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Social Workers' Education in Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Simmons Jones

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Social Workers' Education in Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking

by

Simmons L. Jones

MSW, Clark Atlanta University, 2016

BSW, The University of Southern Mississippi, 2013

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

More than 27 million people are victims of human trafficking worldwide according to the U.S. Department of State. This qualitative study was conducted to understand the education and training social workers receive to identify victims of human trafficking. The research questions examined participants' education and training on the identification of human trafficking victims, what education and training is offered within their employment, and what education and training in identifying human trafficking victims is needed for future practices. Notes from 10 individual interviews were coded using in vivo coding with results indicating that there was little to no education and training provided to social workers in the identification of human trafficking victims. Moreover, the results indicated that there is a need for more education and training on identifying human trafficking victims adequately for social workers. This research is significant for positive social change for researchers, educators, social workers, and other social service providers who service the human trafficking population.

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Dedication

To the late George F. Dupree and D'Orlyly "Cookie" Freeman—grandfather and grandmother. Thank you for pushing me to educate myself to the highest level possible. I know you are both proud of me. I love you with everything I have. Continue to watch over me and rest in peace.

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Thank you so much, Dr. Diane Rullo, as you have been my number one cheerleader in obtaining this Doctorate. You are an inspiration and the greatest gift to Walden University. You did not allow me to give up, and I thank you so much for your support. I hope you are proud. I would also like to thank Dr. Deborah Rice and Dr. Lindy Lewis for your support. You both have been a significant influence in helping me earn this degree. I cannot thank you all enough, and I wish you well in your careers.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Human trafficking impacts vulnerable and oppressed men, women, and children of all ages (Anderson, 2018; Cox, 2018; Ernewein & Neives, 2015). Human trafficking is the act of recruitment and harboring, through threats, abduction, coercion, and abuse of a person for exploitation (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Research from a study completed in 2016 found that over 313,000 people globally experienced problems related to human trafficking, of which 79,000 were minors and youth (Mostajabian et al., 2019). Adolescents and young adults are more vulnerable to human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking (Mostajabian et al., 2019). Seventy-five percent of these youth come from foster care placements and the juvenile justice system with their backgrounds including being homeless and/or on runaway status (Mostajabian et al., 2019). These types of situations put them at substantial risk of human sex trafficking (Mostajabian et al., 2019).

Human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing global crimes (Nsonwu, 2019), although most cases go unreported. The lack of proper reporting has resulted in human trafficking becoming the second or third most profitable global business (Marcus et al., 2016; Nsonwu, 2019). Human trafficking is among the most critical problems facing society. With profits exceeding \$55 billion or \$21,000 per victim (Cox, 2018), it is the fastest-growing illegal and hidden industry in the world (Ernewein & Nieves, 2015).

The responsibility of identifying human trafficking victims falls on professionals who are involved in various fields such as law enforcement, medical (doctors, nurses, social workers), and education (Gonzalez-Pons, 2019). These various professionals engage with trafficked victims often, when they may not be prepared to

properly identify them (Gonzalez-Pons, 2019). With human trafficking being one of the biggest industries in the world, professional social workers could play a significant role in identifying and referring services to human trafficking victims (Cox, 2018; Nsonwu, 2019). Social workers are on the front lines to identify victims (Cox, 2018; Ernewein & Nieves, 2015; Nsonwu, 2019; Roney & Villano, 2020). Social workers need to recognize human trafficking victims as they provide mental health, substance use treatment, housing, and AIDS/HIV treatment that may be necessary (Bromfield, 2016; Nsonwu, 2019).

Problem Statement

Human trafficking occurs in each of the 159 counties in Georgia (McDonald, 2022). A trend observed by the Georgia Anti-Trafficking Task Force includes an increase in reported cases since the Covid-19 pandemic started (McDonald, 2022). Another trend the Georgia Anti-Trafficking Task Force has identified is that social workers throughout the state do not have the proper education or training to adequately identify a human trafficking victim (McDonald, 2022). Other researchers have also noted that human service providers in Georgia are ill-equipped to identify victims of human trafficking (Nsonwu, 2019; Roney & Villano, 2020; Williams et al., 2018). There is inconsistency in the identification tools used by social service providers, causing missed opportunities for identification, prevention, and victim service efforts (Williams et al., 2018). Additionally, identifying human trafficking victims and subsequent service delivery is hindered due to the lack of documented education related to human trafficking (Gonzalez-Pons, 2019). There are sporadic education and training programs available in Georgia for social workers in identifying human trafficking victims, and there is little sign that they will receive education and

training anytime soon (Williams et al., 2018). Culturally relevant training and education are essential to identifying and serving this vulnerable population (Nsonwu, 2019).

