which has provided the most in-depth description of sex trafficking by country, and there is no information like his in academic articles. This was particularly helpful in writing the literature review because the information from Kara provided a vast outlook from every continent. The scholarly research was organized using the Zotero citation management software. Microsoft Word was used to keep literature matrices. The literature was analyzed by my own manual coding and the qualitative software NVivo.

Conceptual Framework

Radical feminism defies a structure that most have lived by for thousands of years that says if women do not play by the rules, then they are not real women at all (Bowen, 2021). The basis for radical feminism is that being a woman is a tool of oppression not liberation (Beegan & Morgan, 2016). Radical feminism is not only about sexism but also racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ablism and any other act that includes women (Bowen, 2021). Additionally, radical feminists advocate for fundamental change of the social structure that currently exists around the world (Bowen, 2021). Furthermore, they

believe that any kind of sex work is a violation to human rights. This includes sex work that is through free will or through exploitation (Stabile, 2020).

Sex trafficking victims are 98% women and girls (Beegan & Morgan, 2017) and its origins have been compared to modern-day slavery in the literature (Stabile, 2020). As evidence, women are often sold and exploited to meet the demands of male buyers (Beegan & Morgan, 2017). Radical feminism posits that sex trafficking and slavery is a subordination of women by men that is fueled by legalized prostitution (Stabile, 2020). Overall, radical feminism plays a critical role in solving the problem as its paradigm is the most influential in creating laws against sex trafficking throughout the world (Stabile, 2020).

In addition to radical feminism, displacement theory offers an explanation of why sex trafficking is a hidden crime and hard to find (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Displacement theory is often used to explain criminal behavior and how criminals evade the law (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Displacement theory often helps investigators and law enforcement to develop new strategies for criminal investigation (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021).

There are five displacements that this theory holds to explain the crime of sex trafficking (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). First, the criminal (in this case the trafficker) will change locations right after the crime has been committed. In the case of sex trafficking, the trafficker will coerce the victim to follow him and then change locations, many times changing countries in the process. Second, the trafficker will change the time and place where the victim is “picked up.” A trafficker will move cities to get more victims in case rumors have spread about what is happening in the current city. Third, the trafficker will

change their tactics on how they secure the victim. Some victims may be coerced into a “modeling contract” but the next victim will be offered a “nanny job for a wealthy family”. Fourth, the trafficker may change his targets. One week he may be looking for Russian slaves but the next week his target is Moldova (Kara, 2014). Lastly, the trafficker creates unpredictability so he cannot be traced (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021).

What is Sex Trafficking?

Sex trafficking can be defined as “the process of acquiring, recruiting, harboring, receiving, or transporting an individual, through any means and for any distance, into a condition of slavery or slave-like exploitation” (Kara, 2017, p. 5)”. Crimes committed against sex trafficking victims include slave trading and slavery (Kara, 2017). Sex trafficking follows three defined steps: acquisition, movement, and exploitation (Kara, 2017). Sex trafficking is a crime against humanity (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). It is the perfect crime because the victims are hidden, and the profits are enormous and continuous (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Human commodities are renewable (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Slaves can be sold and purchased repeatedly bringing in a huge profit for the slave owner (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). Most slave owners own many women/children at once, selling their bodies up to 20 times daily and rendering huge profits (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021).

Contributing Factors

There are many contributing factors that put women and children at risk for sex trafficking. The main factor that enables sex trafficking to continue worldwide is the value of women in society (Franchino-Olsen, 2019). Societies that embrace the

perspective that young girls and women are sex objects is the leading indicator of sex trafficking prevalence (Franchino-Olsen, 2019). Additionally, countries that tolerate abuse and exploitation of women experience higher rates of sex trafficking victims than countries with more stringent laws in place to condone this negative behavior (Franchino-Olsen, 2019). In societies “tolerant” of abuse and exploitation, women are put in a lower societal class because of oversexualization, whereas men are elevated and glorified as a “pimp” because they are seen as aspirational and business owners (Franchino-Olsen, 2019).

Poverty is another main factor for women who find themselves victims of sex trafficking (Franchino-Olsen, 2019). According to Moteski and Mofokeng(2022), some women feel they need to leave their home countries to find legitimate and well-paying jobs to support their families because of living impoverished communities where work is unattainable (Moteski & Mofokeng, 2022). Women who are desperate to support their families can fall prey to illegitimate job requests and find themselves in sex trafficking. A women may think she is moving to Saudi Arabia to be a housemaid and nanny but when she arrives quickly finds herself being pimped out for sex by her sponsor.

Patriarchal Societies

Patriarchal societies are specifically created to meet the material, psychological, and social needs of heterosexual men (Links, 2018). Patriarchal societies focus on nuclear families as the “perfect family”, heterosexual parents, father as the head of household, and biological offspring (Links, 2018). These male-dominated societies are built with societal norms such as women being second class citizens and over sexualized

(Franchino-Olsen, 2019). Patriarchal societies feed the sex trafficking industry, with men creating and sustaining an unequal power balance by aiding the trafficking of women across the globe (Beegan & Morgan, 2017).

In many patriarchal societies, there is pressure put on women to be the “good dutiful daughter” or the “self-sacrificing mother” (Hamid, 2022). Women are taught from an early age about women’s role and male privilege (Hamid, 2022). It is enforced in patriarchal societies that men are the superior sex and women must prioritize the men’s and family’s needs over her own (Hamid, 2022). A woman may find herself in a vulnerable sex trafficking situation because of the traditions of her patriarchal society (Hamid, 2022). Women in these societies are held against strict moral code but are also expected to provide for their families (Hamad, 2022). This situation often leads women to migrate to other countries looking for work and finding themselves in sex trafficking (Hamid, 2022). These women are easily exploitable because no one is accounting for them, and the women can send money back home and uphold the cultural expectations of the patriarchy (Hamid, 2022).

Purity Culture

Research indicates that purity culture can be a way to normalize sexual violence against women, deprive women of their autonomy, and participate in victim blaming when a woman is assaulted (Owens et al., 2021). Purity culture is defined as a system where gender expectations are stereotypically assigned with gender. Men are considered “masculine”, leaders of the household, church, and to some extent society (Owens et al., 2021). Women are there to support the men in their life, to be pretty and feminine and

their major roles are to be sweet wives and loving mothers (Owens et al., 2021). Sexual expectations vary by gender and many times double standards come into play (Klement et al., 2022). In purity culture, men and women are taught that men's minds are evil, and that women's bodies are evil (Owens et al., 2021).

Purity culture places the responsibility on women for both the thoughts and actions of men and women regarding sex (Owens et al., 2021). If a man decides to act on a sexual thought, the woman is perceived as responsible for causing the action because of her appearance or attire, or the way she walked, giggled, or said something. Men take little or no responsibility for their actions in such a culture (Owens et al., 2021). In purity culture, if a woman is raped, the woman, although a victim, is thought to bear some responsibility. The bottom line of purity culture is that women carry more value if they are "pure," and the people assigning that value are men (Owens et al., 2021).

The six values of purity culture include (a) woman saving themselves for marriage (virginity is idealized in a purity culture), (b) women needing to be modest at all times, (c) women not being able to show physical affection before marriage, (d) women being considered the sexual gate keepers in the relationship because men have higher sex drives, (e) denial of female autonomy, and (f) women's lack of education about sex and consent (Klement et al., 2022, Owen et al., 2020). There is evidence that connects purity culture with rape culture. People who tend to value purity culture tend to believe myths about rape culture (Klement et al., 2022). People who do not believe victims of rape and feel that women bring it on themselves share similar ideas about sex trafficking (Kara, 2017).

Rape Culture

Burt (1980) created the term “rape culture” to explain the rapid number of sexual assaults happening in the United States. He defined rape culture as people who believe in rape myths and have prejudicial, stereotypes, and false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists (Owens et al., 2021). Some myths around rape culture include that only “bad girls” get raped, that a rapist cannot help it because his sex drive is higher than females, or that women bring rape upon themselves by what they wear or how they act (Klement et al., 2022, Owens et al., 2021). In 1994, Lonsway and Fitzgerald added to the definition of rape myths to be “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false, but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Edwards et al. (2011) found that rape myths are created by patriarchal systems. Acts of sexual violence are supported through rape culture, which supports violence towards women and girls with male sexual aggression (Sosenski, 2021).

Rape culture and sex trafficking are two interrelated issues that have significant impacts on individuals and communities around the world (Jackson & Hill, 2018). Both are rooted in patriarchal structures and perpetuated by the power imbalances between men and women (Kara, 2017). Studies have shown that rape culture and sex trafficking are interconnected, as they both stem from patriarchal structures that prioritize the sexual pleasure and control of men over the autonomy and safety of women and girls (Jackson & Hill, 2017). For example, a study by Farley and Cotton (2005) found that men who buy sex are more likely to hold attitudes that support sexual violence and sexual exploitation, and to view women as objects for their own sexual pleasure. This is consistent with

research by Ditmore (2006) that suggests that the sex industry is built upon the same patriarchal norms and attitudes that support rape culture.

