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## Exploring Victim Advocates Perceptions of Human and Sex Trafficking Laws and Programs in Tennessee

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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2024

Abstract

Exploring Victim Advocates' Perceptions of Tennessee's Human  
and Sex Trafficking Laws and Programs

by

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MA, Walden University, 2015

BS, Troy University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2024

## Abstract

Human and sex trafficking is a widespread problem that is viewed as modern day slavery in all 50 states. Women and girls are at greater risk, but no one is exempt. Human and sex traffickers are motivated by the vulnerability of their victims, who typically have no family connections, and face other challenges, such as homelessness and drug addiction. An understanding of victim advocates perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in the state of Tennessee is unknown and requires further research to define and guide stakeholders' work and to determine if Tennessee laws and programs are effective and if modifications can be made. The theoretical framework for this study is the normalization process theory. The research questions addressed victims' advocates perceptions on human and sex trafficking, preventative measures, and how to enhance/support victims of trafficking in Tennessee. I collected data through semi-structured interviews via video conference or telephone. Participants was victim advocates across fields, such as law enforcement, mental health, health care, and nonprofits, in the state of Tennessee who had a background or who experienced working with human and sex trafficking victims for at least five years. Data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software and deductive and thematic coding techniques. The findings yielded recommendations for human trafficking stakeholders to improve laws and programs for victims who had experienced trauma, mental despair, difficulty maintaining healthy relationships, shame of experience, and trust issues when dealing with victims' advocates and law enforcement.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my study to my dad, Bobbie Lee Newsome (rest in peace 2011). He pushed me to continue with my education when I was caring for him and my children. He saw a drive in me when I didn't see it for myself. Thanks, Dad, for always believing in me and my success. I truly miss you.

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I would like to give thanks to my kids: Porshia, Iran, and Devante for always prepping me to wake up and keep going. Thanks for believing in me and making sure I stayed focused. I would like to give a shout out to my husband Mario who dealt with my long days and nights and never gave up on me. I would like to give thanks to Dr. Blackmon, Dr. Kurst-Swanger and Dr. Williams at Walden University for being available and offering all resources to get me to the point of accomplishment. Lastly, I would like to give thanks to my friend, Romona Johnson, for helping me to get back on track after the feeling of defeat set in. I appreciate each and everything you did. I have learned in life professionalism and kind words make oneself push towards greater heights.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In response to federal mandates, states across the United States had established key legislation to combat human trafficking in recent decades. The current anti-trafficking efforts, to date, included stronger penalties for traffickers; federal prosecution in trafficking cases; financial resources for local, state, and federal anti-trafficking efforts; and protection and support resources for survivors of human trafficking (Hedlin, 2017). States are required to prosecute human trafficking by law; but human trafficking identification is not well developed or defined. Human trafficking crimes are secretive in nature; consequently, victims are typically unidentified, inaccurately identified, or undetected altogether (Minnesota Statistical Analysis, 2017).

According to The Human Trafficking Report of Minnesota, there wasn't a consistent method for tracking data on human trafficking victims in the U.S., and the limited data collected was only compiled every two years. In Tennessee, there were a total of 173 cases reported for human and sex trafficking as of October 2022 (Tennessee Statistical Analysis, 2022). Victims were often susceptible to crimes because of their vulnerabilities, such as homelessness, poverty, drug abuse, and lack of family connections.

Inconsistencies with federal compliance among states added to the problem of inadequate sex trafficking victim identification (Meads, 2017). Despite the federal law, Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, focused on victim's rights while

children under age 18 were treated as criminals instead of victims and continually prosecuted for prostitution (Meads, 2017). One major problem with enforcing the TVPA was inconsistencies in the age of sexual consent among state laws (Meads, 2017). The inconsistencies in the age to consent to sex prevented accurate recognition of sex trafficking victims (McDonald, 2018). For instance, Minnesota's legal age for sexual consent is 18; New York State's age for consent is 17; and Texas's age for sexual consent is age 14 (Meads, 2017). Since 2013, only 18 current states had established safe harbor laws. In 2014, only 31 states had enacted safe harbor laws (Meads, 2017).

Meads (2017) described the variations in treatment of sex trafficking victims between federal and state governments, which had resulted in child criminalization for prostitution. Federal law recognized child victims and prohibited child prosecution for prostitution (Meads, 2017). On the contrary, state governments typically prosecuted children for prostitution (Meads, 2017). Despite federal law decriminalizing children for sex trafficking, states were rarely penalized for non-compliance with TVPA (Meads, 2017). Anti-trafficking advocates voiced concerns about the low motivation of law enforcement personnel which enforced the mandates of TVPA (Meads, 2017).

This phenomenological study was designed to explore victims' advocates' perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in the state of Tennessee. It was important to understand how the laws were carried out from the perspectives of those who supported victims and worked to improve anti-trafficking policies. The results of the study may have implicated creation of and revising policies, educating the law

enforcement community on how to identify and support victims as victims, and not as criminals and provided a framework on how to better support victims' advocates in their work.

This chapter includes an overview of the study, including background information, purpose, significance, and nature of the study; theoretical framework and research questions; definitions of key terms; and the scope, delimitations, assumptions, and limitations.

### **Background**

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 was established to eliminate international trafficking, domestic United States trafficking, and to criminalize traffickers (Perry, 2018). Nevertheless, implementation and enforcement efforts had been ineffective. Problems with implementation and enforcement were due to lack of accountability and complexity of human and sex trafficking laws. Roby and Vincent (2017) stated that domestic minor sex trafficking wasn't addressed in the TVPA until 2013. Emphasis on trafficking of children increased with implementation of the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act in 2015 (Roby & Vincent, 2017). The TVPA recognized a child as anyone under age 18, as victims of human trafficking. For that reason, Safe Harbor Laws were enacted for the protection of juvenile trafficking victims (Roby & Vincent, 2017). The Safe Harbor Laws mandated protection of juveniles from prostitution criminalization and professional treatment for possible effects of trauma associated with human trafficking (Roby & Vincent, 2017).

Emphasis addressed the problem of human sex trafficking which began in recent decades in the United States (Baird, 2019). Sex trafficking is world renown while neighboring countries has organized efforts to mitigate its impact, particularly in matters involving exploitation of children (Baird, 2019). Due to the strengthening of laws and law enforcement on sex trafficking, there have been an increase in arrests for prostitution (Baird, 2019). Consequently, more children are criminalized rather than identified as victims of trafficking. An additional problem was law enforcement agencies' inability to identify sex trafficking victims versus criminals of prostitution (Baird, 2019).

According to Cockrain and Bowers (2019), human trafficking today centered around women and girls, leaving male victims and other trafficking types overlooked. The response to human trafficking offenses, other than sex offenses, remained underdeveloped. Researchers studied internet-enabled sex trafficking, white slave trade, prostitution, and human organ harvesting (McDonald, 2018). A recent development focused on the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) legislation of 2018, which aimed to target internet crimes. The main goal of SESTA/FOSTA was to prevent online exploitation of individuals which led to more undetected crimes (Micetic, 2017).

Human trafficking is considered a broad area that included different types of exploitation. The gap in literature included examining similarities and differences between those trafficked for sexual exploitation; domestic and labor exploits; examining



the mental health needs of trafficked survivors, and the challenges of working with once trafficked victims.

Studies have examined the issues in other countries and less still is known about commercial sex trafficking in the state of Tennessee and how sex trafficking laws helped to protect women victims and what advocacy programs exist. The research gap identifies the phenomenon on how victims of human and sex trafficking in Tennessee described their experiences from the perceptions of victims' advocates when supporting victims, while working to improve policies, and informing them of existing mandates that relate to mentoring, counseling, leadership, housing, and advocacy in private/public sectors in Tennessee.

### **Problem Statement**

The state of Tennessee had a total of 165 human trafficking cases in 2022 at the time of this study (Hotline Statistics/National Human Trafficking Hotline by State, 2022). Human trafficking still is a worldwide problem. Tennessee law officials recognized traffickers' presence in every social, ethnic, and racial makeup. The problem with human trafficking is that it has become more prevalent due to exploiting and enslaving victims in Tennessee. Tennessee is renowned for country music in Nashville which makes it a huge tourism attraction site for visitors. Traffickers blend in with residents and prey on individuals whom they found in Tennessee who are homeless, jobless or don't have strong family support. Tennessee huge drug population lead to problems with employment and stable housing due to felony convictions. This led to problems with

stability and providing for themselves or other dependents. Traffickers introduced themselves as financial relievers or support mechanisms for individuals under 18. The laws of Tennessee are not fully designed to help women and children who are victims of human trafficking. There was very little knowledge or safe houses which assisted drug dependent individuals or juveniles of truancy except incarceration. There are only three safe houses for women in the 93 counties in the state of Tennessee. Davidson County Sheriff Office mentors a program for mental health and drug dependent individuals once arrested for crimes due to homelessness but include incarceration from one day to five years served. Further studies centered on human trafficking in Tennessee would help victims and victims' advocates identify available resources/programs and understand how those policies helped or hindered victims of human trafficking. This phenomenological study helped to address ways to prevent sex trafficking and yielded recommendations that enhanced the support provided to women of sex trafficking in the state of Tennessee. There was a gap in the literature based on how victim advocates perceived the implementation of laws and programs in Tennessee.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to explore victims' advocates' perception of Tennessee's human trafficking laws and available resources provided to victims, while gaining a better understanding of what could be done to improve support to victims across the state. Victim advocates are trained professionals who supported victims of crime by offering emotional support, victim's

rights information, helped in finding needed resources, assisted in filling out crime related forms, accompanied through the criminal proceedings, and other duties deemed appropriate (Clark, 2019). The goal was to collect rich data through interviews of victims' advocates, which included law enforcement personnel and healthcare professionals in the state of Tennessee who advocated for human and sex trafficking victims.

### **Research Questions**

There were three research questions for the study:

1. What are victims' advocates' perceptions on human trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee?
2. What could be done to help prevent or mitigate human trafficking incidents across the state of Tennessee?
3. What could be done to enhance/support women victims of sex trafficking in Tennessee?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was framed within the normalization process theory, which was based on the normalization process model by Carl R. May (May et al., 2018). The normalization process theory explained that practices became embedded or normalized when people within organizations worked together collaboratively to enforce them (May, Cummings, & Finch, 2018). The purpose of this study, normalization of anti-sex trafficking laws was analyzed for efficacy in practices and the intended outcome of the

law. The normalization process model was used to analyze how anti-sex trafficking laws were introduced. The study did explore how victims' advocates worked within their organizations and collaborated with others on the implementation of sex trafficking laws and explored stakeholders' perception of implementation. A more detailed explanation of the normalization process theory is included in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

Human trafficking is a global problem that continued to threaten the safety and overall human rights of individuals (Gerassi & Nichols, 2018). Federal and state legislation had changed over time, particularly to protect individuals from sex trafficking. The purpose of this study was to explore developments of anti-human trafficking efforts and the extent of the legislative impact while protecting individuals from sexual exploitation and criminalization. This phenomenon led to the qualitative research paradigm because there was a need to obtain in-depth data about the issues that victims' advocates faced and gleaned recommendations from experts through the lens of their lived experiences. Findings from this study will inform research on anti-sex trafficking efforts and the charge to further protect individuals from the effects of sexual exploitation and criminalization due to commercial sex. This qualitative phenomenological study included 11 semi-structured interviews by victims' advocates which consisted of law enforcement personnel, health professionals, social workers, and representatives from non-governmental organizations that advocated for the abolition of sex trafficking among

women and children. Data was analyzed which yielded themes and recommendations to improve policy and practice.

### **Definitions**

The following terms were used consistently throughout the phenomenological study. These common words or phrases were used differently throughout the text.

Definitions listed below help simplify word meaning.

*Anti-trafficking*: Referred to attempts to stop human and sex trafficking from occurring, such as laws, policies, and programs (McGuire, 2019).

*Human Trafficking*: The act of kidnapping which removed someone from their position by force or coercion to make them work or perform sexual acts at the demand of someone else without consent (Hedlin, 2017).

*Human Trafficking Stakeholders*: Referred to victim advocates, law enforcement personnel, counselors, or anyone who had an interest in assisting victims of human and sex trafficking with laws and programs which benefited success (Baird, 2019).

*Safe Harbor Laws*: A safety net that assisted victims of human and sex trafficking which protected them from being forced to commit a sexual act without consent which include up to deadly force (Perry, 2018).

*Sex Trafficking*: Movement of victims to various perpetrators for sexual acts without their consent which result in a profit (Perry, 2018).

*TVPA or Tracking and Violence Protection Act of 2000*: A federal statute that provided a framework to help identify victims of trafficking (Baird, 2019).

*Victim Advocates:* People put in place to speak on behalf of or defend the victim in any setting and present resources to assist in recovery (McGuire, 2019).

### **Assumptions**

There are several research assumptions in the study. Most importantly, human trafficking always has been a violent crime and always involves commercial sex. It was assumed that women and girls could be victims and survivors of sex trafficking, which included trafficking across state or national borders. The interview method assumed that participants would be open and informative about their experiences. Furthermore, there lay an assumption that the results of the study were applicable to states other than Tennessee. Lastly, the result of this study implicates improved public administration policies, with feedback to Tennessee state law enforcement divisions, improved housing units, increased mental awareness and physical health and developed long-term sustainable solutions for victims' support.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The primary focus of the study was the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Act (2000) and safe harbor laws to protect minors by categorizing any individual under age 18 involved in commercial sex activity as a victim instead of a criminal of prostitution. Implementation of law and policies was analyzed to determine to what extent guidelines are followed in the state of Tennessee. In this case, analysis of the degree of protection that the Trafficking in Persons Act (2000) and Safe Harbor Laws provided for minors under age 18. Additionally, this study was used to analyze the

levels at which support services are offered to sex trafficking victims. This study explored these issues through the lenses of victims' advocates. This study was limited to participants who worked in the state of Tennessee. Participants included victims' advocates from a variety of settings and professions, such as law enforcement personnel, social workers, health and mental health professionals, and community advocates. This study did not investigate human trafficking that involved forced labor of adults in any work capacity.