Purpose Statement

This qualitative study was conducted to identify social workers education and training on how to identify human trafficking victims properly. Currently, there are little to no research studies that address the level of preparedness of social workers to identify human trafficking survivors. Social workers play a vital role in advocating for the vulnerable populations in society (Cox, 2018; Nsonwu, 2019). But their ability to adequately identify victims of human trafficking has remained limited (Gonzalez-Pons, 2019; Nsonwu et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). Though human trafficking victims present in emergency rooms and social services facilities, they are not being identified by health care or social work professionals (Nsonwu, 2019; Roney & Villano, 2020). The foster care system is another component that employs social workers who lack the necessary skills to identify victims of human trafficking (Nsonwu, 2017). Because professionals play an increasingly vital role in identifying victims and providing coordinated and collaborative care (Cox, 2018; Ernewein & Nieves, 2015; Nsonwu, 2019; Roney & Villano, 2020), relevant training and education is needed to serve victims of human trafficking properly (Nsonwu, 2019).

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are social workers experiences with formal education received in the identification of human trafficking victims?

RQ 2: What training experiences do social workers receive in the identification of human trafficking victims?

Definitions

The following definitions and key terms are provided for clarification and context.

Education: A formal process of inquiry and systematic instruction in a school or university setting (Oxford Languages Dictionary, 2021).

Forced labor: A form of modern-day slavery forcing victims to work in construction, manufacturing, mining, hospitality, agriculture, or as domestic workers (Human Rights First, 2017).

Human trafficking: A form of modern slavery in which includes sexual exploitation, forced labor, and domestic servitude (Parrish, 2018).

Labor trafficking: The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, using force, fraud, or coercion for involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (Administration for Children & Families – Office on Trafficking in Persons, 2017).

Services: A sum of activities that authorities make available for individuals, businesses, or other public authorities in which is intended to address their needs (Guarino, 2017).

Sex trafficking: The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sexual act, in which the commercial sexual act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age (Administration for Children & Families – Office on Trafficking in Persons, 2017).

Sexual exploitation: A form of sexual abuse of a person that he or she does not comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, that violates the laws of society.

The victim also receives something in return, such as drugs, food, money, gifts, alcohol, cigarettes, *etc.* (Kyegombe et al., 2020).

Social work: Work carried out by trained, formally educated, and licensed professionals (social workers) aimed at alleviating conditions in individuals, communities, or groups in need of help, with special attention to the most vulnerable in society (Oxford Languages Dictionary, 2021; NASW, 2018).

Training: A learning experience, or series of experiences, specific to an area of inquiry and related set of skills or dispositions that are delivered by the professional who has the knowledge and skill (Meadan et al., 2017).

Transnational: A process where victims of human trafficking are recruited abroad and transported to other countries where they are exploited for labor and/or sex (Human Rights First, 2017).

Nature of Doctoral Project

I used qualitative research to determine social workers' education and training in identifying human trafficking victims. I completed one-on-one interviews with social workers conducting human trafficking assessments in child protective services due to many human trafficking victims being found and placed into foster care. I electronically mailed the directors from child protective services and the social services departments to recruit social workers. Finally, I asked for permission to send an electronic mail invitation to 8 social workers in their respective venues.

Significance of the Study

Human trafficking is a widespread problem that continues to grow each year (Cox, 2018; Marcus et al., 2016; Nsonwu, 2019; Scannell & Conso, 2020). Obtaining credible numbers on the severity of the problem is challenging due to the lack of

accurate identification and reporting from key providers such as social workers, medical professionals, and law enforcement personnel (Scannell & Conso, 2020). Education on how to identify victims of human trafficking needs to improve (Nsonwu, 2019). Knowledge is crucial for direct service professionals to fully understand the complexities of identifying human trafficking victims, especially in efforts to prevent victims from withholding that they are involved in a trafficking situation (Scannell & Conso, 2020).