Additionally, research has shown that exposure to rape culture can increase the vulnerability of individuals to trafficking. A study by Jackson and Hill (2017) found that women and girls who have experienced sexual violence or have been exposed to rape culture are more likely to be targeted and exploited by traffickers. The authors argued that since these individuals are more likely to be viewed as vulnerable and less likely to report exploitation due to shame, guilt, and a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, they are at higher risk of being targeted by sex traffickers.

The literature provides strong evidence of the relationship between rape culture and sex trafficking (Jackson & Hill, 2017). Both are perpetuated by patriarchal structures that prioritize the sexual pleasure and control of men over the autonomy and safety of women and girls (Kara, 2017). Addressing rape culture and sex trafficking requires a comprehensive approach that challenges patriarchal norms and attitudes and supports the autonomy and safety of all individuals.

Sex Traffickers and Recruitment

Sex trafficking is widespread and increasing annually on a global scale. According to the U.N., a primary reason for its growth is due to a global failure to identify sex traffickers and those who help them (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Sex traffickers have a certain stereotype that is not based in fact but based off the media, cinema, and printed literature (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Sex traffickers are defined as “those who exploit vulnerable persons for the commercial sale

of sex” (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019, p. 608). Sex traffickers are predominantly very violent men, and violence is as equally important as sex in sex trafficking (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). Sex traffickers will use violence with their victims to make sure the victim follows the rules and does not try to escape (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). Some other tactics that sex traffickers use around the world include grooming the victim with lavish gifts and money, becoming a “trusted” friend, providing the victims with drugs to make them dependent on the sex trafficker, and giving a false sense of love, protection, and a fantasy (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). It is reported that sex traffickers prefer minors since they are easier to manipulate and earn more money for the trafficker (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). Approximately 30% of sex traffickers have a criminal history and are most often men (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019).

In other cases of sex trafficking, it has been reported that the traffickers are very kind, and the victim feels attached to them and view them as “helpers,” which can be explained through the Stockholm Syndrome (Hamid, 2022). This type of trafficker can be very confusing to victims (Hamid, 2022). On one hand the victim feels like the trafficker is taking care of her and allows some agency over her life. In turn, she feels grateful to the trafficker for giving her an opportunity to send money back home. In reality, the trafficker is ultimately having her engage in sex work with profit in mind (Hamid, 2022). This is another technique of a sex trafficker to manipulate women or girls who are victims of globalization, migration policies, low wages in their home country, unemployment, patriarchal societies (gender inequality), and poverty (Hamid, 2022).

Women and Recruitment

Although sex trafficking perpetrators are mostly men, women sex traffickers find themselves invisible to the public and law enforcement because of the stereotypes found in the media (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Female sex traffickers are 16% less likely to be arrested or convicted for sex trafficking than men although extensive literature reviews show that women are involved in all stages of sex trafficking (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). If women are involved with sex trafficking, they are considered a victim themselves and thought to be coerced and manipulated by the sex trafficker. Another technique used by sex traffickers to recruit another victim is to use a woman “who is already in the business” to coerce her into the new lifestyle (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019, Hamid, 2022, Roe-Sepowitz, 2019).

Women sex traffickers are typically labeled recruiters, supporters, or “bottoms” (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Women recruiters are used to gain trust of the new victims and present a facade of “happy trafficking”. Women are sent back home to their home country in lavish clothes and accessories to show other women or girls how great their life is to obtain new victims (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019).

Supporters are those women who are subordinate to the top women in the trafficking ring voluntarily or involuntarily (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Their role is to manage the sex trafficking victims, guard them, provide them with fake documents, bribe law enforcement if needed, and rent the hotel rooms, brothels, or sex clubs (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Women who fall into this category are usually dependent on the sex trafficker for survival or may have family in the sex

trafficking ring, otherwise considered a “family affair” (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019).

“Bottom” is the name given to the highest-ranking female in the sex trafficking ring (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). This position is considered a promotion and implies that the female has earned the trafficker’s respect and trust. This position allows the victim to stop working as a prostitute and maintain the ring (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). The idea of being a “bottom” is often dangled to new victims to give them incentive to stay with the trafficker (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). “Bottoms” oversee training new victims, collecting money, finding them clients through advertisements, and transporting them to their clients (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Although it is promised to “bottoms” that they no longer must engage in sex work, research shows that about 50% of the time they still are required to service clients and are still being abused emotionally and physically by the trafficker (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). The difference between a “supporter” and a “bottom” is that a supporter is usually a female family member who does not engage in sex work and a “bottom” is a sex worker (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019).

“Partners-in-crime” are women who commit acts of sex trafficking voluntarily and are equal partners with profit in the sex ring (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). There are three general ways a woman participates in sex trafficking as a partner-in-crime. The first way is in the form of equal division of the labor and equal division of the profit. A second way is women is the mastermind of the operation and the man is the

violent one. Finally, the third way is the woman recruits and supervises the sex victims and the man commit the acts of violence towards the victims and is the aggressor (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). In partner-in-crime cases it is made to look like the woman has control or equal say, but she is also a victim of violence in their relationship which classifies her as a “supporter” (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019).

Madams

In the regions of Eastern Europe to Central Africa, “madams” are in control of the sex trafficking (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). Madams are considered “businesswomen” running a business with no family links to the business (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). In Ukraine, it is known that the women run at least 60% of the sex trafficking rings (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019). In Nigeria, sex trafficking is run by women, and it is known to be a business of women. As a result, men in Nigeria take on more supportive, passive roles (Veldhuizen-Ochodnicanova & Jeglic, 2019).

Sex Trafficking Clients

Without clients, demand for sex trafficking could not exist. It is reported that 1 in 15 men buy sex (Beegan & Morgan, 2017). While the demand for sex is high, the demand for sex with minors is exponentially greater (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). Fueling these high demands are citizens from Western countries who board planes for sex tours in other countries where the laws are not as strict (Malarek, 2011). It has been consistently demonstrated from previous research that military service members across the globe are

commonly involved in sex trafficking as clients while on deployments in Asian countries or in war-torn regions (Bolkovac & Lynn, 2011). Soldiers are not only clients but may also be sex slave owners in war-torn countries (Bolkovac & Lynn, 2011, Malarek, 2011).

Why Women Cannot Escape

There are many reasons that sex trafficking victims cannot escape from their trafficker. One such reason is trauma bonding, also known as Stockholm Syndrome, and can sometimes occur between sex traffickers and their victims (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). Trauma bonding can happen when the victim develops strong emotional feelings or a strong connection with their trafficker (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). The victim becomes dependent on the sex trafficker through cycles of abuse (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). This dependency includes the imbalance of power between the sex trafficker and the victim, in which the sex trafficker is the one who imposes punishments and rewards (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). This imbalance of power creates confusion and dependence of the victim (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). Trauma bonding among the sex trafficker and the victim is recognized as enhanced survival by victims (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). Not all victims experience trauma bonding with their sex trafficker but many do (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). It is more common in victims that are youth and do not have the means to acquire housing, health care, income, education, or asylum in the country they have been brought to by their sex trafficker (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022).

Sex traffickers, as part of their tactics to keep victims from running, foster a sense of “protector” and “caretaker” to create dependency, loyalty, reliance, and connection

(Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). Many times, the victim is already attached to the sex trafficker before being trafficked when the trafficker is a parent, a family member, or an intimate partner (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). This can also create an environment where the victim feels gratitude to the sex trafficker while also being terrified for their life (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022). Victims are purposefully kept isolated. For victims to leave their sex traffickers, many variables need to occur (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2022).

Numerous women who are sex trafficked do not understand what outcome is awaiting them. Many women who are sex trafficked come from countries where there is no money to be made. These women, looking to keep their families alive, trust ads in local newspapers that they are being hired to be waitresses, nannies, house maids or working for hotels (Malarek, 2011 & Kara 2014). The ads look legitimate and many times the women are convinced to take the job by other women who the pimps are using for recruitment (Kara, 2014 & Malarek, 2011). Women who are the most vulnerable to being sex trafficked desperate and naïve due to their circumstances. It is paramount to understand how women find themselves in these situations and why they cannot escape.

The definition of sex trafficking includes actions such as force, coercion, and fraud (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). The process of enslavement is a calculated design (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). The enslaved lose their human rights, freedom, and basic entitlements such as food, shelter, and healthcare (Talbot & Suzuki, 2021). The enslaved are often brutally beaten and are required to work as much as 20 hours per day sometimes serving up to 20 clients a day (Kara, 2017). The traffickers

mentally “beat down” the women by physical and sexual abuse if a woman gets “out of line” (Kara, 2017). Traffickers often withhold food from the victims or get them addicted to drugs, so it keeps the victims dependent on the traffickers (Kara, 2017).