### **Limitations**

Due to the secretive nature of human and sex trafficking, many data sources were incomplete and unreliable. The study was limited to the perspectives of the participants and their individual and collective experiences. This study explored issues associated with human and sex trafficking policies and programs in Tennessee and was not generalizable to other states or settings. This study was limited by participants' perspectives on the topic and job-related duties and responsibilities associated with human trafficking and sex-related crimes. This study was limited by participants' interpretation of interview questions. This study was also limited by the small population sample size, as the population consisted of 11 interview participants. This qualitative study was limited in validity and reliability because the study was difficult to replicate as the study was conducted with participants from various types of organizations. Therefore, populations or demographics and organizational settings did vary.

### **Significance**

Historically, the primary focus within the United States had been the prevention of human trafficking and protecting the rights of women (Farrell, Bright, de Vries, Pfeffer & Dank, 2019). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000 was developed to oversee and combat trafficking in persons (Farrell et al, 2019). Several reauthorizations of the federal law occurred since 2000 and the current significant legislation was comprised of the safe harbor laws that protected children from criminalization in prostitution (Farrell et al, 2019). The cut off age for children to give consent to sexual activity varies from state to state (Meads, 2017). The federal safe harbor laws indicated that any individual under age 18 is considered a child and a victim of human trafficking (Meads, 2017). Even though federal law mandated that children be recognized as victims instead of criminals in prostitution, many states and stakeholders had varying viewpoints on the age in which a person is considered victimized or criminalized (Meads, 2017). For example, the cut-off age for safe harbor in New York was 16. In Texas, the cut-off age was 14 (Meads, 2017). These discrepancies in state safe harbor statutes resulted in children being prosecuted as prostitution criminals instead of victims of sex trafficking (Roby & Vincent, 2017). For these reasons, the safety of children, particularly related to child sex trafficking, was at stake (Roby & Vincent, 2017). There were several cases across the United States that received national coverage. One particular case was concerning a Virginia man who was sentenced to 25 years in 2018 imprisonment for producing images of personal sexual abuse to a child.



Marcellin (2019) discussed domestic minor trafficking, which involved United States policy that defined sexual exploitation as the force or coercion of individuals under age 18 for financial or other gain. Roby and Vincent (2017) explained that states responded differently to federal guidelines for human trafficking. The authors suggested that despite the TVPA 2000 federal mandate, minimal compliance and accountability existed.

Marcellin (2019) spoke of limited research or reliable data for sex trafficking. Farrell et al. explained the gap in knowledge of how law enforcement implemented human trafficking directives. The authors alluded to focus on enforcement of prostitution law that took precedent over implementation of human trafficking laws. Marcellin pointed out the overlapping responsibility of identifying sex trafficking victims involved in commercial sex and recognizing prostitution offenders. Marcellin (2019) explained that little was known about the impact of federal and state human trafficking laws on prostitution enforcement. Findings from the study did provide insight on how laws were implemented and promoted recommendations for increased consistency with policy implementation and access to resources.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore victims' advocates' perception of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in the state of Tennessee. The role of the advocates considered was essential to understand and gain insight into the victim population, who had and still face challenges due to not having proper resources in place. This study did attempt to fill gaps in the literature by exploring

the phenomenon within the state of Tennessee and allowed the perspectives of victim advocates to develop recommendations for combatting the problem of human and sex trafficking.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling methods, which started with direct invitations to professional contacts who fitted the study criteria, then asked for referrals (snowball sampling). The study population included victim advocates from various fields, such as law enforcement and healthcare, who currently or previously held such positions in the state of Tennessee within the past five years. Interviews were conducted via telephone or video conferencing. The data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to discover themes and recommendations. The research implicated for increased support to human and sex trafficking victims, developed more efficient policies, and trained and engaged human trafficking stakeholders.

This chapter included introductory and background information, key definitions, the purpose and nature of the study, and limitations. Chapter 2 provides a detailed description of the theoretical framework, the literature search strategy, and the literature review. Chapter 3 highlights the research design, rationale, and methodology, including data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore victims' advocates' perception of Tennessee's human and sex trafficking laws and programs. Perceptions was captured from advocates who directly supported women and children's survivors of human trafficking. Limited research on experiences of human trafficking victims and their advocates have been conducted by law enforcement and advocates in different regions of the United States. The violence and abuse that accompany human trafficking result in health and social problems, such as stigma and shame for individuals who have been trafficked (Viergever, Thorogood, & Durand, 2019). There was a gap in the literature on how victim advocates perceived laws and programs within the state of Tennessee. The current literature comprised the effects of current anti-human trafficking law and policy, areas for improvement in anti-trafficking law and policies, evaluation of state safe harbor laws, victim identification, and enforcement of policies for victim support. The literature implied that future law warranted change in legislation that included prevention of online sex trafficking. A synthesis of the literature began with a review of previous anti-human trafficking legislation signed into law.

This chapter includes a description of the literature search strategy and theoretical foundation, a literature review of the research describing state law and policy regarding human and sex trafficking, data on human trafficking cases, and challenges that human trafficking victims face, particularly within the state of Tennessee. The body of literature

in this analysis of United States child protection laws and anti-human trafficking surrounded the removal of the United States domestic law and policies, consistency in safe harbor laws, policies for sex trafficking victim support, sex trafficking victim identification, minorities, and sex trafficking.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Sources for this literature review were obtained by searching the internet and the following databases: Walden library, Google Scholar, Thoreau Multi-Database, ProQuest Central, and Sage Publications. In search of related literature, terms used included *child sex trafficking*, *Tennessee human trafficking*, *Tennessee human and sex trafficking*, *victim's advocates*, *victimization*, *trauma*, *human trafficking stakeholders*, *phenomenology*, *anti-trafficking*, *normalization process theory*, *commercial sex*, *safe harbor laws*, and *anti-trafficking laws*.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This phenomenological study was aligned with the normalization process theory, which provided a framework for exploring how the implementation of Tennessee state laws and programs factored into victims' advocates perceptions whether they helped or hurt victims of human trafficking. The normalization process theory identified, characterized, and explained key mechanisms that promote and implement complex interventions within a body of literature (May et al., 2018).

The intent of the normalization theory was to provide a framework of how victims of human trafficking victims were identified, how laws and programs in Tennessee were

implemented, how the perceptions of advocates were used to integrate new practices with the laws and policies in Tennessee in diverse settings with tools that introduced and implemented change. The normalization process theory aligned with this study because it was relevant to policy implementation and organizational systems and attempted to explain the perceptions from advocates in Tennessee on human and sex trafficking survivors who received and further needed to be productive after victimization. In addition, the crime of human and sex trafficking was still current, and victims' advocates perception of the laws and programs in place whether they helped or hurt victims due to shame or being ridiculed for their experience was a factor.

Victims of human and sex trafficking were looked at as an aggressor versus a victim. The perceptions of their peers were not supportive, and they often relied on advocates to speak and rally their support through laws and programs. Hung (2021) wrote a qualitative analysis in the normalization process theory reflected on *Tortured between Two Hells* in which a study was done on brides trafficked from Myanmar to China between 2000 and 2019. There were young girls in the study that were wrongly told by family friends that they would be given a childcare job paying well in Myanmar and was later sold to families in China as a bride. Once purchased, these women were held in a captive state and used for sexual favors and forced labor. Some of the women trafficked had children from their captors. Some of the women were interviewed and thus stated that they were left to survive until they returned to Myanmar from being trafficked and left in desperation. Hung (2021) stated that between 100 and 200 female trafficking victims

were returned from China each year. In this qualitative study, the results yielded that many cases were never reported, many were never found, and many kept their experience secretive out of shame and fear.

Most victims interviewed stated they were sold between \$300 to \$13,000 United States currency. Hung (2021) stated that of the survivors interviewed, fifteen were recruited by friends, twelve by an acquaintance, one sold from a bible school friend, another recruited by a thirteen-year-old girl she knew, and six were recruited and sold by their own relatives. Survivors stated they were drugged and woke up in a locked room. This normalization theory reflected on program implementation how victims were identified and integrated into trafficking and displayed cognitive participation in the study conducted. Johnson (2012) wrote a normalization process theory-based article on Aftercare for Survivors of Human Trafficking, which reflected on victims understanding of accepting mental health care after being traumatized. This article explained how most aftercare shelters are government operated which offered quality care but limited resources, which only provided care for a few survivors at once. Johnson stated that aftercare facilities have become community based where children survivors could be cared for by family or foster homes. Those community-based facilities allowed for re-entry back into the community and allowed for weekly visits and service management from advocates.

Johnson (2012) stated that working with survivors of human trafficking through aftercare was trivial and had little standardized care for trauma informed victims. This

article reflected on the normalization process by coherence and reflexive monitoring by daily activities which created and established long term care for victims of human trafficking by making them the overall project to build on program implementation. Liverseed (2018) wrote a normalization process theory on Implementation of Human Trafficking Response Reproductive Healthcare Setting in which the researcher wrote about the impact of Clinician Preparedness on identified victims of human trafficking due to lack of knowledge. Liverseed stated that healthcare workers weren't successful in identifying victims to human trafficking due to lack of knowledge and awareness to successfully intervene. Healthcare workers associated health concerns of human trafficking victims with an influx of injuries, diseases, poor dental health, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancies, forced abortions, affective disorders including anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, bad sleeping patterns, human immunodeficiency virus and increased risks of suicidal tendencies.

Liverseed (2018) stated that victims often went to healthcare settings to obtain birth control and got abortions, but healthcare providers don't ask the questions needed to intervene and end the cycle the victim experience. This normalization article reflected how embedded and integrated techniques from advocates in the healthcare field detected and correctly identified the signs and symptoms of abuse and reported the findings to the appropriate personnel when treating potential victims of human trafficking based off policy and program implementation. Dalkin, Hardwick, Haighton and Finch (2021) wrote a systematic review on combining realist approaches and normalization process theory to

understand implementation. Dalkin, et al., focus was to see how the realist approach and normalization were combined and how it unveiled the problems associated with implementation.

The realist approach gave a better understanding of causation and how policies, programs and interventions achieved their outcome and became normalized. This review reflected on when using a combination of the realist approach with the normalization theory showed advanced knowledge in a theoretical setting while implemented program results presented. Mackenzie, Bradley, Stanley, Gannon, Barton, Cosgrove, Conway and Feder (2019) wrote a case study about what might normalization process theory brought to policy implementation studies. Mackenzie, et al., stated that contradictions existed when implementing broader policy when dealing with human and non-human individuals when in a normalization process. The study was done based off implemented policy changes and predictions in the study which proved inaccurate with results by human and non-human interactions.

This case study was based off implementing new policies as it related to laws and procedures which attempted a case study of certain populations for field results based off change when interacting with victims of human trafficking. McEvoy, Ballini, Maltoni, O'Donnell, Mair, and MacFarlane (2014) did a qualitative systematic review of studies using the normalization process theory to research implementation processes. McEvoy, et al., stated they conducted a qualitative systematic review of peer reviewed literature which identified the implementation process using multiple stakeholders for research



based on the English language published from 2006 to 2012 with significance to familiarization, identification of thematic framework, index, chart, mapping, and interpretation.

This qualitative review was based off policy implementation as it related to the present study based on perspectives of laws and policy in human trafficking. Murray, Treweek, Pope, MacFarlane, Ballini, Dowrick, Finch, Kennedy, Mair, O'Donnell, Ong, Rapley, Rogers and May (2010) wrote an article on normalization process theory: a framework for developing, evaluating, and implementing complex interventions. Murray, et al., stated that the normalization process theory acted as a sensitizing tool while acting as a multitasker for evaluation and design while highlighting problems while recruiting candidates for research during the data collection phase. The complex problems were healthcare components which acted as dependent or independent components during qualitative methods. This research studied by Murray, et al., determined gaps with health-related policy and practice which related to the current study based off policy implementation of laws and programs in place for survivors of human and sex trafficking.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review section introduces laws as it related to human and sex trafficking which gave a better knowledge of the present laws in place in which victims are governed and advocates must follow when advocating for survivors. This section details anti-trafficking legislation, safe harbor laws, refined United States domestic law and policies, policies for sex trafficking victim support, sex trafficking victim

identification, sex trafficking cases and minorities and sex trafficking. Tennessee has several laws centered around human trafficking. Human trafficking was considered modern-day slavery because victims are often subjected to involuntary force, unintentional fraud or coercion for any purpose centered around sex. Senate Bill 1115 Public Charter 363 removed the statute of limitations for human trafficking for a commercial sex act (Hounmenou, 2018). Senate Bill 188 Public Charter 115 Law allowed human trafficking victims to use force that could result in serious bodily injury or death in situations where they are being trafficked. Senate Bill 214 Public Charter 246 prevented minors who are victim of human trafficking from being prosecuted for prostitution. House Bill 2147 Senate Bill 2400 allowed for the victim testimony outside of the courtroom from age 13 to 18. House Bill 1416 Senate 1378 created a Class A felony for aggravated human trafficking and specified release eligibility for the person who committed the offense. The Tennessee law enforcement community joined with victim advocates by safeguarding the victim's right to tell. The notion of not being oppressed due to the nature of the crime created a unique challenge for prosecutors because the crime may be several years old but still prosecutable. Prosecution brought relief to the victims, victims' families, and victims' advocates.