This research identifies the level of education and training of social workers delivering social services to identify human trafficking victims. The study also determined gaps in education and training to evaluate if it is necessary to provide more education and training to adequately recognize human trafficking victims. The outcome could give social service agencies, law enforcement, and policymakers useful information to develop enhanced education and training initiatives. This study also builds on the body of literature available for scholars within the social work field to explore the development of programs and education and training initiatives to identify human trafficking victims. Improving social workers' training in early recognition of victims may help improve identification practices and mitigate the adverse effects on this vulnerable population.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

General systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1964) was used as the theoretical framework to guide this study. Systems theory in social work provides an interdisciplinary approach to study complex systems to assist in identifying, defining, and addressing social problems (Lalande & Baumeister, 2018). General systems theory explains human behavior in terms of reciprocal relationships within that

system (Masilo, 2018). The framework is used to look at complex systems and how parts relate to each other and the whole system (Banson et al., 2018). Social workers utilize systems theory to understand the interactions between individuals, families, institutions, and societies (Banson et al., 2018). Social workers play an essential role in providing services to human trafficking victims, so there is an increased need to educate social workers to identify human trafficking victims. Providing effective services to victims of human trafficking becomes challenging due to gaps in training and the educational system for social workers (Steiner et al., 2018). But through general systems theory, social workers gain a level of understanding of the physical, social, and environmental systems of the victims (Banson et al., 2018; Meshelemiah & Lynch, 2019).

Values and Ethics

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021) Code of Ethics, outlines ethical practices of the social work profession. The values and principles related to this clinical social work problem is competence. Although several codes are available, this study is grounded in need to improve social work services and representation as competent only within their education, training, license, certification, or other relevant professional experience (NASW, 2021). The second competence code states that social workers should provide services in substantive areas or use intervention techniques or approaches that are new to them only after engaging in appropriate training, consultation, and supervision from competent people in those interventions or strategies (NASW, 2021). To effectively identify and assess a human trafficking victim, social workers must be fully informed of the work when it comes to the human trafficking population (Lucio et al., 2020). The challenge with

this core value is that to do so, social workers require specific training and education, which is very rare (Lucio et al., 2020).

The third competence code states that when generally recognized standards do not exist concerning an emerging area of practice, social workers should exercise careful judgment and take responsible steps to ensure their work's competence and protect clients from harm (NASW, 2021). The challenge with this core value is that social workers may be providing services to victims. However, their agency may have poorly designed trafficking education and training programs or policies (Knight et al., 2021). These challenges also include possibly not identifying victims correctly or providing adequate after-care (Knight et al., 2021).

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I used a variety of professional and peer-reviewed databases through Walden University Library and Google Scholar to search for and locate the common themes related to social workers and the identification of human trafficking victims. The search was completed for published submissions from 2016 through 2021. I used the following key terms when searching the databases: *adult services, coercion, debt bondage, education, exploitation, forced labor, gaming, grooming, human trafficking, involuntary domestic servitude, involuntary servitude, luring, manipulation, services, sexual exploitation, smuggling, social work, social workers, trafficking, and training*. The key word search provided useful information to determine the common themes related to this problem. Peer-reviewed journals were obtained from the following sources: EBSCO host, SAGE Journals, SAGE Knowledge, Social Work Abstracts, ProQuest Psychological Journals, and various human trafficking and social work websites related to the need for adequate identification for human trafficking victims.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is the recruitment and involuntary servitude of a person (Camp et al., 2018; CLF, 2020; Dierkhising et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Justice). Human trafficking is a global concern that impacts the most vulnerable in society (United Nations [UN], 2020). International/national human trafficking is a crime orchestrated individually or within an organized group that impacts thousands of vulnerable men, women, and children (Child Liberation Foundation [CLF], 2020; Du, 2017; Williams, 2018). Many victims are from unemployed or poor backgrounds and are single and homeless (Camp et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018). Millions of men, women, and children are trafficked worldwide annually (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [USDHS], 2021). Approximately 1.5 million victims originate from North America, Europe, and other developed nations (CLF, 2020; Williams, 2018).

Due to the covert nature of trafficking activities, obtaining definitive statistical data on this problem is challenging (Kim et al., 2018; UN, 2020; USDHS, 2021). Estimated data are collected from missing person reports, reports of trafficking in the areas where the individuals go missing, and additional authority reports of trafficking occurring (Kim et al., 2018). At this time, although it is difficult to estimate, it has been reported that there may be more than 20.9 million victims of human trafficking globally (Du, 2017; Klimley et al., 2018; UN, 2020; USDHS, 2021).