Gang Affiliations

Gang affiliation can sometimes be the culprit to sex trafficking (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). In recent studies, gang affiliation was identified in sex trafficking with minors in one out of every five cases (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). It is shown that when gang affiliation is associated with a sex trafficking case it will most likely include victims who are runaways, have a drug/alcohol addiction, are homeless, or from foster care (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019). There are many types of gangs throughout the world, however, it is a well-known fact that the Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG's) in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and western Europe such as Hells Angels, the Bandidos, and the Outlaws are involved in a variety of crimes including human and sex trafficking (Piano, 2017). Each group has claimed a region of the United States that they have domain over and similar patterns are being seen in other countries (Piano, 2017). Today law enforcement claims there are 20,000 members of the Outlaws who are involved in sex trafficking, human trafficking, drug cartels, street gangs, and prison gangs (Piano, 2017). The typical make-up of these bike members are white men, who have had some military experience and have return home with patriarchal ideas about women. These men typically are unable to fit into society, and as a result, join the biker gang (Piano, 2017). A biker's lifestyle revolves around the ideas of hyper-masculinity, independence from the government and social norms, brotherhood, and mechanical skills (Piano, 2017).

Power is the upmost goal, and they live by the idea that women are second class citizens and brotherhood is the upmost importance (Piano, 2017). Women who are victims in sex trafficking with the biker gangs would have little chance to escape with the “brotherhood” watching the women’s every move (Piano, 2017).

Medical Professionals

Many times, a medical professional might be the only person who can help, and they are lacking in skills to recognize sex trafficking victims (Pederson & Gerassi, 2022). Medical professionals most times are the only people, besides clients, who encounter sex trafficking victims (Pederson & Gerassi, 2022). There are missed opportunities to identify victims if the medical professional is not trained or falls into the belief of sex trafficking stereotypes that don’t accurately represent the red flags of victims (Pederson & Gerassi, 2022).

Since medical professionals are usually the first or only people to encounter victims, it is crucial, they are trained on what the red flags look like on sex trafficking victims (Pederson & Gerassi, 2022). Some of the red flags include reoccurring abortions or sexually transmitted diseases, an older man accompanying a young female to the appointment and not allowing the woman to speak for herself, signs of torture or abuse, tattoos or branding that states that the women belong to a man, and the woman being shy, timid and cannot answer questions (Pederson & Gerassi, 2022).

There are many times that sex trafficking victims are not allowed to seek medical attention, or they are taken to a medical professional, who knows that sex trafficking is occurring, but they are being bribed by the pimp. In this case, a medical professional

would be no help to the victim. When sex trafficking victims are brought across borders the victim usually does not understand the language of the country she is in and would not be able to communicate with a medical professional that she needs help. If the victim is in a country that has no reporting system by medical professionals, then the medical professional may be no help to escaping.

Impact of Religious Culture

Religion and culture have a significant impact on the phenomenon of sex trafficking and the experiences of its victims (Routledge, Jin & Kim, 2018). Studies have shown that religious beliefs and cultural norms can both perpetuate and mitigate the risk of sex trafficking (Chirinos, 2017). On one hand, cultural beliefs and religious practices that support gender inequality and male dominance can increase the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking. For example, a study by Routledge et al. (2018) found that patriarchal family structures, in which women are expected to prioritize the needs of their husbands and families over their own, increase the risk of trafficking in certain cultural groups.

Navarro and Tewksbury (2018) found that people who live with increases in religiosity are associated with increased rape acceptance. This may be explained because religious people may be exposed to higher levels of patriarchal teachings (Owens et al. 2021). People who are involved in religion may hear accounts or descriptions of acquaintance rape, marital rape, and date rape that are explained by the patriarchy stating inadequate self-defense, a woman not understanding her role in marriage, or a woman's poor choice or decision making (Owen et al., 2021). Not all religions support these ideas,

but it has been shown that the more sexist or fundamental a religion is, the more likely that the group will have negative attitudes towards rape and sex trafficking and will blame the victim (Owens et al., 2021).

Conversely, religious, and cultural practices can also provide support and resources for victims of trafficking, as well as encourage societal attitudes that reject trafficking and promote the rights of survivors (Chirinos, 2017). For example, a study by Chirinos (2017) found that indigenous communities in Latin America that adhere to traditional cultural practices and beliefs have been effective in organizing against trafficking and promoting the rights of trafficking survivors.

It is important to note that the relationship between religion and culture and sex trafficking is complex and influenced by various factors, including the specific religious or cultural group in question, the region or country in which it is practiced, and the specific beliefs and practices of individual members (Chirinos, 2017). Additionally, the relationship between religion and culture and trafficking may vary for different groups of individuals, including those who are at higher risk for trafficking, such as migrant workers or refugees.

Recent research suggests that religion and culture may have both positive and negative impacts on sex trafficking (Chirinos, 2017). While cultural beliefs and religious practices that support gender inequality and male dominance can increase the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking, religious and cultural practices can also provide support and resources for trafficking survivors and help to organize resistance against trafficking (Chirinos, 2017). The relationship between religion, culture, and

trafficking is complex and influenced by various factors, and further research is needed to fully understand the impact of these factors on trafficking and its victims.

Similarities and Difference of Sex trafficking Across Cultures

Sex trafficking is a global issue, but the cultural differences between Western and Eastern societies may lead to variations in the prevalence and characteristics of sex trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], n.d.). In the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, investigated by the United Nations, it stated the one factor that is the same between all countries is that seventy percent of human trafficking is sex trafficking. The report also states that the investigation gave a “big picture” but shows clearly that the world lacks depth in really understanding the problem of sex trafficking (UNODC, n.d.). It is feared that the problem is getting worse around the world (UNODC, n.d.).

Western cultures, such as those in North America and Europe, have been reported to have high rates of sex trafficking (Javdani, et al., 2019). One possible reason for this is the demand for commercial sex in these countries, which attracts traffickers and creates opportunities for exploitation (Danna & Graham, 2017). Victims of sex trafficking in the West are often young women and girls and are frequently trafficked for sexual purposes within their own country (Berman & McCloskey, 2017). The trafficking is often facilitated through force, fraud, or coercion, and victims are typically recruited through false promises of work or education (UNODC, 2018).

In Eastern cultures, sex trafficking may be more covert and difficult to identify versus the west. One study conducted in India found that victims of sex trafficking in

rural areas were often trafficked by family members or close acquaintances, which may explain why many cases go unreported (Budhathoki, et al., 2019). In some cases, victims of sex trafficking in Eastern cultures are also transported across borders for sexual exploitation, often under the guise of employment opportunities (UNODC, 2018).

The cultural differences between Western and Eastern societies also influence the types of interventions that are effective in combating sex trafficking. In Western cultures, legal and law enforcement interventions are often used to target sex trafficking (Danna & Graham, 2017). In contrast, interventions in Eastern cultures may focus more on addressing the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, lack of education, and social norms that devalue women (Budhathoki, et al., 2019).

In conclusion, while sex trafficking is a global problem, there are significant cultural differences between Western and Eastern societies that may impact the prevalence, characteristics, and interventions related to this issue. The demand for commercial sex in Western cultures may make them more vulnerable to trafficking, while the covert nature of trafficking in Eastern cultures makes it difficult to identify and address. Understanding these cultural differences is crucial in developing effective strategies for combating sex trafficking.

Saudi Arabian Culture and Women

In the Saudi Arabian culture, women are held to beliefs that biology and nature are the cause of difference between men and women and their rights (Malik, 2019). This is not as far-fetched compared to the rest of the world. Women all over the world are continually fighting for equal footing in legislation and bodily autonomy and Saudi

Arabian females are no different (Malik, 2019). Extreme gender roles plague the kingdom in denial of basic human rights for women (Malik, 2019). The current Saudi Arabian government has made some notable recent changes, but it has a far way to go (Winkel, Strachan & Aamir, 2021).

In the past five years, the Saudi Arabia government has made great strides in equalizing men and women in the Kingdom. Women have been given long overdue rights such as obtaining a driver's license, being able to work outside the home, and be in public with men (Malik, 2022). Women in Saudi Arabia are now seeing their education opportunities flourish due to the government allowing women to apply for the same scholarships as men for overseas education, which increases their participation in social society and allows for independence if desired (Al Bakr, Bruce, Davidson, Schlaffer & Kropiunigg, 2021). The government has also allowed women to join the ranks of leadership for the Kingdom representing 20% of the total leadership (Ministry of Interior, 2023). The Saudi Arabian government is on a fast paced time line to industrialized their country and to be seen as a top market in the western world (Ministry of Interior, 2023).

Although there are some extreme, yet welcomed, changes for women in the Kingdom by the government, women will have to wait for their families' views to change and modernize to fully optimize their rights and opportunities. Saudi Arabian families are patriarchal meaning the father and male relatives dictate how the family operates. When a woman is married, she typically moves in with the husband's family is now under the husband's families ruling (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Women are still bound to men

by requiring approval to get married, leave prison or a shelter (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Education for Women in Saudi Arabia

The first girls' school in Saudi Arabia opened its doors in 1960 (Malik, 2019). According to the Ministry of Education by 2015 they had a total of 551,000 enrolled in university compared to the male counterparts of 513,000 enrolled (Malik, 2019). Fifty years ago, most Saudi Arabian females were illiterate and carried the taboo to be educated (Malik, 2019). With statistics such as these, one would think this was a raving success, but there needs to be a deeper dive into the roles of women in the Kingdom that keep the women of Saudi Arabia a second-class citizen.