According to the Human Rights Commission of San Francisco, California, (2022) the most specified forms of human trafficking were sexual, labor, and financial bondage. First, human and sex trafficking was a crime where force, fraud or persuasion was used to get another to sell sex (Hounmenou, 2018). Human and sex trafficking was a growing

business referred to as Modern Day Slavery. Second, forced labor occurred when individuals were provided work or services using force against their will (McDonald, 2018). Women and girls forced into human and sex trafficking, migrants in money shortages and field laborers are paid small fees which made them lack funding resources (McDonald, 2018). In June 2022, the American Civil Liberties Union found that nearly 800,000 prisoners out of 1.2 million in state and federal prisons were forced to work, which generated \$11 billion annually in goods and services while average wages ranged from \$0.13 to \$0.52 per hour (Clark, 2019). The Department of Corrections in Tennessee paid their offenders an average of \$0.17 to \$1.30 an hour to perform various job functions during their incarceration. Lastly, debt bondage was exchanged for a debt which could never be repaid (McDonald, 2018). Workers were convinced they were working off debt. Financial bondage was a process in which traffickers sought out individuals and confined them into human trafficking (Clark, 2019). Nevertheless, the varying types of trafficking expanded the knowledge base of victims' advocates collective knowledge and their perceptions.

The 2022 Trafficking Persons Report stated, "Governments and businesses improved their ability to identify human and sex trafficking victims focus were on abuse of power, discrimination, debt bondage, and coercion that kept workers embodied, rather than physical abuse" (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Tennessee human and sex trafficking laws and programs were designed to allow victim advocates and other stakeholders modified interactions to meet common interests, overcame challenges and

offered online human trafficking courses for self-learning while deleting pre-existing attitudes or beliefs (O'Brien and Li, 2020).

Studies documented the physical, psychological, and socioeconomic harm caused by exploitation which adversely affected women and children (Baird, 2019). Wilson (2020), in her qualitative study on counselor preparedness when working with survivors of human and sex trafficking, used victim advocates as a voice to marginalize the suffering of victims. Wilson explained that victims of human and sex trafficking; particularly in treatment, are expressed complex trauma and counselor's maybe unprepared to work with survivors. McDonald (2018) conceptualized her qualitative study on fear within victims and the safety of people in community from being sought out by aggressors in which stakeholders' importance identified victims properly and implicated for positive change by incorporated collaboration amongst all stakeholders. Domoney, Howard, Abas, Broadbent, and Oram (2015), in their qualitative study of mental health service responded to human and sex trafficking, provided insight on the high prevalence of mental health disorder amongst trafficked people and the services offered by therapists to aid in recovery after being victimized which elevated to a level of stability to cope in the world from a victim advocate perception.

This phenomenological study was appropriate for exploring victim advocates perceptions of Tennessee human and sex trafficking laws and programs. This study did help to create a foundation for interpreting and instituting the challenges and identification of human and sex trafficking victims that have been victimized. In addition,

the phenomenological design of the present study did align with human and sex trafficking misconception, which provided victim advocates and Tennessee law enforcement community which provided a voice for victims of human and sex trafficking identify with coping mechanisms. Furthermore, this study allowed participants an opportunity to share detailed experiences of what they encountered when offering services to victims of human trafficking.

The research questions for this study were organized to gain insight on victim advocates perceptions and ways to prevent future occurrences by building a vocal bridge to give insight to treatment and programs for success. Additionally, participants took part in answering the research questions in hopes of contributing feedback to Tennessee state law enforcement training classes, particularly, in the areas of identification and prevention methods with defined strategies that target potential human and sex trafficking victims.

### **Anti-Trafficking Legislation**

#### **Safe Harbor Laws**

Safe harbor laws are designed to steer arrests of minors from sexual exploitation and deter them away from the juvenile justice system and perpetual police harassment. Safe harbor laws provide protection from legal liability when certain conditions are met, and the premise that state interventions are effective remedies to violent bonds between traffickers and victims (Hounmenou, 2018). Victims are usually exposed to sexual

exploitation when interacting with runaway peers, homeless individuals, or minors introduced to sexual exploitation in foster care (Perry, 2018).

Roby and Vincent (2017) explained how federal and state policy had evolved over recent decades. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 stated any individual under age 18 who are sexually exploited were considered human and sex trafficking victims and not criminals. In 2015, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act were enacted to outline social service support and human and sex trafficking victims (Perry, 2018). With current laws, prosecution and punishment and resources for victims had been sparse. Legislators and advocates worked to establish laws that effected the fight on human and sex trafficking crime. The primary purposes of current antihuman trafficking policies were to protect victims, prosecute traffickers, prevent labor and human and sex trafficking (Roby & Vincent, 2017). Previous law and policies were refined to eliminate suspected traffickers' excuses of being unaware of the victims' age. Safe harbor laws resulted in increased arrests of minors for prostitution, extended court supervision and institutionalism, perpetual police harassment, and limited support for human and sex trafficking victims (Hounmenou, 2018).

Finigan-Carr, Johnson, Pullmann, Stewart, and Fromknecht (2019) discussed current legislation and policy promoted prosecution of prostitution. Arrests for prostitution overshadowed human and sex trafficking prevention, protection of victims, and prosecution of trafficking criminals. The authors furthered suggested that any protection or law enforcement cooperation occurred only in exchange for cooperation

with investigations implied that anti-human and sex trafficking efforts had resulted in increased prostitution arrests, a disproportionate number of arrests of women, arrests of trafficking victims, and only a small number of arrests of human traffickers. Finigan-Carr et al. suggested that the flaws of Safe Harbor Laws made this legislation failed to protect youth from human and sex trafficking or arrests.

Blanton, Blanton, and Peksen (2020) explained why human and sex trafficking was extremely difficult to prevent. Blanton et al., claimed that corruption among legal systems, border control, and law enforcement allowed human traffickers to operate with the least possible consequences. For instance, policymakers were made to be financially persuaded to ignore enforced laws against businesses that conducted prostitution. Border authorities accepted incentives which allowed victims to be transported illegally between countries. Policemen may be inclined to accept incentives to inform criminals of raids. Corruption weakens anti-human and sex trafficking efforts and laws.

Findings of Blanton et al., showed that countries with strong fiscal capacity are at low risk of being nations that are sources for labor trafficking or prostitution. Blanton et al., also found a significantly positive association between democratic nations and forced prostitution. Additionally, the study showed nations that adopted United Nations Trafficking Protocol strongly associated with being human and sex trafficking sources. In these countries, workers' rights are not respected, and gender economic discrimination is widely evident. As a result, citizens of these countries seek refuge in foreign countries to better their circumstances.

### **Refining U.S. Domestic Law and Policies**

Many U.S. states had safe harbor laws pertained to anti-human and sex trafficking. The problem lies with the scope and strength of each state's laws. Variation in scope and strength of state laws resulted in over-criminalization of human and sex trafficking victims and under-criminalization of human and sex traffickers (Baird, 2019). The Polaris Project 2002 and the Shared Hope International 1998 organizations were the national authorities against human and sex trafficking. Polaris Project and Share Hope International used rating and grading systems to evaluate each state's anti-human and sex trafficking laws. Tennessee anti-human and sex trafficking laws reflected on the degree of effectiveness in (1) criminalization of domestic minor sex trafficking, (2) effectiveness for criminal provisions addressing sex purchasers, (3) criminal provisions for traffickers, (4) effectiveness of protective provisions for the child victims, (5) criminal provisions for facilitators, and (6) criminal justice tools for investigation (Kelly, 2019).

Human trafficking laws continued to evolve since the enactment of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act in 2000. A more recent development in the TVPA specified that all children under age 18 whom had been convinced to participate in commercial sex treated as human and sex trafficking victims. The TVPA guidelines also emphasized "survival sex" as a type of sex trafficking act whereas the victim exchanged sexual favors or pornography for acquisition of basic needs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017). The federal agency outlined support services for victims and strengthened penalties for traffickers.



The Child Welfare Information Gateway expounded upon Safe Harbor Laws and vacatur laws, or criminal acts that are annulled. Expungement of criminal records facilitated procurement of jobs and housing; affect immigration status, loan qualifications, and program eligibility.

Many of the United States areas had safe harbor laws pertaining to sex trafficking. The problem lies within the scope and strength of each state's laws. Variation in scope and strength of state laws resulted in overcriminalization of human and sex trafficking victims and criminalization of human and sex traffickers. The new safe harbor amendments classified minors 18 and under as victims of human and sex trafficking and prohibited criminalization of minors for prostitution (Baird, 2019). The amendments also declared felonies for individuals found making payments for commercial sex with minors at age 18 or younger (Baird, 2019).

The State of Tennessee strengthened its law for solicitation, inducement, and promotion of prostitution which included human and sex trafficking. Tennessee law stated that if a trafficker received, recruited, enticed, harbored, provided, or obtained any person to support prostitution, then the acts are considered sex trafficking (Kelly, 2019). There was an underrepresentation of sex traffickers and sex trafficking victims in Minnesota. There was no source of data in Minnesota on human and sex trafficking offenses that never received attention from law enforcement.

### **Policies for Sex Trafficking Victim Support**

Domestic views dismissed risk factors such as poverty, abuse, homelessness, race, and victim blaming as common barriers to proper human and sex trafficking victim identification (Seidman, 2019). Seidman determined the focus on services to victims was more effective than directing efforts toward punishing buyers of sex. Instead of making stronger penalties for sex traffickers. Seidman argued that sexually exploited children were better served with policies and laws that mandated education, healthcare, foster care while prohibited discrimination based on class, race, sex, or sexual orientation.

Vries, Nickerson, Farrell, Wittmer-Wolfe, and Bouche (2019) discussed how public opinion on anti-immigration influenced the level of advocacy for services for immigrants who are victims of sex trafficking. Vries et al., found that Republicans showed less interest in promoting services for immigrant victims of human trafficking. On the contrary, Blacks and Hispanics showed more interest in promoting services for individuals who are at risk of any human trafficking victimization (Vries, et al. 2019). For these reasons human and sex trafficking laws were shaped by public opinions on anti-immigration. If public opinion on anti-immigration was increased, then the focus on groups that were marginalized or disadvantaged do not become priorities in legislation. Vries et al., underscored how public interest in laws on human and sex trafficking are centered upon the traditional victims such as white women and children. Other marginalized groups were overlooked and were often deprived of services.

Perkins and Ruiz (2017) studied adjudicated minors involved in human and sex trafficking to determine the factors that led to involvement in commercial sex exploitation. The interviewees varied in age from 14 to 19. The participants were from diverse backgrounds with varying living environments. Findings of the study showed victims experienced physical abuse at home and endured sexual abuse. A percentage of victims reported no sexual or substance abuse but indicated that parents were involved in substance abuse. Participants admitted to being a runaway participant, homeless, or in foster care at one time. The study showed other living statuses for participants such as two-parent, single parent households or living with grandparents. Descriptive data of youth at risk of human and sex trafficking is important for services provided.

Gerrassi and Nichols (2018) conducted a study on coalitions and community-based reactions to human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. The study included 24 semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the study was to examine perspectives of coalition members and the influence on anti-human and sex trafficking work. The study sought to examine how participants' perspectives on religion, politics, feminist actions, and human and sex trafficking which resulted that with services in place did not deter the crime from happening and the community was not actively participating in identification, assistance, or deterrence methods.

### **Sex Trafficking Victim Identification**

Sukachand Gonzalez (2018) conducted a study on minor and adult domestic human and sex trafficking in the state of Ohio. The purpose of the study was to analyze

risk factors strongly associated with trafficking victims in Ohio. The risk factors examined in the study included juvenile detention, survival sex while running away, depression, difficulties in school, conflicts with parents, familial poverty, and experience in foster care. Study results showed that running away from home before involvement in sex work as the strongest predictor for human and sex trafficking victimization (42%) and familial poverty as the second strongest predictor (33%). For adult victims, the strongest predictor of human and sex trafficking victimization were school drop-out at 38 percent. For both study groups, drug and alcohol use were the strongest common risk factor associated with sex trafficking (48%).

Greenbaum (2017) discussed the importance of healthcare provider training in identification of human and sex trafficking victims at risk for human and sex trafficking. Goldberg, Houck, Kaplan, and Barron (2016) reported that 80% of youth sex trafficking victims received medical examinations one year before identification as a trafficking victim. The suspected victims visited emergency rooms or outpatient clinics for sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, physical and sexual injuries. Victims had previous pregnancies, depression, suicidal attempts, post-traumatic stress disorder, and negative behaviors. Suspected victims demonstrated temper tantrums, sleep disorders, anxiety, etc. Greenbaum pointed out the importance of healthcare providers to effectively identify human and sex trafficking victims and use these characteristics to make referrals for social services (Greenbaum, 2017).

Bouche (2018) conducted a study, titled *Survivor Insights*, which described the urgent events of Domestic Minors of Sex Trafficking. However, one in six entered sex trafficking by force between infancy and age 12. Findings also showed that DMST under age ten were sexually exploited by family members. The study detailed physical, verbal, and substance abuse experienced by DMST. The study also described the multiple buyers of commercial sex that the victims endured while trapped in trafficking. Bouche noted the post-traumatic effects of experiencing these circumstances.