Human trafficking is considered the third-largest global criminal activity (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2017) and the second most lucrative transnational crime, profiting billions of dollars annually (CLF, 2020; Cox, 2018; Du, 2017; Human Rights First, 2017; Klimley et al., 2018). Since human trafficking

encompasses several illegal activities, criminal syndicates involved in human trafficking earn approximately \$99 billion annually from sexual trafficking and slavery; \$43 billion from forced labor; and \$8 billion from forced domestic servitude (Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019).

Gaps in Education

Health care and social service agencies are settings where many young people seek help and engage in services (Lutz, 2018; Nsonwu, 2019; Roney & Villano, 2020). An estimated 88% of human trafficking victims seek medical attention during captivity (Wallace et al., 2021). But many go unnoticed because healthcare professionals are ill-equipped to adequately identify them (Duquesne University, School of Nursing, 2020; Mahapatra et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018), and victims often fail to disclose their situation in a clinical environment (National Human Trafficking Research Center, 2021). The lack of proper identification techniques makes it challenging for professionals to recognize victims of human trafficking (Mahapatra et al., 2019; National Institute of Justice, 2020; Wallace et al., 2021).

Insufficient knowledge, training, and experience in identifying and aiding victims is a common problem related to the lack of recognition of a human trafficking victim (Mahapatra et al., 2019; Okech et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2021). Social workers and other health professionals do not understand the various forms of activity related to trafficking due to insufficient coursework in the primary educational content (Mahapatra et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., 2018). Further, a lack of research exists in identifying what human trafficking is, making it difficult to provide social workers with the appropriate knowledge while attending undergraduate and graduate-level programs (Mahapatra et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2019).

Researching human trafficking is challenging due to the covert nature of the crime and the difficulty of obtaining methodological and ethical approval (Mahapatra et al., 2019). The lack of research results in insufficient literature grounded in evidence-based practices to support curricula content and the subsequent identification of victims following graduation (Mahapatra et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2021). There is a need for additional research to improve the identification of human trafficking victims by social workers and implement appropriate interventions (Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019). Education modules must be updated and improved to identify victims of human trafficking correctly (Okech et al., 2018). Completing research and analysis will aid social workers in the identification of human trafficking victims from an individual level and a larger group context to understand the forces driving the problem and mitigate its harmful effects (Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019). While some screening tools exist, there is a need to develop evidence-based clinical guidelines on correctly identifying victims of human trafficking is needed (Martinho et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2021).

Tools Used for Human Trafficking Identification

Agencies worldwide are finding it challenging to address human trafficking through proper identification, screening, intervention, and treatment due to the lack of appropriate measurements and tools (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2019; McDonald & Middleton, 2019; Pate et al., 2021). One such tool is the Vera Institute Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (TVIT), which is a validated tool that screens adults for human trafficking for 60 minutes and requires a human trafficking expert for interpretation (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2019). Another tool used for identification of a HT victim is the Human Trafficking Interview and Assessment Measurement

(HTIAM), which takes 45 minutes to screen an adult and also requires a human trafficking expert to administer (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2019). The TVIT and HTIAM are both cumbersome and are not pragmatic for agency use because they are lengthy and not easy to administer (not user-friendly; Chisolm-Straker et al., 2019). Statistical performance indicators also revealed low outcomes of identifying victims of human trafficking using both measures, resulting in missed opportunities for intervention (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018).

Researchers have developed additional screening tools to standardize how professionals identify victims during a client's encounter (Davy, 2016). Greenbaum et al. (2018) created an electronic short screening tool to identify victims of human trafficking in a healthcare (emergency room) setting. Medical professionals are equipped with a tablet to confidentially administer the 6-question assessment to minors suspected of sex trafficking. Practitioners can use it assess various characteristics of victims such as appearance, demeanor (nervous/cooperative), and medical history to access health system information to determine previous treatments (Pate et al., 2021). Results of using this simplified and confidentially administered electronic screening tool suggest this modality is helpful in accurately identifying trafficking victims (Pate et al., 2021).

Similarly, Salisbury et al. (2018) developed a trauma-informed identification tool to analyze risk indicators of youth suspected of being victims of human trafficking. The instrument assesses risk using three tiers (client interview, consent, and assessment). Tier 1 provides a means to conduct an initial interview of at-risk youth to determine the likelihood of involvement in sex trafficking (Pate et al., 2021). Tier 2 requires assent to conduct a second, more invasive confidential consultation of

suspected client involvement. Tier 3, the most detailed, includes administering a behavior-specific interview, allowing practitioners to get a complete and thorough assessment of the various types of victimization experienced. The three-tiered screening process has provided a results-oriented intervention to identify and divert victims to community advocates.