Currently, in 2022, women and men are still segregated in classrooms from Kindergarten to University (Malik, 2019). The reason for this decision is based on gender division and different curriculums taught to instill cultural norms (El-Sanabary, 1994). Saudi Arabia is the fastest growing market for foreign students in the USA due to an agreement with President George Bush and the King of Saudi Arabia (Winkel et al., 2021).

The Saudi Arabia government offers an exclusive scholarship program to its citizens to study abroad in places such as the USA, Canada, and the UK (Ministry of Education, 2021). The government pays for all tuition, plus living expenses if studying business management, medical sciences, or engineering (Ministry of Education, 2020). The only caveat is that the Saudi national must return to the Kingdom and work in the Kingdom. Out of the all the Saudi nationals that use this scholarship only a quarter of

them are female (Winkel et al., 2021). If the Saudi females takes the scholarship, then a guardian must accompany her to the west, whereas the male counterpart does not need a guardian (Malik, 2019).

Although the Saudi Arabian government is providing education opportunities to women it is not equal education (Malik, 2019). The main goal is to keep girls and women compliant believers in the system and not disruptors (Malik, 2019). Although education is allowing women educational opportunities, within traditional boundaries, it does not increase gender and power relations (Malik, 2019 & El-Sanabary, 1994).

Male and Female Responsibilities in the Saudi Arabian Culture

There are many roles that women and men play in the Arab culture. They are not unlike patriarchal roles found in the west, but the difference being that they are being taught in education in every school across the kingdom (Malik, 2019). The curriculum used in education is focused on teaching girls and women that their upmost goal is the subordination to men (Malik, 2019). They are a taught they cannot handle certain situations on their own, such as travel, and have been taught that men are needed for protection (Malik, 2019). Every Saudi female has a guardian no matter the age or education level (Malik, 2019). Physical education classes are banned for girls and girls from ages 12 to 16 years old to take mandatory home economics and sewing classes focusing on how to have a proper home and how to focus on the family (Malik, 2019). Women are taught, unless necessary, that woman should stay home (Malik, 2019). Mandatory religion classes teach that a woman should never raise her voice in earshot of a man or yell directly at a man (Malik, 2019). Woman are taught their clothing and how

the dress is a reflection on the good standing of the family's reputation (Winkel et al, 2021). Men oversee taking care of the family, providing for all the needs of the family and if the husband cannot do it then the father's family does it which then leads to the patriarchy making all the decisions (Malik, 2019).

Sexuality and Saudi Females

Purity is the upmost goal of a Saudi female on her wedding day (Malik, 2019). Some might argue that Saudi females are not taught their own body autonomy and are left confused to figure it out.

The males in the Saudi Arabian culture oversee the women (Malik, 2019). A woman could be a highly educated university professor but still needs her father, husband or even more illogical her little brother sign permission for her to allow her to travel (Malik, 2019). Women may not obtain passports without permission from the patriarchal family (Malik, 2019).

Saudi Arabia Law and Sex Trafficking

Human trafficking, including sexual exploitation, is a significant issue worldwide, and Saudi Arabia is no exception. In response to the problem, the Saudi Arabian government enacted anti-trafficking legislation and taken steps to address the issue. Due to limited research on this topic within the Kingdom, the following literature review contains several references prior to 2017.

The Anti-Trafficking Law in Saudi Arabia

In 2012, Saudi Arabia enacted its anti-trafficking law, which provides for the prosecution of traffickers and penalties for those convicted of trafficking, including

trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (Alharbi, 2016). The law defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of threat, or the use of force. Additionally, this law prohibits other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

The penalties for trafficking under the law range from seven to 15 years in prison and fines of up to 500,000 Saudi riyals (approximately \$133,000 USD) (Alharbi, 2016). The law also provides for the protection of victims, including foreign national victims, and allows for their removal from the country if necessary (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

Efforts to Address Sex Trafficking in Saudi Arabia

In addition to the anti-trafficking law, Saudi Arabia has taken steps to address sex trafficking through the implementation of various programs and initiatives. For example, the government has established a national committee to combat trafficking, which is responsible for coordinating the country's efforts to address the issue (Alharbi, 2016).

The government has worked with international organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to raise awareness about human trafficking and provide support to victims (Alharbi, 2016). The IOM has also provided training to law enforcement officials in Saudi Arabia on how to identify and respond to cases of human trafficking (International Organization for Migration, n.d.).

Challenges in Addressing Sex Trafficking in Saudi Arabia

Despite the efforts of the government and international organizations, sex trafficking remains a significant issue in Saudi Arabia. The country has faced criticism for its human rights record, including the treatment of migrant workers, and the system of male guardianship, which restricts the freedom of women and can make them vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In addition, the lack of data and information on the issue of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the government's efforts to address the issue (Alharbi, 2016). There have also been reports of victims being punished for crimes committed as a result of their trafficking, such as immigration violations, rather than being provided with support and protection (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Saudi Arabia has taken steps to address the issue of sex trafficking through its anti-trafficking law and various programs and initiatives. However, the country continues to face significant challenges in effectively addressing the issue, including a lack of data and information, the treatment of migrant workers, and the system of male guardianship. Further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of the government's efforts to address sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia and to identify areas for improvement.

Summary

Sex trafficking affects every country in the world. Millions of women and children are sold into sex slavery each year for a multitude of reasons. Sex trafficking is a global issue that affects numerous countries, including Saudi Arabia. Despite being

illegal under Saudi Arabian law, sex trafficking continues to persist, with women and children being the primary victims.

This chapter provides a summary of the current literature relating to sex trafficking around the world. Additionally, this research will address a significant gap with respect to understanding perceptions of sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia.

Unfortunately, the area related to sex trafficking is almost nonexistent for Saudi Arabia and relatively unexplored and because of this, other countries were used to make inferences about Saudi Arabia. Almotairi (2019) conducted a critical review of literature on sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia. The study highlights the lack of empirical research on sex trafficking in the country and identifies key challenges in addressing the issue, including the stigmatization of victims and the need for better collaboration between government agencies.

In conclusion, recent studies highlight the persistence of sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia, with women and children being the primary victims. The research underscores the need for better collaboration between government agencies and increased efforts to combat the stigmatization of victims. Additionally, there is a need for more empirical research to better understand the factors that contribute to sex trafficking in the country.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The qualitative study was to understand the knowledge and perceptions of sex trafficking for native Saudi Arabian females who currently live in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabian women's perceptions were explored through one-on-one interviews and reflective journaling. In this chapter, I describe the research design for this study, as well as the instrumentation, criteria for participant selection, and the rationale for using a qualitative approach to understand the perceptions of Saudi Arabian females about sex trafficking. Specifically, this chapter will outline the sampling approach, analytical plan, and the data analysis and reporting. Lastly, the role of the researcher, confidentiality issues, and how to minimize personal bias will be appropriately addressed.

Research Question

The research questions are concerned with understanding and documenting Saudi Arabia women's perceptions about sex trafficking.

- RQ 1: What are Saudi Arabian women's perceptions about sex trafficking?
- RQ 2: What are Saudi Arabian women's perceptions about sex trafficking occurring in Saudi Arabia?

Research Design Rationale

A qualitative research design with a semistructured interview approach was appropriate for this research study because of the in-depth, rich, detailed answers it provided the research study (Bryman, 2016). When exploring people's lived experiences and perceptions about the world they live in, the participant must not be boxed into previous assumptions (Bryman, 2016). A semistructured interview approach allows the

participants to show the researcher new insights about a particular phenomenon (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021).

Qualitative interviewing tends to be more flexible and allows the researcher to identify significant themes when participants are allowed to explain themselves fully (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). This strategy allows the participants to “ramble or go off-topic” to give new insights that might have been overlooked if it were a rigid interview (Bryman, 2016). In this study, the goal was to understand Saudi Arabian women’s perceptions of sex trafficking. Qualitative interviewing focuses more on the participant’s thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the living world (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021).

Saudi Arabian women are often silenced by the culture and the traditions within the culture. Their personal perceptions are required to gain a better understanding of these research questions, particularly in the context of more comprehensive literature that addresses global perceptions of sex trafficking (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021).

Methodology

Setting and Sample

The target population was from the Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia. The Eastern Province was chosen because it is where most women who are Saudi Arabian speak English. The large oil company located in the Eastern Province that requires English to conduct business is heavily influential in the area. Most of the women in the sample have most likely been educated in the Western culture and speak English. The aim of the study was to recruit between eight and 10 participants to achieve saturation.

Participants

This qualitative research study used purposeful sampling to recruit English-speaking Saudi Arabian women between the ages of 18 and 50 years old. Due to the sensitivity of this research, participants' willingness to share their perceptions of sex trafficking was hard to find. Ads could not be placed in common areas or on social media. Participants were recruited by my asking women who seemed to be willing to participate in the study or by word of mouth through previous participants. Using nonprobability sampling was the best choice for this study because the goal was homogenous sampling. A limited number of participants fit the criteria to participate in this study, thus also showing that a purposeful sample was appropriate. Eight Saudi Arabian women were interviewed.