Micetic (2017) alluded to the negative perspective on prostitution in the U.S. for decades. The subjective, negative perceptions of anyone involved in prostitution caused individuals to be judged without analysis of circumstances. Moreover, these individuals are often automatically labeled as criminals instead of victims. Roby and Vincent (2017) contended that the TVPA corrected the criminalization of minors under the age of 18, but consistency was needed at all state levels. The lack of consistency in state laws made it difficult to distinguish between criminals and victims of human and sex trafficking.

McGuire (2019) explained the critical impact misidentification of sex trafficked youth as criminals rather than victims. McGuire expressed that Domestic Human and Sex Trafficking victims were deemed as child prostitutes, which made the minor delinquent and subsequently placed in juvenile detention and the punitive system. These events significantly impacted a child's life because penalties were applied rather than rehabilitation. McGuire explained that DMST needed to be labeled as victims instead of criminals by policemen and child protective service employees. McGuire emphasized the

harm that the criminal justice system could create. For instance, victims could be traumatized by seclusion, deprivation of privacy, restraints, and verbal or physical aggression. McGuire explained that DMST victims needed therapy that was safe, trusting, and predictable.

Greeson, Treglia, Wolfe, and Wasch (2019) explored the relationship between vagrants and sex trafficking. The fear of being homeless was a tactic often used by traffickers who coerced victims to stay under their control (Greeson, et al., 2019). People who were homeless lacked a support system or desperate for work made it easy for the promises of others to exploit them for sex or work.

### **Sex Trafficking Cases**

Sprang (2018) explained that children are often exploited through commercial sex for money, drugs, shelter, or pornography to sell. Sprang also suggested that although familial sex trafficking of minors occurs, the crimes were usually reported as acts performed by boyfriends, pimps, or strangers. Furthermore, victims were less likely to report familial human and sex trafficking because the sex trading was means for survival. Sprang conducted a study on human and sex trafficking. Findings showed that nearly 40% of cases involved multiple children in a single family exposed to sexual exploitation. Findings also showed that 64.5% of human and sex trafficking cases involved the mother as the trafficker, 32% of cases involved the father as the trafficker, and 3.2% of cases involved other family members. Approximately 50% of the cases involved non-related individuals (Sprang, 2018).

About 64.5% of traffickers received criminal convictions; however, 30% received criminal convictions for human and sex trafficking. Approximately 60% of human and sex trafficking victims continued communication with traffickers even after being identified for engaging in commercial human and sex trafficking (Sprang, 2018). The following were examples of human and sex trafficking cases across the country, highlighting disparities in how policies were implemented and enforced.

Adolescents are frequently forced to work in brothels, massage parlors, strip clubs, and in escort services. There was a conviction of an Illinois woman for kidnapping and transportation of a minor with intent to engage in sexual activity.

### **Minorities and Sex Trafficking**

Lacey (2019) illuminated the relevance of the theoretical lenses, general systems theory, labeling theory, and structural functional theory in association with child protection laws and child sexual exploitation. Lacey further explained the potential consequences applied to the lives of individuals who are currently experiencing sex trafficking. Lacey claimed that missing children were often mislabeled as “runaways,” which profoundly affected a missing child’s case investigation and chances for recovery and return home. As the labeling theory implied that labeling a person deviant or criminal, labeling missing children as “runaways,” without verifying the accuracy of the status automatically endangered the child (Lacey, 2019).

Lacey (2019) asserted that minorities were especially endangered by mislabeling or stereotyping. Lacey explained that Black missing children were immediately

categorized as “runaways” and their cases received less attention from law enforcement and minimal media coverage, if any at all. Lacey contended that mislabeling was highly discriminatory and dangerous as it placed children at increased risk for being victims of sex trafficking. Lacey further argued that categorization of “runaways” should not be based upon age and race. The label “runaway” only applied as factual evidence presented and all missing children’s cases were to be treated as priority. Lacey also admonished legislation and policies that criminalized children who are status offenders or places recovered missing children in court systems. Lacey argued that court or detention center placement created unnecessary, negative records in children’s history. Instead, legislation was more effective when social services were mandated for at risk children and their families (Lacey, 2019).

Kelly (2019) identified how society often ignored crimes committed against women of color. Kelly described the notable case of Cyntoia Brown in Nashville, Tennessee who was forced into prostitution at a young age. Ms. Brown feared the endangerment of her life and consequently shot Johnny Allen, a 43-year-old who picked her up for commercial sex in 2004. Cyntoia Brown was tried as an adult and sentenced to life imprisonment for first degree murder and aggravated robbery. Ms. Brown’s life sentence was subsequently commuted by Tennessee Governor, Bill Haslam, in consideration of her rehabilitation and young age at the time of the crime. Advocates of the Women of Color Network, Inc. were disturbed that crimes against Cynthia Brown remain overlooked. Kelly cited a 1999 study that disclosed that victimized girls of color



are typically at risk of immediate placement in the criminal justice system and labeled as commercial sex offenders rather than white girls. Contrarily, white girls are immediately treated as victims and referred to child welfare and mental health services.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

To explore victim advocates perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in the state of Tennessee, this phenomenological study was based on the normalization process theory. Human and sex trafficking victims were legally bound by policies and environmental barriers that form challenges for their success. Victims experienced more turpitude as criminals and held a compelling stance when society does not view them as victims of a crime. Research on exploring victim advocates perception of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in the state of Tennessee was needed to see the perceptions of victims' advocates and law enforcement personnel related to victims after being victimized. There was a gap in the literature on how victim advocates partnered with law enforcement to bring relief to victims through housing, protection from laws not enforced and how human and sex trafficking policies influenced female victims of prostitution who may be seen as criminals. There were also research gaps in inadequate victim identification for law enforcement and victim service providers.

The present study on exploring victim advocates perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in the state of Tennessee attempted to fill several gaps. The study occurred in the state of Tennessee setting, and it included perceptions from participants who are or have served within the last 5 years as an advocate or stakeholder

and shared information about their role and perception. Additionally, participants were those who worked in various settings, such as counseling, law enforcement, and healthcare. To successfully explore this phenomenon and answer the proposed research questions, the current study is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Furthermore, results from this study may fill additional literature gaps related to existing barriers in providing direct services to human trafficking victims.

A detailed description of the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summary was in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

As of 2022, there was approximately 40.3 million children who were victims of human and sex trafficking (Blasey, 2020). Sex trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, thereby commercial sex was enacted by unlawful means in which the individual made to perform such acts is under 18 years of age (Farell, Dank, Kafafian, Lockwood, Pfeifer, Hughes, & Vincent, 2019). Human and Sex trafficking is considered the modern-day version of slavery. Since abrogation in 1865, slavery had only revolutionized into human and sex trafficking (Blasey, 2020). Human and sex trafficking made an estimated \$150 billion (about \$460 per person in the US), and 25% of the victims were children under age 18 (Blasey, 2020). Although new Federal human and sex trafficking laws and guidelines were established across the nation, children under age 18 continued to be arrested for prostitution instead of being recognized as a human and sex trafficking victim (Farell, et al., 2019). Consequently, more research was needed on how Federal sex trafficking laws affected law enforcement where prostitution laws and sex trafficking laws were implemented (Farell, et al., 2019).

Despite expedient and widespread changes that occurred among Federal human and sex trafficking laws stating that children under age 18 were categorized as human and sex trafficking victims instead of criminals, children continued to be arrested for prostitution (Kelly, 2019). The purpose of the proposed study was to analyze the current

levels of implementation of child protection laws related to how law enforcement and victim advocates supported human and sex trafficking victims. The proposed study was a qualitative phenomenology designed to explore human trafficking stakeholders' perceptions about the laws and programs that impacted victims across the state of Tennessee, including interviews of victims' advocates across various settings throughout the state. This chapter contained the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and a summary of the chapter.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

To explore the perceptions of victims' advocates and the law enforcement community within the state of Tennessee regarding human and sex trafficking victims, three research questions were addressed:

1. What are victims' advocates' perceptions about human trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee?
2. What could be done to help prevent or mitigate human trafficking incidents across the state?
3. What could be done to enhance/support women victims of sex trafficking in Tennessee?

There are several laws that applied to Tennessee human and sex trafficking. This includes House Bill 2592 and Senate Bill 2740 that require several departments in Tennessee to develop response teams for child sex trafficking cases. House Bill 2591 and

Senate Bill 2739 requires the Department of Children’s Services to provide resources and services to persons 18 to 24 who were victims of human and sex trafficking. House Bill 2113 and Senate Bill 2793 requires mandatory annual human trafficking training for Department of Corrections, The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, and the Department of Human Services personnel. Senate Bill 1656 and House Bill 1849 made records of human trafficking service providers records confidential. Senate Bill 2505 and Public Charter 1018 created a path for juvenile victims of human trafficking to have their records expunged. There were other laws that dated back to 2000.

Qualitative research relied on data generated by the researcher through first-hand participant observations, interviews, recordings, and documents in a natural setting (Laureate Education, 2020). The phenomenological approach was designed to understand the experiences they encountered with victims’ advocates and law enforcement after victimization. According to Sukach and Castaneda, (2018), “phenomenology was a descriptive live experience of an individual’s joy or trauma” (p.43). Engaging and withdrawal was also signs of phenomenology experiences.

The research questions were designed to capture information about the perceptions of laws, policies, and programs, as well as data about programs and services, along with recommendations for improvement. The present study included interviews conducted with victims’ advocates, including mental health counselors, alcohol and drug counselors, law enforcement personnel, and victims' advocates from non-governmental organizations that promoted anti-human and sex trafficking efforts among women and

children in an informal setting. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' perceptions on human and sex protection laws related to anti-human and sex trafficking. Semi-structured interview questions were used to allow study participants to elaborate on experiences and personal perspectives regarding human and sex protection laws associated with anti-human and sex trafficking efforts. Data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to capture themes and patterns, answer research questions and identify actions and recommendations about the phenomenon.

This chapter contains in-depth information on the study's research methods, the research design, role of the researcher, participant selection logic, data and collection analysis, and issue of trustworthiness.

### **Role of the Researcher**

For this phenomenological study, I served as the interviewer and analyst of data. Study participants were derived from behavior health counselors, alcohol and drug counselors, and law enforcement personnel who served as victim advocates across the state of Tennessee. I worked in several departments in her career since 2001 as a victim advocate providing direct support to human and sex trafficking victims over three states. I had no personal relationship with study participants. To control my bias, I described the procedures and explained within the interview sessions. I did not interview anyone she had supervised or worked with in the last five years to reduce further bias. I did conduct the participant check-in procedures with all interviewees which ensured accuracy in

reporting. I did the interviews without interrupting the participant. I displayed active listening skills while taking notes or recording the session.

### **Methodology**

Guillen and Elida (2019) explained that the phenomenological approach was a method for exploring radical concepts within the world to make meaning of experiences. This approach facilitated an analysis of extremely complex facets of human life. This research design fit the current study as the I studied how the perceptions of Tennessee law enforcement community and victims' advocates related to human and sex trafficking in Tennessee.

For this study, a phenomenological approach was used to explore Tennessee laws and programs on human trafficking from law enforcement and victims' advocates perceptions for identifying human and sex trafficking victims. This research informed the body of knowledge on levels of implementation of human and sex protection law enforcement related to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000 and Tennessee House Bill 1416.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The core of this study was to explore victim's advocates perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee. Therefore, the study population was victims' advocates from across the state of Tennessee who worked in various roles as human trafficking stakeholders. The participants were current or former employees of the government, nonprofit, or other relevant entities who interacted or encountered victims of

human and sex trafficking. The participants' roles were within law enforcement, healthcare, social work, policy, and advocacy professions.

Purposeful sampling was used to select study participants. Purposeful sampling was convenient and relevant to gathering data for analysis of implementation of human and sex trafficking laws and programs. Participants were selected from qualified applicants who work in the state of Tennessee. The study invitation (Appendix A) was sent to direct professional contacts who fit the study criteria and included a request to refer additional participants. Participants needed to confirm that they met the eligibility requirements by email. Study participants had to have a background in law enforcement, healthcare, social work, counseling and/or victims' advocates in a non-governmental agency in reference to protection laws and anti-human and sex trafficking. Participants who were confirmed to meet the study criteria agreed to do the interview with verbal consent and agreed to a Calendly link to schedule their interview via email. Participants had the flexibility to choose a Zoom video call or a phone call when selecting their preferred interview time. The Calendly system automatically generated a unique meeting identification and added the selected interview time and mode to both the researcher's and participants' calendars.

The goal was to generate at least ten participants that met the study criteria. The Zoom interviews were audio recorded using the features of the software. I administered the interview according to the Interview Protocol (Appendix B).



## **Instrumentation**

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. I developed interview questions that were created from relevant literature and resources, and the questions were designed to victims' advocates perceptions of Tennessee laws and programs, in accordance with the research questions. The questionnaire listed a total of 11 open-ended questions to gain as much rich data as possible which is included in Appendix B. Rafique (2020) stated that open-ended questions in a study created more experiences and streamlined single or multiple interviews with participants. Bhandari (2022) stated open-ended questions helped to explain how others experienced the world in their own words. The interview questions drafted met this methodology framework because it helped to identify the perceptions of advocates laws and programs in the state of Tennessee and gained insight as to what needs to be better aligned to assist survivors which implemented or acknowledged the study. Interviews were conducted via Zoom audio. This study on exploring victims' advocates perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee aimed to generate data to yield thick description of the phenomenon. Sources for developing interview questions included *The Crime of Human Trafficking: A Law Enforcement Guide to Identification and Investigation* (Enhancing Community trust: Proactive Approaches to Domestic and Sexual Violence, 2020). No participants were sought, and no study activities began until approval was granted from Walden University's Institutional Review Board.