There are also various tools used to identify sexual trafficking and adult services in online platforms and digital environments (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021; L'Hoiry et al., 2021). The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) over the past decade has created new human trafficking and profiteering opportunities, presenting a challenge to law enforcement and social service professionals seeking to identify victims (L'Hoiry et al., 2021). The Traffic Jam and Spotlight (TJS) and the Sexual Trafficking Identification Matrix (STIM), are used by law enforcement to facilitate investigations on adult services websites (ASW; Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021). The Traffic Jam and Spotlight is the most prominent tool used by police to analyze content and determine false profiles among legitimate advertisements (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021). TJS also helps law enforcement identify online trafficking scenarios through facial recognition software and data scraping advantages or the quick online retrieval of data from various websites (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021). The Sexual Trafficking Identification Matrix aims to assist law enforcement with identifying risk indicators on adult services websites and flag high-interest profiles for investigation (L'Hoiry et al., 2021). The matrix used with other risk assessments can measure the probability of trafficking scenarios of adult services websites. The matrix has been proficient in identifying high-risk profiles related to trafficking versus legitimate postings by independent sex workers.

Marinus Analytics reported that the TJS device assisted law enforcement with identifying 3,800 human trafficking victims in 2019 (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021). The tool has helped identify 15,000 trafficked victims since 2016 and saved over 60% in investigation time for law enforcement (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021).

Despite the growth in law enforcements' use of technical tools to identify victims of human trafficking, there remains a lack of research to establish the reliability and accuracy of such tools (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021). Limited research is available related to the examination of adult services websites and the identification of profiles of suspected traffickers (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021). The studies are speculative due to only identifying potential or suspected instances of trafficking (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021). Likewise, online tools such as STIM include limitations related to the identification of false positives (L'Hoiry & Moretti, 2020). The scale of opportunities adult services websites creates for traffickers outweigh the capacity for law enforcement to investigate nefarious activities, not due to the lack of resources, but due to the relationships between victims and their traffickers, creating additional challenges to identifying victims (Moretti & Antonopoulos, 2021).

To fight human trafficking networks, the U.S. government reformed public policies and implemented the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (NAPCHT) as a mechanism to identify victims through the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline (Anthony, 2018; NAPCHT, 2020). The hotline is used as a tool to identify human trafficking victims and focuses on retrieving critical information, support, and providing safety (Anthony, 2018; NAPCHT, 2020; Polaris, 2019). Operated by the Polaris Team, paramount to the program's goals is developing a

safety plan (Anthony, 2018; Polaris, 2019). The team adapts their phrasing and scope of questions to callers uniquely to help identify if the person is experiencing a trafficking situation (Anthony, 2018; Polaris, 2019). Services are accomplished via phone calls, text messaging, and chat signals (Anthony, 2018; Polaris, 2019). According to government data (NAPCHT, 2020), federal law enforcement agencies initiated over 1,600 new investigations into trafficking situations, and an additional 2,500 new cases were opened at the state and local levels from information gained from the hotline. Although this is a tool, in part, to help identify victims of human trafficking, the number of victims identified from this specific tool could be higher if the staff used a systematic, standardized set of questions (Anthony, 2018).

While multiple identification tools exist, many systems and service providers are not aware of, or agencies have not implemented the use of these tools (NAPCHT, 2020; Pate et al., 2021). Government and external stakeholders (social service professionals, medical personnel, educators, law enforcement officers, and government officials) face key challenges related to insufficient understanding and access to scientifically rigorous data analysis and program evaluation to inform better which strategies are most effective (NAPCHT, 2020). There needs to be more informed policies and practices around identification tools to effectively screen human trafficking victims within social work agencies and medical facilities (Pate et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2021). It is essential to provide appropriate education to individuals administering identification tools on the prevalence of the problem (Pate et al., 2021).

Federal Initiatives and Legislation by State

Government officials have immersed states with programs and resources

designed to help and promote awareness of human trafficking and anti-trafficking campaigns (Carmichael, 2021). Available Federal resources provide local and state governments with the necessary tools to fight this social injustice (Carmichael, 2021). Carmichael argues (2021) that these initiatives, especially education, aid social workers and government officials with the necessary elements to combat human trafficking. The U.S. Department of Justice (USDJ, 2021) aids states by educating leaders on strengthening collaborative responses to mitigate human trafficking using the Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide. The model uses a comprehensive, multidisciplinary task force approach that encompasses various agencies (medical, law enforcement, education, and hospitality) working together to respond to human trafficking (USDJ, 2021). As of 2016, only 13 states have legislatively addressed education related to human trafficking for multidisciplinary agencies (Atkinson et al., 2016). To tackle the problem associated with continuing education following formal schooling, Texas, Michigan, and New Jersey, have made human trafficking training for health professionals, including social workers, mandatory (Health & Human Services – Texas, 2021; New Jersey Hospital Association, 2018; Whiteford, 2021).