Instruments

Demographic information was collected during the interview. Information in this part of the interview included the date of the interview, age, nationality, highest level of education (and location), marital status, and number of children. Due to the highly sensitive nature of this research, no identifying information was included. I developed a list of interview questions for Saudi Arabian women that focused on obtaining their insights on sex trafficking.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research is often criticized as being too subjective and limited by a researcher's unintentional bias (Bryman, 2016). Critics claim that findings in a qualitative study rely too much on the lived experiences of the researcher and the unsystematic

views about what the researcher finds important or not necessary in the data (Bryman, 2016). It is of the utmost importance for researchers to remain objective so that they are reporting back on the true, lived experiences of the participants. During the research process, an awareness of potential bias needs to be at the forefront of the study to ensure the approach remains as objective as possible and does not influence the data in any way. I used self-evaluation to reduce researcher bias in this study.

Data Collection Plan

The data collection plan involved snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a technique where the researcher starts with a small group of participants relevant to the research question and then relies on those participants to suggest other participants who might be willing to be interviewed and meet the criteria for study participation (Bryman, 2016). Probability sampling was not possible in this case due to the sensitive nature of the research. No information could be written, posted, or advertised about the research for it would cause great harm to both the participants and me.

Due to the highly sensitive matter that was being researched, oral consent was required in lieu of paper consent. This was appropriate due to the possibility that I and the participants could be put at risk by the existence of a paper trail. A recording device to record the consent of the participant was used. Each participant was not known by name, but rather by a number (e.g., participant #1). During the oral informed consent meeting, I reviewed confidentially and ensured that each participant understood their rights, the potential risk of the study, and the benefits of participating in the study. The participant was told repeatedly throughout the process that she could stop the interview at any time

without coercion or fear of penalty for not completing the interview. The participant was told in the same meeting that the interview would take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. There was no compensation to participate in the study.

Each participant was interviewed separately to ensure confidentiality. All interviews were recorded for absolute accuracy. To build rapport with the participants, I informed them of their complete confidentiality and that I was not affiliated with anyone in Saudi Arabia. The participants were encouraged to be as honest and open as possible, but if at any time a question made them feel uncomfortable, they did not have to answer. I reminded them that there were no correct answers, just their perspective on the subject matter.

Open-ended questions were used in the interview, so the answers were not guided or led by me. Furthermore, open-ended questions encouraged participants to answer according to their lived experiences. I took notes during the interview, not to transcribe, but rather, to make notes about observations from the participant.

Since the interviews were audio recorded, I was able to go back and analyze the interview as many times as needed. The interviews were also transcribed and placed into a qualitative data analysis software program. In order to verify the validity of my findings, I used the triangulation method.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the data were collected, I reviewed all the interviews to ensure a whole, full picture was present. After analysis of the data, I began identifying codes, categories, and themes that emerge. To ensure that all themes in the data were accurately identified, I

used a qualitative data analysis software tool to discover key themes that may have been missed using hand coding. Additionally, the use of this software tool allowed me to validate findings and minimize data interpretation errors.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness is important in research, especially in qualitative studies. According to Lincoln and Guba (1994), qualitative studies should not be held to the same judgment or evaluation as a quantitative study. To provide reliability and validity in a qualitative study, trustworthiness is the criterion used for assessment. Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, each with a counterpart in quantitative research (Bryman, 2016). Researchers can achieve credibility by adhering to the principals of good practice and submitting their findings to the research participants to confirm that the researcher correctly understood what was being reported. To attain transferability in a qualitative research study, the researcher must use thick descriptions when accounting details of a specific culture (Bryman, 2016), which allows others to create a base for judgements about the findings of the study. To show dependability in a qualitative research study, researchers should use an “auditing” approach (Bryman, 2016). The suggestion is to use an audit trail by ensuring that all records of the entire research process are kept. Peers then can act as auditors during the course of the research to make sure correct procedures have been followed (Bryman, 2016). Confirmability shows that the researcher has shown good faith throughout the study. Although it is impossible to be

completely objective, confirmability is the act of showing the researcher has kept their personal values and bias out of the research (Bryman, 2016).

In the current research study, my committee members, and Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) will serve as judges to ensure that my study has met the four criteria set out by Guba and Lincoln (1994). I also employed the triangulation method to ensure my study reaches the same conclusion with multiple overseers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues can arise at any stage of the research process (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, ethical issues cannot be ignored, and there must be a plan in place to try to prevent them from occurring to safeguard participants and the integrity of the research (Bryman, 2016). Participant protection, namely how the researcher will treat participants and avoid detrimental activities in the study, is imperative for conducting ethical research (Bryman, 2016). It is the researcher's utmost priority to be aware of the implications of the choices made in the research. According to Diener and Crandall (1978), there are four main areas that need great consideration when conducting research: harm to the participant, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception.

In the current study, before the interviews commenced, participants gave me informed oral consent to proceed. I did not ask for any identifying documents or create a paper trail because of the sensitivity of the topic in a country that finds sex trafficking taboo. All participants was given the label "participant", plus a number ("participant 1", "participant 2", etc.), and no names were used. Each participant received the researcher's

contact number on WhatsApp (<https://www.whatsapp.com>), a private messaging app that uses a VPN and is encrypted.

All data collected from participants were stored on password-protected computers. No other individuals have access to the laptop or desktop where the research data were collected or analyzed. The recorder, with the taped interviews, is stored in a fire-proof safe when not in use. All data have been stored on an external hard drive which will also be kept in the safe. Data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed after that.

Summary

This chapter outlined the method of research used in the study. The research design allowed me to explore the perceptions of Saudi Arabian women around sex trafficking generally and then specifically in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In this chapter, there was a preliminary plan outlined for data collection, analysis, and instrumentation, along with a detailed approach how I recruited my targeted population. Ethical considerations are the upmost concern for the researcher and were reviewed continuously throughout the research process, along with ways to mitigate any negative effects from the study. The findings of the study will be presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of Saudi Arabian women regarding sex trafficking. I used one-on-one interviews with purposefully selected participants to gather data about Saudi women's experiences about sex trafficking to answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: What are Saudi Arabian women's perceptions about sex trafficking?
- RQ 2: What are Saudi Arabian women's perceptions about sex trafficking occurring in Saudi Arabia?

This study was designed to understand the perceptions of Saudi Arabian women and sex trafficking and to gain insight about what typical women in Saudi Arabia understood about sex trafficking.

Settings

The settings for the interviews for the research study were chosen by the participants. The participants could either meet with me in person per their trusted location or over the phone to further mask their identity if they felt that was needed. My highest priority as a researcher was confidentiality and privacy since the topic is taboo in Saudi Arabia. Flexibility was provided, and I worked around the participants' schedules. At the start of the interviews, in order to make the participants comfortable, I started with small talk to ease into such a heavy topic. I informed each participant that their participation was confidential and I took no identifying factors. Before the interviews began I read the consent statement. Since I did not want a paper trail for this research

study, I took their verbal consent on the audio I was recording. I informed the participants that they could stop the interview at any time or if they felt uncomfortable answering a certain question they could reply with “pass.” The one telephone interview I conducted was in my home office, with the door closed, and conversations could not be overheard. I was alone and uninterrupted while conducting the interview. For the interviews that were in person, the participant selected the location, and I met her there at the specified time. The locations were private with no other people around.

Demographics

The criteria required for this study were that the participant had to be a female Saudi national between the ages of 18 years old and 50 years old. The participant also needed to speak English without a translator to help maintain confidentiality and to make sure meaning of the information did not get lost in translation. Eight to 10 participants were recruited for this study. Recruitment for this study was halted once saturation was reached (Ellis, 2020), so the study concluded with eight interviews. In Saudi Arabia, talking about sex and criticizing the government in any way can be a taboo topic, so recruits for the study were found by word of mouth. As a result, I experienced a difficult time getting recruits.

Data Collection

One-time interviews were conducted with each participant. The participant chose the location where she felt the most comfortable to keep confidentiality. One woman chose the telephone due to time constraints with work and child care. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes to give each participant ample time to give in depth

answers. Each woman was read the informed consent and responded orally if she wanted to participate or not. There was no written informed consent in order to keep the participants safe in their communities and workforce, and for me, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. There were no participants who declined nor asked to stop the interview.

Participants were advised that their confidentiality was paramount for the research. There were no identifying factors used such as name, city the participant lives in, or place of work. Although there are quotes from the participants' interviews, it is believed that the reader could not identify a participant from this research. It was also shared with the participants that electronic data and written records would be stored securely for a period of 5 years as required by Walden University and as read on the informed consent form; at that time, they will be destroyed in accordance with best practices and legal standards.

The semistructured interviews contained 10 open-ended questions in accordance with the interview guide (see Appendix). The questions were divided into three categories: (a) generalizations about sex trafficking, (b) sex trafficking specifically in Saudi Arabia, and (c) what they felt the Saudi Arabian government should do regarding victims and social education. The semistructured nature of the interviews and the ease of conversation enabled participants to elaborate on their answers and provide additional insights that the researcher had not planned on. In accordance with the interview guide, I used several "conversation continuers" (Knight, 2013), motivational probes, and other interviewing techniques. This approach resulted in participants expanding on their

answers and providing much additional useful information that was unexpected about the Saudi Arabian culture.