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

I reached out to prospective participants by focused job titles in connection to human and sex trafficking, personal referrals, in-person meeting or via email to qualified candidates for study. The study invitation email was sent to professional contacts who were assumed to meet the study criteria, with a request for them to make referrals about additional participants (snowball sampling). Prospective participants expressed interest to me via email, and I confirmed that they met the study criteria, as well as sent the informed consent form via email. If a participant was not eligible to participate, I thanked them for their interest and dismissed them from the study. Upon receipt of the signed consent form or an email that stated “I Consent” from the participants, they were sent a Calendly link to schedule their Zoom or phone interview. Using Calendly did prevent issues with scheduling, as the software prevented double bookings or other overlaps. The software automatically generated a unique Zoom meeting credential for each participant, eliminating the need to manually create and send links. Zoom interviews were audio recorded. The study consisted of 10 participants, but the researcher sought out 12 qualified participants in the event of a cancellation and notified all participants via email if they were actively scheduled or on standby in the event of a cancellation. Once the consent and date of preference were received, participants were scheduled for their interview. If cancellation was done prior to interview, I would send a confirmation email and seek another qualified candidate from list of two standby candidates via email to see if they were still in agreement to take part in the study. If the standby candidate was

willing to do the study, I did follow the same procedures for consent and scheduling. No recruitment activities began until Walden University IRB granted approval for the study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

After Walden IRB approval was granted, and participants had been recruited, as described in the previous section, interviews were conducted. Each semi-structured interview followed the established interview protocol, which was included as Appendix B. Several types of data were collected, including the audio recordings of the participants' responses to the interview questions. From the recordings, transcripts were developed for analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcript for member checking, which generated additional data. I did take typed or handwritten notes to capture additional observations about the participants and the interviews. All interview recordings and any materials with personally identifiable information were saved as password-protected files, and paper documents were stored in a locked file cabinet.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Research was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software, such as NVIVO. The interview transcripts and notes, along with any additional info from member checking, were uploaded into the software for coding and analysis using both deductive and inductive methods. The first cycle of coding was completed using deductive techniques, starting with pre-established themes in which the researcher developed by looking at gaps in the literature based on eminent concern areas when advocates

encountered survivors of human and sex trafficking and what factors were not in place that could have been a preventative measure if the victim had stability and security prior to being targeted as a potential victim. The six themes were: 1) human and sex trafficking laws and policies, 2) counseling and mental health, 3) housing and homelessness, 4) risk factors, 5) programs and resources, and 6) advocacy. Direct quotes and responses from the transcripts were chosen and categorized within the six themes, noting that several responses would fit under more than one theme. After the initial coding and organizing of the data, the second cycle coding, which was inductive, had begun using the thematic analysis approach to discover further meaning and context of responses, which led to the generation of new themes and recommendations.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Research credibility was established by constantly comparing interview responses across participants and settings of transferability, dependability to answer questions and confirmability by completing the interview when scheduled. The findings were cross-referenced with current research to determine whether participants' responses were consistent with findings among related studies. My aim was to support the argument that the study findings after the interview with questions answered were worth paying attention to and had emphasis to make a change in the interaction and responses the victims received when dealing with stakeholders after the victimization. I worked to eliminate reactivity, researcher bias and respondent bias by eliminating opinion and had no interruption during the participation selection process and the interview process. Stahl

and King (2020) stated another way to increase credibility through research was to involve informants to verify interpretations after the research was done, which in this study, did involve member checks. Results to be via triangulated qualitative data analysis software.

To demonstrate transferability, I utilized thick description, in which I provided details on the study, participants and the procedures used to obtain and collect data during the study. Thick description was paying close attention to contextual detail when I observed or interpreted social interactions when doing qualitative research when focused on internal and external factors so an outsider may understand their perception (Drew, 2022). The goal was to be able to apply context in the study with other studies and be able to produce findings that addressed gaps in the literature on victims of human sex trafficking when researched by other researchers or stakeholders. To establish research transferability, research findings were categorized with other sources from research sites and locations. I enhanced transferability by doing a thorough job of identifying the study context and assumptions that were important to the research. The research findings were reported with descriptions and organized to record findings to other contexts, circumstances, and situations.

For confirmability, I did report findings based on participants' responses by checking and rechecking data collected through and using data analysis software to ensure results were likely to be repeatable in other results. Interview transcripts were verified with recordings of each interview session which was password protected and

encrypted on a flash drive and secured in a locked filing cabinet for five calendar years after the interview had been conducted. Member-checking was also used to determine whether transcriptions of responses aligned with participants' responses. There was an audit trail, which gave step by step analysis with results which could be repeated by others. The aim for confirmability was for other researchers to be able to research this study and yield results. I ensured confirmability in research by using triangulation techniques through data analysis software.

Research dependability was established by including each step followed to recruit participants, describing each selection and rationale for use of all research methods and procedures and documentation. I tried to prove dependability by having participants participate in the interview process by giving their perception of the research questions asked by conducting step by step repetition during the research interviews to enhance findings. I aimed to prove dependability by demonstrating that the data analysis had been conducted in a systematic manner in NVIVO data analysis software by recording and giving visual descriptions of enough data to determine credibility and consistency.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The study procedures for recruitment, collection, and analysis were reviewed and approved by Walden's IRB prior to engaging in study activities. All organizational policies and procedures for administrative research were followed. I, the researcher, have sole access to all electronic and hard copies of data. Strong passwords were used to protect all electronic files and encrypted. Data shall be retained for five years and deleted

after expiration of five years. Participating organization's information, including law enforcement, healthcare, counselors, victim advocates will not be revealed in compliance with the guidelines of Walden University's Institutional Review Board. As the researcher, I sought to assess the implementation of exploring the perceptions of victim advocates human and sex trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee.

Prospective participants were workers or former state workers within law enforcement or victim's advocate in the state of Tennessee. None of my fellow coworkers were solicited for study purposes. I chose the state of Tennessee based on data which showed increased reports of human trafficking activity compounded by a lack of strong policies and resources. I am familiar with the dynamics regarding the implementation of human and sex trafficking advocates perceptions of Tennessee laws and programs. Insights on the challenges of victim identification were useful. Participants from different counties in Tennessee did allow comparison of trends and issues that took place in diverse settings. I explained that there were no consequences for study participation or nonparticipation. Any information derived was used for purposes of public awareness and understanding challenges that accompanied perceptions from victim advocates on Tennessee human and sex trafficking laws and programs. I also emphasized that study participants' identity and organizational identity was to be kept strictly confidential by giving them aliases upon the interview process. Results of the study were reported in an aggregated summary of data to refrain from revealing any identifying factors related to study participants by using NVIVO data analysis software.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore victims' advocates' perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in the state of Tennessee. There were three research questions that frame the study around laws and policies, prevention of human trafficking, and support human and sex trafficking victims, particularly women and children. The research design and methodology aligned with the qualitative research approach and were intended to yield rich responses to the research questions. Participants were victims' advocates who worked with victims and other human trafficking stakeholders across the state. Purposive sampling methods were used to recruit qualified participants. There were 11 participants who participated in semi structured interviews via Zoom audio, following the researcher-developed interview protocol. All ethical guidelines were adhered to in the research process, and no study activities began until after IRB approval was received. Participants were asked to maintain confidentiality, and all study materials were safeguarded by electronic passwords or in locked file cabinets.

In addition to the interview transcripts, researchers' notes, and member checks were analyzed, using deductive and inductive coding techniques. The first cycle codes were deduced from six major themes. Then, a thematic analysis was induced by new themes and recommendations. Data analysis was supported by NVIVO software. To support data trustworthiness, the study included strategies, such as member checks and multilevel coding. Chapter 4 included a detailed description of the study results.



## **Chapter 4 Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the phenomenological research study was to explore victim advocates perception of Tennessee's Human and Sex Trafficking Laws and Programs. Through individual interviews, participants furnished perception of their personal experience, which brought about recognition and comprehension about the phenomenon. One primary research question was discussed: What were victim's advocates perceptions about human trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee? Additionally, there were two research sub-questions examined:

1. What could be done to help prevent or mitigate human trafficking incidents across the state?
2. What could be done to enhance/support women victims of sex trafficking in Tennessee?

This chapter contains an overview of the study, including the research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis and evidence of trustworthiness. The mass of the chapter discloses the study results which evolved from the qualitative data acquired through individual interviews. The results are arranged to summarize the research questions and to relay vital themes brought about through data analysis.

### **Research Setting**

The study candidates were current and former Tennessee state employees. During the process of putting this study into effect, there were no known personal or

organizational conditions that influenced participants participation during the time of the study that influenced the interpretation of the study results. Advocates data on perceptions of Tennessee's human and sex trafficking laws and programs were collected by individual interviews which captured their experiences, thoughts, and opinions. The interviews were held online via Zoom audio communication.

### Demographics

The center of the study was exploring victim advocate's perceptions of Tennessee's human and sex trafficking laws and programs. To meet the criteria for the study, candidates' requirements were to be current or former employees of the state of Tennessee within the last five years. Participants who had interacted with victims of human and sex trafficking were considered advocates. Also, the candidates needed to have served in law enforcement, been a therapist or counselor, mental health advocate, or in the health care field role to be considered for the study.

A study of eleven candidates committed to the study with individual interviews conducted. There were two candidates who were former Tennessee state employees. The remaining eleven candidates were current Tennessee state employees. There was one registered nurse, one certified nursing assistant, one records manager, one Corporal in transportation, one shift commander, one supervisor in social work, one emergency medical driver, one probation officer in the sex offense, and one jail administrator. There were four candidates in non-supervisory roles. Two candidates stated they don't serve as advocates now due to career change. The remaining candidates served as

advocates at the study. The demographic questions were included in the Interview Protocol (Appendix B). Table 1 showed demographics details for interviewers. The identification code was given without providing demographic information.

## **Demographics of Participants**

### *Participant Demographics*

ID Code	Employee	Service Length	Advocate	Age Range
94685	yes	4 years	Probation officer	50
0031	no	3 years	EMT	51
0347	yes	27 years	Criminal records	52
2788	No	2 years	x-ray tech	31
7309	Yes	28 years	Unit manager	59
7427	Yes	3 years	Nurse	32
7860	Yes	10 years	Corporal	64
8356	no	17 years	Administrator	37
8833	yes	3 years	C.N.A	24
9621	yes	5 years	Officer	51
9826	yes	22 years	Social worker	46

Table 1 shows demographics of all advocates interviewed. It displays the codename given to each participant, age, current or former employee of Tennessee and length of service as a victim advocate. The participants varied in age, job positions, job titles and the length of service in their levels of expertise on treatment pathways when interacting, coaching, counseling, therapy, education, correcting or servicing victims in trauma.

### Data Collection

All data collection procedures started after Walden University IRB approval. All participants conducted semi-structured interviews concluded with a total of eleven participants. As listed in Chapter 3, the study participants' invitation was sent to direct professional contacts with a request to refer additional participants known as the snowball sampling. The recruitment goal was to generate at least ten participants who met the criteria with a background in law enforcement, healthcare, social work, counseling, and/or victim advocates whom presently or formerly worked in the state of Tennessee within the last five years for semi-structured individual interviews. Although there were enormous interactions with referrals, only eleven participants qualified.

Snowball sampling was introduced and yielded ten referrals and seven email inquiries received, but only two participants were selected from the invitation to participate in the interviews. After obtaining consent, eleven semi-structured individual interviews were scheduled. Participants selected the days and time they were available, and the interviews were conducted for the data collection method.

Seidman (2019) stated the rationale for interviewing and the complexity of selecting interview participants, important interview techniques, and how to work with the results of interviews. In addition, Shane and Sergent (2023) noted that interviewing was an effective system of gathering vital information centered around the character and intellect of perceptions while performing data collection with individual interview sessions.

The individual interviews were held on scheduled days via Zoom audio recording in the privacy of the participant setting. The interviews lasted anywhere from fifteen to forty minutes. This time included introduction to the study and verbal consent given on audio before the interview began. Upon the start of the interview, participants were told there were a total of eleven questions and that no name identifiers were to be given but I would assign them a code name for the study. I gave the introduction, overview of the study, review of the consent form and confidentiality expectations. Next, demographics was done, race, service length and job title. Each participant was advised the interview was to be recorded. The ZOOM audio recorder was turned on, and the interview questions were presented for advocates perceptions. Interviews were audio recorded but I also took handwritten notes and labeled them to coincide with the audio recordings. Audio recordings were turned off and interviewees were notified of the next steps. Participants were given the same questions with an array of different answers and different perceptions concerning the laws and programs in Tennessee.

## Data Analysis

For the individual interviews, there were three data sources analyzed: the handwritten notes, audio recordings via Zoom and NVivo transcripts. The audio recordings were digitally transcribed via freeconvert.com. I concentrated on the audio recordings while referencing the transcripts to remedy any mistakes and enhance the general aspect of the file before transferring them to NVivo. During the review of the transcripts, I highlighted similar words for reference. Adu (2019), stated that qualitative coding presented a suitable format for researchers and readers to examine the art of coding and synthesizing categories and themes.

The data analysis approach was the thematic analysis method, which involved reading through a set of data and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Familiarizing the data captured in the one-on-one interviews was the primary step to analyze the recorded data. Braun and Clarke explained that generating an initial set of codes and phrases from a first review provided a platform for themes in generated codes across the entire data set by different interviewers. The purpose of analyzing codes and themes was to gain a good approach on advocates perspectives, beliefs, comprehension, participation in or moral value from a set of qualitative data. Table 2 lists data repetition recognized in the interview transcripts.

## Common Codes

### *General Themes*

Codes	Frequencies	Patterns	Codes 2
Abuse 4	Advocate 4	Affection 1	Afraid 1
Aggressors 3	Alcohol/Drugs 6	Amber Alert 1	Arrest 1
Assessment 6	Assistance 9	Awareness 7	Child 5
Clothing 2	Communication 8	Cope 2	Counseling 4
Court 3	Courts 2	Crime 4	Countries 2
Domestic 2	Exploitation 3	Education 10	Exposure 4
Deterrent 2	Environment 4	Family 5	Fear 2
Follow-up 4	Homeless 4	Hurt 3	Hotline 3
Identification 7	Forced 5	Group 2	Housing 10
Illness 5	Gangs 2	Trafficking 10	Internet 2
Investigation 4	Stability 5	Laws 9	Medical 7
Jobs 8	Training 2	Material gain 3	Mental 4
Molested 2	Pandemic 6	Police 7	Policy 6
Prostitution 6	Telehealth 2	Pimps 3	Patrol 6
Programs 7	Punishment 4	Rapport 7	Referrals 2
Rejection 3	Restrictions 6	Runaways 2	Rebellious 2
Rehabilitation 3	Resources 8	Risk factors 4	Safe place 6
Sex offender 4	Slavery 2	Telehealth 2	Training 9
Treatment 2	Singled out 3	Support system 7	Victims 7
Transportation 3	Trust 5	Women 2	Wrong crowd 3

Although interviewees used comparable terms, there was some dissimilarity in prevalence and significance in speech. For example, participant one spoke about

identification, housing, and family several times during the interview when compared to participant three. The themes were analogous. The interviews centered around perceptions of Tennessee human and sex trafficking laws and programs. Participant four focused on “good family ties” as a basis for prevention for human and sex trafficking laws and programs to be effective. Yet, participant six stated that, “an open-door policy such as a hot spot where traffickers could go or call in for immediate intervention” could be an asset. All participants shared indistinguishable points of view focused on the issue of not enough laws and programs were present in Tennessee for victims and identification measures. Participant seven declared, “educating our youth in the schools would help them to understand the problem and bring awareness”. Participant ten stated that, “there needs to be light shed on the laws presently because in the past there was none. Shielding light on the laws provides a voice for those who don’t have a voice”. All participants shared their focus on attention to help, programs, family, education, and past hurt. There was a remarkable similarity in how the participants used these words. Participant eight stated, “I can go on Google and find information on sex trafficking to help me identify what is going on”. Participant eleven provided a promoter perspective: “I would basically provide grants for housing, jobs, grants for therapy and lesser punishment for victims”. When speaking on perceptions, all interviewees gave detailed insight on laws and programs in Tennessee in which they had familiarity with and how victims’ perception of assistance could aid in the reduction of victims and how proper



identification measures could assist law enforcement personnel in getting victims their voice back if not viewed as an active participant or labeled as a prostitute or runaway.

Research was collected and coded for frequent word themes. All interviewees' transcripts were scanned for similarities using deductive and inductive methods. Research was uploaded into NVivo software. There were six sections that were created from the research questions and sub-questions. The sections contained sub-sections, as listed in Table 2. On average, there were over thirty units coded from the transcripts and handwritten notes. Most importantly, because including all subject matter areas of the interview and handwritten notes centered around perceptions, multiple content was relevant and supplied feedback to the research questions. For example, material coded in sub-sections under human and sex trafficking laws and policies, counseling and mental health assisted in providing response to more research questions about housing and homelessness for programs and resources. There was no conflicting information noted.

Upon careful study of the data using the deductive and inductive method in response to the research questions, themes were created using Roberts, Dowell and Nie (2019) thematic analysis codebook development. The author's embarked on determining the relationship between knowledge and practice through the practice of rigor while allowing replication through detailed explanation. The participants' perceptions about Tennessee's human and sex trafficking laws and programs sparked several themes that outlined the dataset: (1) not having a good rapport or family background, (2) runaways, (3) laws help, and (4) listening to the victim. These four

themes personified the convolution of advocates' perceptions about laws and programs in Tennessee.

#### Evidence of Trustworthiness

To guarantee trustworthiness, several of Stahl and King (2020) plans of action were applied in every part of the data collection and analysis process. Credibility was reinforced by controlling beliefs and bias as the observer. I made use of a hard-wired binder with thorough information regarding email confirmation, interview scheduling, personal notes to include ideas, extensive thoughts, or feelings. All paperwork and notes started with a personal file and a digital file for information obtained. Over time, a positive rapport was built with each interviewee by individual contact and the consent phase. At the start of each interview, I started by introducing myself as a Walden doctoral student, giving a brief paraphrase of the study and its intent and asking for consent again verbally. This approach tended to calm any tension and allowed the interviewee to be open and give responses regarding their perceptions of any interactions that applied to the research. All participants were emailed the recorded transcript and given seven days to provide feedback or concerns. No participants provided feedback except one interviewee who thanked the researcher for their active role doing the research.

Results yielded established transferability. Participants were given full range to speak on their interactions with victims, law enforcement or other advocates while giving their perceptions on laws and programs in Tennessee. The diversity amongst

participants was race, age, job titles or positions, length of service and roles as advocates. ZOOM audio interviews were only able to pick up moments of silence during the answering of questions unless the interviewer asked if a question could be repeated to determine applicability and transferability by utilizing thick description. Drew (2022) applied thick description by paying attention to contextual detail by focusing on internal and external factors so an outsider may understand their perception. To establish research transferability, interview results were categorized with other sources from research sites and locations. Enhanced transferability was performed by researcher doing a thorough job of identification study context and assumptions vital to the research with descriptions to record and organize contents, circumstances, and situations. Confirmability and dependability were established by implementing checks and rechecks of data collected using NVivo software. Transcript recorded interviews were password protected and encrypted on a flash drive and locked in a filing cabinet with all handwritten notes with the researcher having the only key. I sent an email to their personal email to verify that encrypted code was utilized and accepted. I then recoded the transcript data with comparison to data. Transcripts were then sent to interviewers for member checks allowing them seven days to provide any feedback or concerns. A review of transcripts was not done while grace period of member checking was being observed but on the eighth day data was recorded for accuracy. Next, recodeing the data established the relationship for replication. Lastly, individual files of recording,

handwritten notes, demographic data, and individual notes were created. Reliability was created via the use of NVivo software.

### Study Results

Study results were obtained by utilizing deductive and inductive methods from the interviewer's data by identifying codes and sections developed by the research questions and creating themes which supplied understanding to interviewers' responses, while accessing the data analysis process mentioned earlier in Chapter 4. Results aligned with individual interview levels which coincided with the deductive and inductive method for individual interview data.

### Human and Sex Trafficking Laws and Policies

There were three (3) general research questions for this phenomenological study: RQ1: What are victim's advocates perceptions about on human trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee? There were four (4) interview questions that directly addressed human trafficking laws and programs. (1) What other recommendations do you have regarding programs and support to this population? (2) Describe your knowledge or familiarity with Tennessee human trafficking laws? (3) Describe some effects of the global pandemic on implementation of anti-sex trafficking laws? (4) Do you think laws help or hurt victims of human and sex trafficking? Explain. Participants' answers to other questions were centered around laws and programs also. The participants' perceptions of how laws and programs in Tennessee lacked a significant amount of

support to offenders and instilled hurt in others. Most advocates were not familiar with a lot of the laws centered around human trafficking in Tennessee.

The second research question for this phenomenological study: RQ2: What could be done to help prevent or mitigate human trafficking incidents across the state? There are three (3) interview questions that directly address ways to prevent or mitigate incidents of trafficking across the state by giving detailed alternatives for law makers to consider or modify. They are: (1) What risk factors contribute to the problem of human and sex trafficking? (2) What do you think are the biggest needs and challenges of human and sex trafficking victims? (3) Is there anything else you would like to add?

The last research question for this phenomenological study: RQ3: What could be done to enhance/support women victims of sex trafficking in Tennessee? There are four (4) interview questions that address ways to enhance or support women victims of trafficking in Tennessee from an advocate's perceptions and what they viewed as a coping mechanism for offenders. They are: (1) Describe your role as a human and/or sex trafficking as a victim advocate. (2) How would you describe your level of training and resources to identify and support human and sex trafficking victims? (3) Describe any methods you use to establish rapport with human and sex trafficking victims? (4) What policy recommendations would you make to better serve human trafficking victims?

### Family

Participants in all interviews discussed how the lack of a strong family support system related significantly to victims need to self-identify and to seek love from others

outside the home. When asked about what risk factors contributed to the problems of human and sex trafficking, several participants noted that the lack of family support created a stigma and negative perceptions, which participant nine stated that, “I believe not having an actual good rapport or family background is a lot of the ones we see on the street, running away from home, or they tend to stray and get in the hands of the wrong people”. A major part of this could be attributed to single parent households where the one parent must work multiple hours, which may cause a gap in the bonding in the household due to fatigue. Participant ten noted, “I would say the type of environment they grew up in is a major risk factor because poverty levels impair thinking and not all traffickers are forced but trying to make money”. Impaired thinking and the need for a better living cause one to seek change. Participant nine stated that, “Sometimes it is rebellious behavior against their authoritative figure that causes them to get caught up in trafficking thinking that the predator wants to take care of them but instead enslaves them into a world of human and sex trafficking” even though there was no potential intent to suggest that it would spiral into a state of deliria. Other participants agreed with these statements, confirming that a close family connection was vital and necessary for help in prevention. However, some participants disagreed with family support being a factor due to going to a store and being kidnapped and family was there morally and still maybe searching for their loved one by adding “The biggest risk factor is the victim themselves because they aren’t fully believing in themselves like they should.

### Communication and Identification

There were five of the interview questions that were focused on the level of training and resources to identify and support human and sex trafficking victims. Participants gave answers to questions, which centered on ways to properly identify victims, gaining rapport and trust upon speaking with them, proper communication, providing a listening ear, and being a support system and follow up with resources. There were significant differences provided by some interviewers, as participant twelve stated that there was not enough training provided to properly identify victims of human and sex trafficking, and another interviewer stated that his department gave annual training in-service on human trafficking which included communication, identification, and warning signs to look for in potential victims.

When asked the interview question, “What do you think are the biggest needs and challenges of human and sex trafficking victims?”, all participants supplied feedback on their perception of the biggest needs and challenges such as: trust, feeling safe, shelter, education, jobs, resources, help, advocates, laws that support, rehabilitation, and communication. Most participants agreed that the need for more advocates and resources was warranted as a coping mechanism to help assist victims after traumatization. However, there was not enough resources or laws in place if any to disband the rise in victims of human and sex trafficking.

For all participants, their perceptions centered on communication and identification. Participant five stated that, “we are trained for six weeks in Tennessee on

constitutional law, Tennessee law, identification training and skit scenarios with different law enforcement organizations to help identify victims versus aggressors”. Participant seven added, “My company partner with a group called domestic violence.org. which has sex and human trafficking victims that come to their agency, and we can send clients over and shadow their level of care”. These statements were beneficial in comparison to other answers given due to a trend of advocacy for victims in Tennessee when care was provided.

When discussing communication in response to the question, describe any methods you use to establish rapport with human and sex trafficking victims, interviewers that builds trust with the person upon initial contact was important in terms of the victim being able to trust the advocate enough to open and share experiences and seek/ask for help. These factors are important to gather in the beginning when encountering a victim because of success or failure rates with advocates when discussing the question, describe your role as a human and/or sex trafficking victim advocate? Participant eight stated, “I have worked with my department for ten years, and we interact with individuals who have had different levels of trauma so it’s imperative to be able to communicate with them because everyone’s trauma is different so just being sensitive, listening and seeing what degree or action can be taken to help them”.

Participants were asked to describe their role as a victim advocate, in which they further explained their job description as it relates to victim advocates when interacting with victims of human and sex trafficking. Advocates play a major role for victims when



they give a voice to the ones who are afraid to speak or have tried to speak and were treated as the aggressor versus a victim. Advocates assist in court proceedings, petition present laws in place, aid in housing and provide counseling and therapy. Advocates align with the first line of defense.

### Education and Laws

Interviewers introduced many facets of knowledge interacting with victims as an advocate. Interviewers were asked, describe your knowledge/familiarity with Tennessee human trafficking laws. An interviewer stated, "I'm familiar with Senate Bill 461, which was started to fight against human trafficking". Laws are set in place to remedy or terminate bad actions brought on by others. Another interviewer stated, "I'm not too familiar with the laws but I think they are treated like sex offenders". Education is key. Individuals are not knowledgeable about laws or the particulars that don't adversely affect them. In response, another interview question was asked, what policy recommendations would you make to better serve human trafficking victims? An interviewer expressed, "that if someone is actually being trafficked or if you know someone is trafficked the thing to do is to go ahead and act on it" while another interviewer expressed, "I think there should be an open-door policy similar like the ones at jobs". This perspective sparked the interest to other interviewers who stated that "follow-up", "more laws of awareness", "grants for housing, jobs, and therapy", "more understanding of how critical the situation is", "policies needed to be more specific about education and programs", and "policies should be a federal concern".