The interviews were recorded on a handheld audio recorder. After each interview, the file was immediately transferred to a Mac computer that is password protected. I am the only one in possession of the password to this Mac. The recorder was then erased and ready for the next interview. The files were then uploaded to a software program called NVivo for qualitative research and transcription. Once the transcription was available from all eight interviews, the program identified themes from the data. The NVivo software was also password protected with a different password than the one used for the MAC computer.

Data Analysis

The research outcomes in this chapter are based solely on my analysis of the data obtained from interviews of the research participants. The themes described below are the findings and my interpretation of the data. Other researchers examining my data may or may not corroborate my interpretations or may find other themes. The interviews consisted of a semistructured format that allowed me to hear in-depth answers and allowed the participant to share the information the way they felt best. When the interviews were complete, the transcripts were imported into NVivo, a data analysis computer software program used for qualitative research. NVivo assisted me in identifying themes and patterns using the participants transcripts and their own words. The program uses common words, key terms, phrases, where themes were developed from the thoughts and experiences of the participants. This program allowed me to see

the common perspectives and differing perspectives. The data collected from the in-depth, semistructured interviews revealed four themes: (a) lack of education, (b) conservative family culture, (c) confidentiality of reporting, and (d) victim blaming.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The best data collection method was selected to ensure credibility to address the research question in this study. The interview method was used to understand whether commonalities existed between participants' responses to identify themes or categories. The interviews were recorded on an audio recorder and carefully transcribed. Each transcription ranged from 10 to 16 pages long and was reviewed numerous times to check for accuracy. Each interview took several hours of review.

I reviewed each interview document several times to ensure that (a) each interview was accurately and completely transcribed; (b) the interview addressed the interview questions that were asked; (c) the questions asked were those that were approved by the IRB following the interview guide; and (d) the questions asked were general enough to stay on topic of the research questions as well as evoke a personal response from the participant.

Dependability and confirmability are paramount elements of a study's trustworthiness to establish consistency (Van Manen & Van Manen, 2021). Consistency is demonstrated when another researcher, not involved with the original study, arrives at the same conclusion using the data provided in this study (Van Manen & Van Manen, 2021). Furthermore, consistency was ensured by using an interview guide that contained 10 interview questions that provided a structure to the semistructured interview while

allowing the researcher and participant to stay on theme. Not only did the interview guide contain the basic interview questions asked to each participant, it also included possible follow-up questions depending on the participants answers. These follow-up questions allowed for the conversation to continue as additional discussions and topics emerged during the interview. The interview guide is easily replicated if another researcher would like to replicate the study. Lastly, to check for confirmability, I assessed my own biases by reflecting on my own preconceptions, before and after the interviews, including assumptions, beliefs, and values and how they may impact my interpretation of the data.

Results

The eight participants in the study were all female, English-speaking, Saudi nationals between the ages of 18 and 60 years old. The participants in this study described their knowledge of sex trafficking and their perceptions of the occurrence of sex trafficking in the Kingdom. The one-on-one interviews provided insights to the researcher regarding Saudi women and their understanding of what sex trafficking is, who the victims of sex trafficking are, and the perceived occurrence of sex trafficking in the Kingdom. Opinions of the Saudi women were also given about how the Saudi government handles sex trafficking situations, reporting, and confidentiality of those who do report. A repeated issue with the participants was that after the first question of the interview, “What is the definition of sex trafficking?”, several of the initial participants did not know what sex trafficking was. Although the interviews required English speakers, I did translate the phrase “sex trafficking” into Arabic, but the participants still did not know the term. Since I was looking for in-depth answers for my study, I decided

not to continue the interview in those six cases. In the end, I had eight study participants who were able to complete the interviews. There were four primary themes resulting from the interviews: (a) lack of education, (b) conservative family culture, (c) victim blaming, and (d) reporting and confidentiality.

Theme 1: Lack of Education

The first identified theme, lack of education, was based on questions (a) “How do you define sex trafficking?” and (b) “What do you feel the psychological impacts of sex trafficking is on victims?” Eight out of eight participants talked about the lack of education in regard to sex trafficking in the Kingdom. As stated above, I had women who were interested in being a part of the study, but could not make it through the first question, “How do you define sex trafficking?” Participant 1 stated the reason she knows about sex trafficking is “through movies and social media accounts.” Participant 2 stated that she knew about sex trafficking due to “attending university in the West and seeing the public advertisements at the university, radio stations, and airports.” Participant 4 talked about being married off when she was 14 years old and “being raped so badly by her husband that she ended up in the hospital for 3 weeks on her wedding night.” She had no education about sex or her body so she concluded that if a women found herself in sex trafficking in the kingdom “how would they even know what is happening to them?” if there is no education about these topics. Participants 6, 7, and 8 all knew about sex trafficking through watching movies.

When asked the question “Do you think there is sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia?” Participant 3 answered, “without a doubt, I have seen it.” Participant 1 answered, “there

has to be, right?” Participant 2 answered, “of course, but we wouldn’t know now would we?” When urged to continue what she meant by that she stated,

The government only shares the good things with us and puts fear into us to keep that bad stuff quiet. I can remember my grandma always whispering “they are listening to us.” I don’t know if she was paranoid or if she was on to something.

All the participants agreed that there was sex trafficking in the Kingdom.

I then asked what they thought the occurrence of sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia was (Question 6): more than in other countries, less than in other countries, or the same as in other countries. All participants thought it was occurring less than in other countries except Participants 3 and 5, who thought it was occurring more in Saudi Arabia than other countries. When asked to explain why the participants thought the occurrence was lower in Saudi Arabia than in other countries Participant 2 said, “I don’t know why I feel that way,” whereas Participant 1 said, “we never hear about it,” and Participant 8 said she “never hears anyone ever talk about this, how would we know?”

When asked the question, “How do victims become sex trafficked?” many answers arose. Participants 1, 2, 5 all stated, “poverty, desperation, and lack of education”. Participant 3 said, “force and not having any idea what is happening to them.” Participant 7 said, “you get trafficked if you come from a bad family,” and Participant 8 said, “I have no idea.” Participant 4 said, “if you get into the wrong hands of someone who is bad.” Participant 6 said “no education of the topic, not a secure family and desperation.”

Theme 2: Conservative Family Culture

All participants spoke about the conservative family culture. All reported that their families' reputation could not be soiled by reports of being sex trafficked or sexually assaulted. When asked, "What would happen if you told your father about being sex trafficked?" Participant 7 stated that she "would be taken to the desert by her father, killed and buried." I then asked, "what if someone went to the police and said you were missing?" and she stated, "the father will just tell them you ran away and they will believe the father. End of story."

Participant 2 talked about what a close family she had and that her parents would protect her and take care of her if she was a victim of sex trafficking, but "no one would ever know what happened to me." Participant 8 stated that "family is everything here whether you want it to be or not. You cannot ruin your family. The pressure to be perfect and do everything right is always in the forefront of my mind."

Participant 7 talked about the conservative family culture, not the government, as being the reason that "progression cannot happen" in terms of reporting sex assault. She said, "the families are so worried what everyone will think that it clouds their judgement about doing the right thing." Participant 3 talked about how "men can do no wrong" and "mothers and fathers will go to great lengths to cover up misdeeds done by their sons." Participant 3 stated that "even after I told my mother I was being harassed by my brothers sexually she still did nothing to protect me. Can you even imagine if I told her I was sex trafficked?" She also stated, "Things are changing. My generation will not put up with

this. If my daughter were to tell me about these things then I would do everything to protect her.”

Participant 1 stated to me,

Look, you are from America. I was educated in America. I know how it works over there. It is not the same here. You have freedom from your family in America. You can do what you want and if your parents are disappointed in you then, oh well! Here in Saudi every weekend you are with your family even if you are a grown woman with your own family. You do what you are told and that is to be with the family all the time. You must be the perfect daughter. The perfect wife. And to not only make your family proud but also your husband's family proud. So you want to tell them that you have been sex trafficked or want to talk about that? No way! Family is everything in this culture. And the men run the family.

Theme 3: Victim Blaming

During the interviews, questions surrounding victim blaming were asked. The questions that were asked were “Who do you think the victims are in sex trafficking?”, “Who do you think the perpetrators are in sex trafficking?” and “How do you think women find themselves in this situation?”. Another question that was asked, but was off script, was “How would your family react if you were a victim of sex trafficking?”. All the participants spoke of the responsibility that the woman bear, women being at fault, in the Saudi culture when it comes to sex trafficking or sexual assault. All the participants

believed that the victims of sex trafficking were women and that bad men wanting money were the perpetrators.

The question “How would your family react if you were a victim of sex trafficking?” provided many different responses. Not one participant noted that her family would fight for justice for her in public or in court. Participant 1 stated that if she were sex trafficked that “her family would protect her and love her, but they would also think that she did something to cause it. We are taught that the man cannot help themselves, so it is our job not to give them temptation. If this happened to me then it must be because I showed my hands or too much of my ankle. It is ridiculous. Men have no responsibility.” Participant 2 stated that her “family is very open. They would take care of me if something happened. They would not blame me, but the culture would or other people would if they heard about it. My family would never tell anyone, but they would believe me.” Participant 3 stated that “women are never believed. My brother was sexually doing things to me and my mother did not believe me. So I would never tell her again. What is the point? Men are never wrong.”

Participant 4 stated that “women are partially to blame as well. If a woman finds herself in that situation then she must have done something, even without knowing, to cause herself to be involved in sex trafficking.” I then followed up with the question “Is there ever a time that a women is never to blame?” and she responded “yes, when they are under 14 years old. Then they are never to blame.”

Participant 7 said “I would be killed.” Participant 8 said “I would never tell anyone.” Participant 5 said “my family would believe me but it is because my mom was

raised in America (although Saudi) so she knows. My dad would listen to my mom.”

Participant 6 said “My husband would divorce me and my family would never talk to me again.”

Theme 4: Reporting and Confidentiality

When participants were asked the questions “If a victim of sex trafficking is found by the police, how do you think the Saudi Arabian government/police would treat the victim?” and “How do you think the Saudi Arabian government/police should improve to handle victims of sex trafficking?”. All participants agreed that the government should be doing more. No participants were satisfied by the current state.

The participants did not express fear from the government if they were victims, but the consensus was that they would not tell the police because they would inform their parents even though they are above the age of 18 years old. Participant 7 stated that “the police should have to stay confidential. My parents do not need to be told by them unless I want to tell them.” Participant 8 said that “I would experience more harm from being treated like an outsider from my family than the harm of being sex trafficked so I would not tell the police.” Participant 3 said “I would not tell the police because what are they going to do? They are just going to believe the man anyway or maybe the man who did the sex trafficking or rape would just pay them off.”

All the women said they would not inform or report to the police because it would not be in their best benefit. The participants did state that they thought the government should be open and transparent to the community about these issue such as sex trafficking, rape and sexual assault. Participant 2 said “the government needs to educate

women on these issues. It is 2023 and there is no reason with social media that there is not a campaign for women to know their rights and not feel shame if this should happen to them.” Participant 1 stated that “we see it in movies and it is not hidden in our daily lives. We just have to know that we will be believed and that there is help available.”

Participant 3 said “men need to stop getting away with these kinds of actions through the police and government, but it is everywhere in this country. It happens in this country more than you realize. It is happening in lots of families and they just keep covering it up. Think about all the maids that come over to serve in Saudi families and end up being a sex slave for all the men in that huge Saudi family. This is everywhere.”

Participant 5 talked about not knowing if sex trafficking was occurring or not. “We would never know, it is not like it is reported on the news or in social media accounts. In Saudi, we do not know anything about what is *really* happening in our country.” Participant 8 stated “it would be nice to know that the police and or government was on our side but we have a long way to go in this country.”

Summary

This qualitative research study aimed to understand the perceptions of Saudi Arabian females and sex trafficking. Two research questions guided this study:

- (1) What are Saudi Arabian women’s perceptions about sex trafficking? and
- (2): What are Saudi Arabian women’s perceptions about sex trafficking occurring in Saudi Arabia?

Participant responses to the interview questions were analyzed by the researcher and four themes were identified: (a) lack of education, (b) conservative family culture, (c) victim blaming, and (d) confidentiality and reporting.

Results indicated that the lack of education in the Kingdom is detrimental to women who may not be able to put language to their experience if they ever find themselves in sex trafficking. Social education is a preventive measure to protect women's lives and help them feel safe in their country. At the moment, in Saudi Arabia, there is no social education revolving around sex trafficking. All of the women knew about sex trafficking from a Hollywood movie or an a social media account.

Additionally, results of the study indicated that the conservative family culture prohibits real change for Saudi Arabian females. Even if the government makes changes to their laws the participants report that their families views on such matters do not. Families are more concerned about their familial reputation that they are about sex assault or sex trafficking.

Participants also made the point about victim blaming being a factor of why women do not report. Participants noted that they would not be believed and if they happened to be believed they would still bear some responsibility to the crime. It was reported in the interviews that participants would rather keep their assault to themselves versus telling/reporting and not being believed or worse, being blamed.

Lastly, participants discussed that confidentiality is a must when it comes to victims of sex trafficking or sex assault. Currently, there is no confidentiality if one reports sex trafficking to the police. The police will tell the family even if they are over

18 years old. All the participants felt the police needed to do a better job helping victims of sex trafficking. Some of the suggestions included: victim support instead of victim blaming, confidentiality with reporting, and prosecution in courts against perpetrators.

Chapter 5 is discussion of the results of the study, its limitations and recommendations for future research. It also discusses the implications of this research for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of Saudi Arabian women about sex trafficking. The problem that this study examined was that little is known about how Saudi women perceived sex trafficking(e.g., what is the definition, how often it occurs, who are the victims, is sex trafficking happening in Saudi Arabia and how victims should be helped). There was a shortage of research about sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia specifically and little to no research where lived experiences by Saudi females have been published. Due to this lack of research, it was crucial that it be investigated to understand the lived experiences of these women to put the pieces together on what sex trafficking looks like in the Kingdom. This research study closes that gap and helps increase the knowledge about sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia.

For this research, I used two frameworks to understand sex trafficking. The first framework I used was radical feminist theory to understand how victims become victims and the second framework used was displacement theory to understand why the perpetrators continually get away with this type of crime. A semistructured interview was completed with eight participants in this study. The following research questions guided the research:

- RQ 1: What are Saudi Arabian women's perceptions about sex trafficking?
- RQ 2: What are Saudi Arabian women's perceptions about sex trafficking occurring in Saudi Arabia?

The participant interviews, and their responses, guided the development of four themes from the data collected: (a) lack of education, (b) conservative family

culture, (c) victim blaming, and (d) confidentiality and reporting. In addition to the four themes, there were six subthemes identified.

Interpretation of the Findings

Participants in this study shared their experiences and perceptions about sex trafficking in general, how they perceive sex trafficking in the Kingdom, and how they feel that victims should be handled. The findings in this study provide an in-depth look at how Saudi women feel about sex trafficking, what they have experienced, and also share what they believe would happen to victims. The overall results were generally consistent, with only one female participant blaming the victim if she were to find herself in a sex trafficking situation.

Theme 1: Lack of Education

The results from the first theme, lack of education, generated two subthemes: limited knowledge and lack of transparency.

Limited Knowledge

In this study, a mix of participants truly understood the universal definition of sex trafficking. The women who had a firm understanding of sex trafficking attended university in the United States. Other participants, who had not been educated in the West, understood a basic definition of sex trafficking through social media accounts and Hollywood movies. Participant 3 perceived sex trafficking as sexual assault against women or “molestation.” She had a lot to say about the sexual assault that happens to women in Saudi Arabia through lived experience. She did not have a universal definition of sex trafficking, but understood the concepts and had experiences that added to the

research. Half of the participants understood sex trafficking, but had never been taught explicitly what it means. Some received knowledge through means other than the government or through parents. Participant 1, a very educated woman with advanced degrees, but educated in Saudi Arabia, knew about sex trafficking through movies but not through any of her higher level education.

Lack of Transparency

All participants agreed there is no transparency from any government agency warning women or teaching women about sex trafficking. The schools the participants attended through 12th grade never broached the subject of sex trafficking, sexual assault, or how they could protect themselves or what to do in these situations. All participants agreed that the government should take an active role in educating the society about these issues that affect the entire world. Participant 2 stated, “it is the government’s job to educate its people and protect people about these topics so women do not find themselves in these situations.” Participant 8 said, “the government wants the rest of the world to think we are all happy and shiny and that bad things don’t happen in Saudi Arabia, but we know they do. We need to know so it does not happen to us.” Participant 4 pointed out that

it is not just the government that holds back this information, it is also the families. Families in Saudi Arabia are so conservative that these sort of topics would never be spoken about. I think sometimes the government wants to be more open, but they get push back from the culture.

The participants unanimously agreed that there should be social education in classrooms, billboards, in airports, shelters for victims to go to, and laws that protect women and to do no harm if they do report. The participants want the government to be clear to the Kingdom that the victims in sex crimes hold no responsibility in being a victim.

Theme 2: Conservative Family Culture

The results from the theme of conservative family culture generated a deep understanding on the Saudi Arabian culture and how it differs from family culture in the West. It was suggested by almost all participants that the families carried more conservative values than the government and they feared the family's reaction over the government (police) reaction if they were a victim of sex trafficking. Participant 3 was the only one who said the fear was equal. The participants talked about the conservative family culture holding back the progress of women and reporting of sexual assault versus the government. Two of the participants (2 and 4) talked about families protecting and still loving them if they were ever a victim but would never tell anyone to save face in the culture and to save their daughter's reputation. Participant 5 stated, "reputation and saving face is everything in this culture. You have to appear perfect and following all the rules to be from a good family." Participant 3 said,

The men run the families. If the father cannot do it then the brothers will. Most times the brothers will think they own you too and will influence the father about the sister. Women have no say. Women have no worth and women cannot decide how they want to live their life.