In response to questions about education and laws aside from communication and identification, all participants served as advocates to victims. In alignment to offering assistance and support to victims, advocates assisted in gaining perceptions to be a voice for victims for prevention and therapy for rehabilitation after trauma. Another interviewer expressed, “programs are needed to help rebuild victims, pour in empowerment, determination, and aid them in being advocates or role models for other victims”. Interviewers’ responses mirrored the need for more resources for victims which are survivors of human and sex trafficking crimes. Although, it was unclear if all interactions with victims whether the advocates were able to achieve progress toward therapy and rehabilitation with being a victim versus an aggressor.

#### Strengths and Limitations of Tennessee Laws and Programs

In relation to the primary research question, there were two secondary questions to explore to help clarify the primary question. The first backup question is, what can be done to help prevent or mitigate human trafficking incidents across the state?

In that respect, several arranged interview questions focused on this research question: (1) what other recommendations do you have regarding programs and support to this population, and (2) describe some effects of the global pandemic on implementation of anti-sex trafficking laws? Interviewers stated that a strength would be with Tennessee laws and programs and the availability of counseling and therapy to victims for physical and mental health care. A limitation was being properly identified and not being treated as an aggressor in the state of Tennessee when the laws were being

introduced. Available counseling was accredited to interpersonal skills, learning more about a particular condition and recognition of distorted thinking with victims. There were several statements concerning counseling in which advocates expressed upon contact with victims after experiencing trauma. One interviewer stated, “I would have agencies to teach and educate them about life skills and provide counseling and therapy where there is not out of pocket expenses for the victims”. However, the advocates perception on free counseling and therapy didn’t facilitate change in Tennessee programs but other interviewers stated that existing laws and plans contributed to costs and co-pays for service.

An interviewer stated, “I work in corrections and interact with a lot of offenders who have some connection with human and sex trafficking, and I refer them to the counseling department who get them access to the proper programs which helps so they don’t get lost within the criminal justice system without the proper guidance”.

Corrections house a lot of offenders and if not properly followed or managed an individual will not get the services needed during incarceration. Other interviewers acknowledged that there needed to be less punishment for victims by adding, “departments need to educate themselves more on proper identification of victims of sex trafficking, so they don’t be treated as aggressors and they lose faith in the criminal justice system laws and programs in Tennessee”. This feeling may construe actions of victims and why they don’t open to advocates upon contact for fear of being charged and their voice not being heard. It has been proven as a system error due to not proper

identification. Proper identification with victims and active listening while applying human trafficking laws can improve advocates success rates when interacting with victims.

On the topic of limitation, an interviewer stated, “we have to treat the patient on the scene but if we know they are victims of human trafficking we could just take the patient away from the location and treat them somewhere else that maybe a plus for them due to removal and safety from trafficking”. In addition, another interviewer stated, “It’s as if you have a child that says they are being touched. So, you must protect that child or someone that is being trafficked is like a child-they don’t know what to do”.

When interviewers spoke on proper identification challenges and interactions with victims, they still discussed problems with their status as a victim versus aggressor. Many advocates perceptions when discussing victims centered on poor communication, education levels, lack of family support, law enforcement interactions, lack of resources, lack of trust, and criminal convictions, which made them open to discussion of their present situation challenging or hard to talk with anyone due to fear of the outcome. Many advocates perceptions were based on not fully educated on Tennessee laws and programs available.

Several interviewers stated they were not familiar or was somewhat familiar with human trafficking laws in Tennessee:” I really don’t know much about the actual laws”. Furthermore, an interviewer added, “what I do know about the human trafficking laws is trafficking can be considered prostitution if its voluntary or forced. I do know it’s

considered sex trafficking. As far as the depth of the laws, I'm not sure as far as they go as far as prosecuting suspected individuals of human trafficking".

Although, interviewers stated little to no knowledge of Tennessee laws but advised they were given some training at their present or past job at least yearly on human trafficking guidelines and procedures. In the individual interviews, many interviewers were compliant with the statement, "I'm not an expert but I do have basic knowledge of Tennessee human trafficking laws". Furthermore, the interviewers expressed that they felt that human trafficking laws were like sex offender conditions".

Despite the challenges faced with proper identification, interviewers advised on multiple highlights, which were tailored around resources for housing, therapy sessions, state assisted medical care and law enforcement interactions as a direct result of laws in place. The vital perception and unison answer given was victims and advocates establishing a positive rapport so they could help with remedy from trauma, while working through their recovery. Interviewers expressed their desires to implement more grants and programs to assist after perceiving implied strengths and limitations given from interactions. An interviewer stated, "sex trafficking is real and sometimes the only thing you can do is give them a hug". Another interviewer added, "A lot of people don't try to get to know these victims. They just look at them like they are trash or something, but they are still human". This feeling of being stereotyped or judged makes a person feel inferior and shuts down. An interviewer stated, "It could be your neighbor that live right next door". Additionally, interviewers evaluated their perceptions with interactions

with victims to: Learn the laws. Trust the process. Don't be so quick to judge. Learn to exercise active listening. Establish rapport. Help not hurt and always report. Be an advocate with a voice that will support and fight for the victims' rights and be ready to guide them to safety.

Additional benefits of Tennessee's laws and programs included interaction and prevention, state funded resources, to include training, or government provided grants for education, housing, and counseling at designated sites. The advocates perceptions of victims assisted was a profound desire for change, being treated as an equal, and the ability to establish a safe place for themselves while maintaining stability under any programs offered. Lastly, interactions with advocates whether individually or in a group setting, interviewers' perceptions on interactions were consistent, and the relationships formed between advocates needed to be more educational based and aware of the identification principles to aid and assist in a timely manner "Reach one teach one".

#### Enhance and Support

The second research question was what can be done to enhance/support women victims of sex trafficking in Tennessee? There were two interview questions that approached advocates' perceptions on how to enhance or support victims when dealing with laws and programs. Interviewers had already supported victims by supporting their perceptions of forming positive advocate-client relationships, which may include counseling and therapy, when needed. Interviewers portrayed what they felt was eventful outcomes, much of the answers given was geared towards positive reinforcers,

as the perceptions from most victims was building a positive rapport and trusting advocates to share information about their experiences in a safe place. One interviewer was adamant about “a strong family relationship” with victims before victimization “enhances trust relations” and “supports their mental thinking” to prevent future victimization.

Nevertheless, during the individual interviews when asked about support and enhance strategies, interviewers stated how their facilities offered identification training, coping skills during interactions, access to database concerning resources to assist and communication awareness skills. In addition, access to social media was given for additional databases or sources of information to aid and assist when establishing a relationship with victims. Also, interviewers spoke on how working with different agencies and sharing knowledge increased their awareness and what goods and services were available when identification of victims was determined and their level of care. This could lead to successful possibilities. Interviewers were generally concerned about victims of human trafficking and contested that more resources and grants need to be put in place to assist establishments for immediate intervention and contact numbers placed on social media, schools, and billboards daily. For example, an interviewer talked about, “a human trafficking hot spot” meaning “a safe place with a direct line to assistance” and when you’re in a predicament of victimization to seek this hotspot or call the number on any phone whether it has a working service or not where an advocate would pick up with immediate assistance. This placement of security hot spots would increase

support and enhance projected safe places if victims utilized the proposed support line, to be properly identified by advocates when seeking help and not labeled as aggressors.

During comparison, interviewers were asked how they felt if laws help or hurt victims of human and sex trafficking when the perceptions of laws and programs was introduced, some replies given were, “I could assist more if I was more familiar with the laws”. Also, another interviewer stated, “I’m not an expert on the laws and programs but I’m somewhat knowledgeable”. One interviewer didn’t want to appear with lack of knowledge and replied, “I’m familiar with human trafficking laws because they are similar to sex offender conditions and they can’t be within 100 feet of a school, church or daycare”. Another interviewer stated, “I’m not familiar but I know it’s illegal. You can’t just take someone against their will and not be punished”. Other interviewers agreed that human and sex trafficking was wrong, and the act was immoral while “forcing someone to work or have sex” against their will.

#### Repetitive Wording

Careful data review when correlating to the research and interview questions unveiled many repetitious word phrases, which give more in-depth meaning to definition and phenomenon.

#### It’s Covid Related

Covid19 was a flu-like virus that originated in 2019 that changed the world as we know it today. This pandemic killed millions of Americans. Covid19 was untreatable due to scientists not knowing what to treat. Emergency vaccines was created to slow the



virus without the CDC and FDA approval. Covid19 changed the way we move around, how we gather in groups, doctor appointments and physical interactions. Telehealth was created due to Covid19. Individuals were advised to stay home if it was not an emergency. Instacart grocery delivery started resulting in a multi-million-dollar industry today. During Covid19, police didn't come out to the house to 811 calls unless it was a serious offense and before they were dispatched the operator asked if anyone in the home was Covid positive to protect the officers coming out. Covid is still present today, but America is vaccine prepared. In response to the interview question, describe some effects of the global pandemic on implementation of anti-sex traffic laws. An interviewer stated, "People weren't allowed to go anywhere and with local law enforcement -just say someone was trying to get help the first question dispatch asked was if anyone in the home was positive or negative or refer you to file a report online". More importantly, all interviewers discussed Covid related incidents when asked about their experiences.

### Sex Trafficking is Real

Interviewers were given the opportunity to give their perceptions on interview question. Is there anything else you would like to add? An interviewer stated, "sex trafficking is real. I see it a lot in what I do". Given today's statistics on human and sex trafficking the numbers are consistent and varies state to state. There is a fear in individuals when someone is not accounted for and when advocates encounter individuals during treatment. Perceptions on human trafficking is dangerous, possible

unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases to include death. Another interviewer added, “they don’t shine the light on human and sex trafficking like they should” and “there should be more laws implemented, more studies done, more training classes for victims’ advocates and anyone that may have contact with them to implement change and bring it more to the forefront.

#### Need for More Advocates

Interviewers also shared their perceptions on whether victims felt enough resources and advocates were in place. When looking at the interview question, what do you think are the biggest needs and challenges of human and sex trafficking victims? An interviewer added, “The biggest need I would have to say is first we need more advocates even though we are shining light on it” while another interviewer stated, “We need more advocates. The ones who are going to speak out against human trafficking”. Interviewers agreed that advocated with a voice was essential to include more education for identification, resources and providing safe places for victims.

#### Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was exploring victim’s advocate’s perceptions of Tennessee’s human and sex trafficking laws and programs. Individual interviews were done through Zoom audio. There were eleven participants who provided their perceptions on their interactions with victims of human and sex trafficking. There was one primary research question with two secondary questions about the phenomenon. The participants were current or former employees of the state

of Tennessee within the last five years. The participants varied in age, sex, race, and various job titles and roles for the study. Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom using deductive and inductive reasoning approach to gather results. Initially, data was analyzed, and hand coded for themes. Then, the deductive and inductive method was introduced to coincide data with research questions. Themes were created due to responses given. To ensure trustworthiness, several tactics were applied for the duration of the data collection and analysis procedure, such as member checking, handwritten notes and code and rechecking for additional codes and themes.

Interviewers supplied thorough replies to the primary question, providing their perceptions regarding Tennessee's human and sex trafficking laws and programs. Interviewers' responses were in unison that Tennessee's laws and programs provided to victims needed more advocates and more resources provided to include safe houses. However, interviewers were speaking on their interactions with victims in different job roles, but they unanimously stated that they were not familiar with a lot of the resources available for victims and more education was needed.

Interviewers stated one of the challenges victims incurred was lack of family support, education and lack of job skills when compared to available programs was introduced. Interviewers emphasized the lack of trusting relationships with victims when trying to establish rapport. Although, interviewers provided insight on how they interacted with victims to gain their trust while establishing rapport for them to open and be comfortable. Interviewers stated due to lack of education on Tennessee laws to

human trafficking they turned to other advocates for assisting with proper identification and social media sites. Many interviewers stated they gained rapport and were able to communicate effectively with victims and offer services.

There were several repetitive wordings used those supplemented definitions regarding the responses and connected all feedback. The first word grouping, “it’s covid related”, described the setback set in the phenomenon. For example, interviewers stated that a lot of victims didn’t get police support during the pandemic and the operator asked if the call was covid related. Interviewers also stated that the lack of a strong family connection, and the lack there of could be the difference between trust issues established. The next word grouping, “sex trafficking is real”, aligned perceptions about the challenges, limitations and communication barriers victims and advocates faced. Interviewers focused on the need to create and establish safe houses, more resources for education and job skills, therapy, and counseling, being treated as a victim versus an aggressor, adapting to less harsher punishments, while being properly identified upon contact. Chapter 5 provides interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusion.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Research unveils that when women and children encounter human and sex trafficking victimization it hinders their ability for higher education, adaptability to job skills, advanced therapy, and the accessibility to obtain proper counseling (Wilson,2020). Often women are conformed to these barriers due to mistrust in the judicial system by non-proper identification methods, being treated as an aggressor versus a victim, negative stereotypes, and lack of resources to assist and aid (Dank et al., 2019). In addition, the lack of support, and particularly women and children, in various home environments creates a challenge for advocates when the need for advocacy exists (Blanton, et al. 2020).

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore victim advocates perceptions of Tennessee's human and sex trafficking laws and programs. The study aimed to display how advocates perceptions of Tennessee's laws and programs help or hurt victims in population. In addition, the rewards and trivia of advocacy-based programs, and outcomes for success interacting with Tennessee laws and programs were explored.

Victims' advocates perceptions provided a framework for understanding human and sex trafficking, and the theory also explored the vitality of qualitatively examining this population to supply detailed information about victim advocates lived experiences, utilizing their own dialogue and perceptions. This study attempted to fill numerous

research gaps, such as utilizing the state of Tennessee as the setting, which included participants of diverse backgrounds. Interviewers were current or former employees of the state of Tennessee who held a position of victim advocate. Also, the participants needed to be employed as victim advocates within the last five years. Data was collected through individual interviews through Zoom audio recording. Individual interview data were analyzed using deductive and inductive methods to detail individual level results.