Theme 3: Victim Blaming

The results from the theme victim blaming generated two subthemes: women's responsibility and lack of responsibility for men.

Women's Responsibility

All the participants stated that women shoulder all the responsibility when it comes to sex trafficking or any kind of sexual assault. Half of the participants stated that their families would disown them or not believe them, and the other half said that their families would still love them and take care of them, but would think they caused it somehow even if they did not mean to. Two participants stated that their husbands would divorce them. Participant 1 claimed that "it will always be your fault if you are a woman. You must have done something. Showed too much ankle, laughed in a flirtatious way, walked a certain way. No matter what, you did something that caused it." Participant 3 stated,

[My husband] would divorce me. He would not believe me and that I must have done something to cause it. If I were in sex trafficking there would be no way out.

The family does not see it any different than prostitution.

Participant 8 said "I would killed in the desert so I would never tell. I don't know what I would do." Participant 4 agrees with some of the patriarchy thinking "that women must have caused it somehow, maybe unintentionally, but did something." Participant 2 said,

Women in Saudi Arabia are taught from an early age that the responsibility is placed on them to preserve their purity for marriage. Their entire life is prepared for the moment of purity on the wedding night. The men even check the sheets to

make sure there is blood after sex. If there is no blood on the wedding night, then he can ask for a divorce that night and it will be granted. We women don't ride bikes, wear tampons, ride horses because we have been told this will take our purity away. Everything we do, or don't do, is to save our purity. Some women even believe it. They think it is right. But men don't have any responsibility. They can do whatever they want, when they want. We know they are having sex before marriage. But with who? If all the women are saving themselves for marriage who is having sex with them? It is all up to the women to make things right.

Lack of Responsibility for Men

Participant 7 stated that

Men do not have to think about anything and if they do something, they do not have a consequence. If a women has sex before marriage she is taken to the doctor to sew her hymn up again so she can present herself as a virgin. But what happens to the man who had sex with her? Nothing. What happens to men that cause so much pain to victims who are sex trafficked? Nothing. They don't go to jail and they make lots of money. Men can pay off the police. Women cannot. Woman are banished from society and are no longer worth anything and have to deal with the effects of being sex trafficked.

Similarly, Participant 2 claimed, "in Saudi Arabia it is a man's world."

Theme 4: Confidentiality and Reporting

The results from the theme of confidentiality and reporting generated two subthemes: confidentiality with reporting and prosecution of perpetrators.

Confidentiality

Most of the participants thought that the police should protect the confidentiality of the report if a woman reports sex trafficking. Participant 5 said if she were to report that she was a victim of sex trafficking “her father would be told because he is head of the family.” When I questioned her further, asking, “what if the victim was older than 18 years old?” Participant 5 answered, “the father would be notified unless she was married, then her husband would be notified. There is no privacy or confidentiality.” Participant 8 stated that “if my father ever found out it would be the end of me.” Participant 2 said, “most women do not report because of the consequences of reporting. You are not going to get help from anyone by reporting, you are just going to ruin your relationships with your family so why would you do that?”.

Prosecution of Perpetrators

The majority of the participants stated that they would like the government to do more in terms of educating the society about sex trafficking, but also prosecuting the perpetrators of sex trafficking. Participant 5 said, “men are not animals. They can control themselves. They should be held to high consequences if they make women participate in sex trafficking. They should be put away forever.”

The participants who did not state that they wanted perpetrators to be prosecuted did not discuss this issue in their interview. They were asked how the government could do better and they discussed more education and more transparency but did not state what they thought should happen to the people who inflict sex trafficking onto victims.

Limitations of the Study

My study was an exploration of the perceptions of Saudi Arabian women about sex trafficking. Data were collected by the way of one-to-one interviews consisting of 10 questions (see Appendix) that could easily be led to more in-depth answers. The study consisted of eight interviews with Saudi women between the ages of 18 and 50 years old and who spoke English. The use of an interpreter was deemed too risky in terms of confidentiality and confirmation bias from the interpreter.

One of the limitations of this study was using participants who spoke English. The women who tend to speak English in Saudi Arabia are most likely very educated women who have been educated in the West. The more educated you are, the more likely you would have been educated in some way about sex trafficking. If these participants had been educated in the West, the chances of them being socially educated about sex trafficking is much higher compared to women who have never left the Kingdom for education purposes. Speaking English and being educated in the West is not representative of the typical Saudi Arabian woman, so generalizing these results across the country for all women may not be accurate.

Another limitation of this study because of the fear to talk negatively about the government was the possibility that participants were not giving the full picture. One participant asked after her interview, “have we done something wrong?” We talked through her options about deleting her interview and not using her information for this research. Although she was afraid, she wanted to use her interview in the research. This interaction illustrates how brave these women were to participate in this study, but also

shows that perhaps they were not entirely forthcoming to protect themselves and their families.

Despite these limitations, this study does provide an in-depth look at how Saudi women perceive sex trafficking and all the issues that arise in this very patriarchal society.

Recommendations

There is a need to understand the patterns of sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia. The way we begin to understand the anatomy of this disease is to understand its causes and understand how we can dismantle it piece by piece (Kara, 2017). Sex trafficking around the world is a monumental issue that will take a great deal of effort of researchers and advocates to take down the system. Although the research may seem basic at times, it is imperative that researchers understand the foundation of this crime and to understand how people in the countries perceive what is happening. Perceptions are often accurate especially when there is no transparency within the Kingdom.

Implications for Social Change

One of the most significant positive social change implications that can come from this study is building the foundation of understanding that can be used as a platform for Kingdom-wide education. A study like this could serve as a starting point for launching a comprehensive education program. This study shows that Saudi women who were not educated in the West know very little about sex trafficking. The information that they do know is coming from social media and movies, which may not be accurate.

Another significant positive social change implication that can come from this study is continuing to empower women, which aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is a national initiative that promotes business development and positive social change in the Kingdom in many areas, including empowerment for women and their rights. Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in the last 5 years toward women's rights including women being able to drive, to travel without a guardian, and to obtain passports without permission from a guardian.

Lastly, another significant positive social change to come from this study is giving women a voice in a patriarchal society to issues such as sex trafficking that affect mostly women. Publishing research that is focused on women allows for a more holistic perspective about what is occurring in the Kingdom about sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia, where there is very little research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sex trafficking is a global phenomenon that is not any closer to being eradicated than it was a decade ago. Although many governments are trying to make changes to laws and prosecution of traffickers, much more still needs to be accomplished before a real change is made. Sex trafficking is the world's third most profitable crime. This crime is easy to hide and the trafficker has only a one-time investment (buying the slave) and reaps the profit over and over. Sex trafficking is caused by patriarchal values and societies and corrupt governments. This issue will go away once the anatomy of the problem is understood and women are valued (Kara, 2017).

The purpose of the study was to shed light on the perceptions of Saudi Arabian women and their perceptions about sex trafficking and what they feel is occurring in Saudi Arabia in regards to sex trafficking. Eight participants, who were Saudi Arabian women, gave in-depth, one-on-one interviews about sex trafficking and the Saudi Arabian culture. The participants provided in-depth information about the society, their knowledge, their culture and how they wish to vision the future in regard to sex trafficking.

This study has potential for great social change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Women are becoming freer and gaining more equality through Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. This study could be used as a platform to start a social education campaign throughout the Kingdom teaching citizens about the dangers of sex trafficking and how to identify it so women can protect themselves. If no language is given to women about potential harmful experiences, then if they do find themselves victim of a crime, they will not know how to report and recover from such trauma. More extensive research is clearly needed in this area in Saudi Arabia to replicate the findings in this research.

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Appendix A: Questions for Interviews

1. How do you define sex trafficking?
2. Who do you think the victims of sex trafficking are?
3. Who are the perpetrators in sex trafficking?
4. What do you think the causes of sex trafficking are?
5. How do victims become sex trafficked?
6. Do you think there is sex trafficking in Saudi Arabia?
7. If a victim of sex trafficking is found by police how do you feel it should be handled?
8. How do you think the Saudi Arabian government would treat a victim of sex trafficking?
9. How do you think the government could improve helping victims of sex trafficking?
10. What do you feel the psychological impacts of sex trafficking are on the victims?

Appendix B: Oral Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from May to June 2023. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is: to understand the perceptions of Saudi Arabian females and sex trafficking. You are being asked to participate because you are a Saudi national, a female and between the ages of 18 years old and 50 years old.

The benefits of the research will be: To better understand the voices of females in Saudi Arabia about sex trafficking.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include: One-on-one interviews and the interview will be recorded without any identifying information. This interview is confidential. The interview will last between 20 and 45 minutes.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using.

Please contact me at any time over what's app. Our discussion will be audio taped to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including tapes) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper. Insights gathered by you and other participants will be used in writing a qualitative research dissertation for my PhD. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

Do you agree to participate in this study?