The study results were obtained by navigating inductively through the individual interview data, from listing word frequencies, to naming codes and themes arranged by the research questions and establishing nodes to give insight to the responses. An analysis of the study results unveiled several findings:

\***Family**, and the connection associated with it, plays a vital role on women and children's perceptions when it comes to forming trust relationships.

**Proper identification** can be a mandate, where victims are scenario-based criteria, and their gender role doesn't signify victims versus aggressors, without proper investigation by advocates upon initial contact during traumatizing events.

**Education** on human and sex trafficking laws in Tennessee and state departments need to ensure that advocates are familiar with the present laws to include any law modifications or revisions which updates and fosters relationships with victims which may enhance or support.

**Available resources** in the state of Tennessee, which are not made readily available, or seen as public awareness resources, where victims and advocates have accessible access

with or without a recommendation need to be able to qualify for goods and services which could provide for future success.

**Advocacy enhanced relationships**, as well as sponsorships, maybe advantageous to women and children, particularly for safe places, when compared to neutral based perceptions alone.

This chapter contained an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and social change implications.

#### Interpretation of the Findings

In relation to the peer-reviewed research and theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2, these results established, unsubstantiated, and increased the remaining literature in numerous ways.

#### Family, Advocacy, Identification

Many of the previously presented ideas around family were confirmed. For instance, interviewers repeatedly stated that their perceptions gathered upon interactions with victims described the lack and void of solid relationships that resulted in lack of family support in the community and home, which incorporated emotional and negative exclusions (Roberts, Dowell, Nie, 2019).

Interviewers also confirmed their experiences with the “a cry for help”, explaining how majority of women and children whom they have advocated for are not properly identified, with little to no help from being assessed as aggressors and charged by law (Blanto, et al., 2020). And while they were in a traumatized state, interviewers

highlighted that the laws did not protect them from the judgmental demands of society in their face of defeat (Wilson, 2020). Because of these continuous defeats and walls related to relationships, interviewers also confirmed the need for strong pro-social support for family relationships (Roberts, et al. 2019).

In this study, Wilson (2020) reflected that victim advocates perceptions established a framework for understanding victim's advocates perceptions of Tennessee's human and sex trafficking laws and programs. Results relevant to family, advocacy and identification confirmed many of the principles of advocates perceptions, which listed the estranged relationship with family, cohort collaboration between advocacy departments with outdated methods to properly identify victims, and the credibility of providing details of victims' advocates perceptions through lived experiences. In sequence with the theoretical framework, it was understandable that the interviewer's interactions were aligned but different due to the need of the victim upon interaction. These interactions may have contributed to the foundation of family, advocacy, and proper identification, such as trauma and therapy level, that are also extended throughout the theory. In addition, interviewers were nervous but anticipated presenting feedback on their perceptions, which gave the victims "voice" a chance to be heard and their needs evaluated through a different set of lenses (Roberts, et al., 2019).

Although, interviewers' perceptions were in comparison and contrast with the theoretical framework. For example, interviewers stated that some victims felt that family was important. Yet, some interviewers stated some victims come from broken



homes and had no support from family and they were targeted due to income, lack of support and environmental settings. The theory of strong family ties appeared to be predominantly theoretical but needed to ensure mental stability when enhancing advocates' rapport. Interviewers focused on resources to assist with counseling and therapy. They were in unison on methods for educating themselves on Tennessee laws. These perceptions were a foundation of the theory, but a basis of the research setting. The interviewers were consistent with stating that more resources and grants should be made available to the victims.

#### Education and Resources

Another lead discovery of the research compacted on adequate education of the Tennessee laws and the available resources for victims in the state. The rationale declared by interviewers, the lack of education or training on human and sex trafficking laws, the lack of resources, and the limited opportunities and knowledge given to advocates are in correlation with (Garcia-Vazquez and Meneses-Falcon, 2023) and (Bogdan, 2020). Interviewers' perceptions concerning educational barriers and the truancy of formalized tutorial programs within the state were in complete distinction to policies, local operating procedures, and facilities provided by the stated government to indicate how self-training applies. In lieu, all interviewers elaborated on how victims stated their level of education or when interacting with victims their perceptions of lower levels of education was prevalent, which stated a trend in counseling or therapy

interactions, or the victim was not able to get a better education although, a free education was afforded by the state.

When gender-based resources were introduced, the focus was on more criminal offenses by a percentile in which the basis where the number of criminal offenders were more males than females (Bogdan, 2020). Because interviewers expressed the need for more individual counseling to cope with the challenges of victimization, it could be a gateway to building positive rapport with advocates and family, instead they may tend to seek outside support making themselves more of a target for traffickers. Interviewers shared their lived experiences through perceptions. Although, when the advocate perception was given, the interview was reared concerning doubt or disinclination to refer victims for resources due to a shortage or the services offered was limited or discontinued without insurance coverage (Garcia-Vazquez, et al., 2023). Discoveries that advocate profit from interacting with victims of human and sex trafficking trauma by supplying their proficiency and notions confirmed, but also by offering free resources of counseling and therapy by reaching out to different counties for assistance when servicing victims in the state.

Due to the lack of resources and the scarcity involving education which include complicated and vigorous results, the explanation or constriction to state funding, such as grants, and educational initiative programs provided by the state. Me and the interviewers proposed that more grants and resources be implemented, educational courses be done for advocates for revised knowledge of state laws and sponsorship to

victims to help enroll in education classes to assist in meeting their needs to decipher better thinking skills. Interviewers' perceptions aligned (Bogdan, 2020) bearings that the unsteadiness of a human and sex trafficking victim primary demands to be fulfilled, and this population may benefit from multiple advocacy programs at one point. Even though interviewers conversed about the need for more resources when servicing victims, interviewers' perceptions also stated that certain programs and laws were advantageous and mutual alliance (Bogdan, 2020). Although, these alliances would still need to present quantifiable results in the event of successfully supplying the needs to victims once traumatized and seeking change. Yet, Bogdan forewarned, and interviewers established, that there is no consistency statewide for victims to successfully heal and recover from victimization, but the focus is more placed on coping skills to establish a recovery through life changes.

#### Limitations of the Study

As noted in Chapter 1, there were four (4) limitations that surfaced from the achievement of this research:

**Topic and job-related duties and responsibilities.** The interviewers were from a diverse culture of both genders from various state government agencies, and the study doesn't require interviewers to be detailed specific of duties and responsibilities acquired when interactions with victims occurred. Therefore, findings may be limited in their topic and job-related duties and responsibilities.

**Interpretation of Interview questions.** The study interview questions were limited and broad as presented to a lay audience due to interviewers who current or former state of Tennessee employees were. Perceptions from all victim advocates were heard, but not explored.

**Limited by the small population sample size.** The research population was limited to who were current or former state of Tennessee employees who were victim advocates. Perceptions from advocates were heard but not explored.

**Limited in validity and reliability.** This research involved perceptions from interviewers' various state agencies in Tennessee. In depth, responses related to change show no specifics to the state of Tennessee programs, policies, employees, and laws were not attained.

### Recommendations

Based on the strengths and limitations of the present study, there are three recommendations for future research. First, available is a chance to channel the research setting. Interviewers in this research were from the entire state of Tennessee area, resulting in responses broadly exemplary of the state. Future researchers could carry out a localized study by restricting the setting to a specific state agency or non-profit organization. Second, there are options to explore the phenomenon with prior victims who are present advocates from the state of Tennessee. For example, since Cyntoia Brown was incarcerated in Tennessee as the aggressor after she was a victim of human trafficking in which she killed the guy she that picked her up. She served ten years and

was released on a commuted sentence to serve ten more years on parole from an original thirty-year prison sentence. She is a renowned victim advocate public speaker who advocates for human and sex trafficking victims statewide. Third, the education level of victims is well-documented, but researchers may need to explore further into the educational dependencies that may hinder or help the onset of victimization and relief from traumatization and relief from traumatization from fostering positive relationships, to provide guidance for future success.

#### Implications for Positive Social Change

This study research has implications for positive social change among victims of human and sex trafficking who represents the study population, and more significantly, within the field of public policy and administration. For victims of human and sex trafficking, privilege can be achieved through advocacy, which validates the vitality of having your presence acknowledged, as previously discussed, but also to rectify public scrutiny that have been created by research that doesn't consider the difficulties of this population. Within the department of public policy and administration, there holds a valid cause and need to evaluate closely needs or demands of traumatized individuals, to aid and provide resources to dilemmas encountered by individuals who are misrepresented and illegal identified by society. In addition, once the perceptions are validated, the opportunity for state government agencies to update their approach in advocacy for victims, and especially those at a higher potential to be victimized.

The state government and non-profit organizations may profit by updating identification methods and stereotypical practices, organizational development, educational awareness, and overall victim notification for victims of human and sex trafficking populations. Based on research results, there are three primary recommendations to upgrade procedures:

**Observe.** Conduct face to face interviews, zoom recorded interviews, or surveys with human and sex trafficking advocates to encourage them to embrace any obstacles with present approaches and give to the outline and application of recently developed or revised policies and procedures.

**Interact.** Compute and conduct formal and informal impromptu meetings, schedule annual training sessions on Tennessee laws and programs, update agencies quarterly on grants and resources, establish a statewide victim hotline such as a hotline for immediate intervention, dismantled by potential target bullets to look out for. In addition, project online training in public libraries and state agencies, as victim and advocate, and hold public seminars for awareness with agents for safe places on site.

**Maintain.** Maintain intentional attempts to sustain profound advocacy enhanced relationships, particularly for women and children's victims of human and sex trafficking, it has been validated that there are some relationships formed, but the additional resources and grants for continuous support to this population are warranted.

## Conclusion

When interviewers expressed their perceptions, one of the most revolving ideas was trust issues. Interviewers speculated on how the lack of family support or positive family relationships, police interactions with not being properly identified, and other difficulties that left them feeling dejected and to allow forced relationships to get by. However, this feeling to coincide with should not lie at the liberty of traumatized victims. The state government, Tennessee state employees and victim advocates, must also adjust to the demands of traumatized victims, and refocus their efforts on identification and therapy. State funded grants and resources needed to assist victims are not fully made aware to advocates. It is meritorious that the state government allows for more grants and resources to assist victims when interacting with advocates. Yet, the focus was on the victims in society, with no clear pathway for success, and limited resources from those who are victim advocates and reign the productive facet of having a revolving door of human and sex trafficking victims.

The difficulties of cultural diversity and sexual orientation for human and sex trafficking victims are real, and affirmations of criminal prosecution versus trauma treatment should be authenticated for human and sex trafficking victims, there is a stigma “victim” or “aggressor” because proper identification measures are impeccable. Examining this growing epidemic and gaining insight on victims of human and sex trafficking should implement and promote recommendations for increasing consistency with policy implementation and access to resources, but necessary to aid advocates in

providing counseling and therapy to this population. It is comprehensible that it may take training and engaging human trafficking stakeholders to accommodate the needs of human and sex trafficking victims by developing more efficient policies and increasing support to human and sex trafficking victims, but the chain of cause and effect of implementing new policies as it relates to laws and procedures may improve victim and advocate knowledge and their perceptions. One interviewer declared, "I would suggest more government assisted programs for victims and provide a place where they are able to have a second chance at life, where they can have hope for themselves and their future."



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## **Appendix A: Study Invitation**

### **Invitation to Participate in Research Study**

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University, pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy and Administration. I am conducting a research study to explore victims' advocates' perceptions of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee. Your perspective is requested as you may provide insight into the perceptions of victim advocates of human and sex trafficking laws and programs in Tennessee in your setting.

To be eligible for this study, you must have at least five years of experience working with human and sex trafficking victims within the state of Tennessee. However, employees of Davidson County government may not participate. You may work in various fields or settings, such as law enforcement, health and mental health, social work, advocacy, policy, and other related areas.

If you are eligible to participate, you will be asked to respond to interview questions about your experiences in implementing human and sex trafficking policies, and your work in supporting victims of these crimes. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom or phone call and will last approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The interview will be audio-recorded for research notes and kept strictly confidential. Your voluntary participation will be appreciated, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

If you would like to participate, please feel free to respond to this email. Also, you may share this invitation with other colleagues who would like to participate. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Michele Fenn

**Appendix B: Interview Protocol**

- Establish Connection:** Researcher will open the Zoom room for video interview or call the participant for phone interviews.
- Build Rapport:** Researcher will introduce herself and provide an overview of the study along with expectations for the interview.
- Confirm Consent:** Researcher will briefly review informed consent, explain confidentiality, begin recording, and administer questions.

**Interview Questions:**

1. Describe your role as a human and/or sex trafficking as a victim advocate.
2. Describe your knowledge/familiarity with Tennessee human trafficking laws.
3. Do you think laws help or hurt victims of human and sex trafficking? Explain.
4. How would you describe your level of training and resources to identify and support human and sex trafficking victims?
5. Describe any methods you use to establish rapport with human and sex trafficking victims.
6. What risk factors contribute to the problem of human and sex trafficking?
7. Describe some effects of the global pandemic on implementation of anti-sex trafficking laws.
8. What do you think are the biggest needs and challenges of human and sex trafficking victims?
9. What policy recommendations would you make to better serve human trafficking victims?
10. What other recommendations do you have regarding programs and support to this population?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add?