California has the highest rates of human trafficking cases reported, followed by Texas and Florida (CA OAG, 2021; Salas & Didier, 2021). The California Department of Justice reported 1656 cases in the state in 2018, with 1226 related to sex trafficking, 151 forced labors, 110 involving combined forced labor and sex trafficking, and 169 not specified (CA OAG, 2021). Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco have high human trafficking occurrences, especially near schools (Salas & Didier, 2021). Due to increased levels of sex trafficking and irregular migration at border crossings, California schools are vulnerable to human trafficking when they

should be safe for children to learn and develop into healthy adults (Salas & Didier, 2021). In response to the staggering statistics, California has developed a whole-of-government approach to human trafficking to address stakeholder concerns (educators, social workers, state officials, law enforcement; Salas & Didier, 2021).

In 2013, California enacted Senate Bill 1193, which added to California Civil Code 52.6, designating businesses and various establishments to post a public human trafficking model notice created by the California Attorney General's Office (CA OAG, 2021). The notice includes information on support services for human trafficking victims and identification strategies for employees and customers (CA OAG, 2021). The post must be placed in full public view and not in an inconspicuous place (CA OAG, 2021). In 2017, legislators enacted two additional measures, Senate Bill 225, and Assembly Bill 260, to combat human trafficking (CA OAG, 2021). Senate Bill 225 required the model notice to include a phone number for victims to text for help, and Assembly Bill 260 required motels and hotels to be added to the business list required to display the model notice (CA OAG, 2021).

In 2017, California became the first of fifty states to mandate human trafficking prevention education for grades 7th through 12th (Salas & Didier, 2020). Educators, social workers, administrators, and various school staff were mandated to receive the same training (Salas & Didier, 2020). The legislation, known as the Human Trafficking Prevention Education and Training Act (HTPETA), was signed into law on October 7, 2017, by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. (Salas & Didier, 2020). HTPETA is the Legislatures' response to the documented vulnerability of California and its children to Human Trafficking (Salas & Didier, 2020). Like the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), HTPETA initiates a multi-disciplinary

approach to reducing human trafficking vulnerability and begin its destruction from the state (Salas & Didier, 2020). It directs state, school, and county officials to join forces and create protection and prevention measures for vulnerable children, as well as formulates assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented measures (Salas & Didier, 2020).

According to information obtained from the Texas Human Trafficking Task Force (2020), Texas continually ranks second in the nation for the number of human trafficking cases. Foos-Pierce and Grona-Robb (2021) report that over an eleven-month timeframe in 2020, over 1.5 billion online commercial ads related to entice human trafficking were distributed, with approximately 300,000 suspected to be associated with targeting minors. The Texas Office of the Attorney General (TX OAG, 2020) acknowledges human trafficking as a major problem for the state that requires an equally strong solution to combat the problem. While some legislation has been introduced, the Attorney General argues that Texas is overdue to initiate updated policies designed to address the problem (TX OAG, 2020). The Texas Office of the Attorney General also reports that Texas must implement practices and collaborative efforts to develop updated responses to human trafficking, including new education laws and training for healthcare workers (TX OAG, 2020).

In response to addressing human trafficking, legislators created the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force (in line with the Department of Justice's - Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide) to increase collaborative efforts across the state, bringing local, state, non-governmental partners, and federal agencies together to end human trafficking (Foos-Pierce & Grona-Robb, 2021; TX OAG, 2020; USDJ, 2021). The task force's number one goal is to become equipped to recover and care

for victims of trafficking and to prosecute traffickers who exploit victims (TX OAG, 2020). Additional goals include strengthening the tasks force's role and structure, fostering a vision of cooperation through workshops and training, and building alliances with other human trafficking tasks forces and coalitions to help combat trafficking worldwide (TX OAG, 2020).

Texas has initiated additional legislative reforms (Texas Senate Bill [SB] 72) to eradicate human trafficking effectively and efficiently through the coordination of programs, services, and state resources for all state agencies receiving appropriations (Foos-Pierce & Grona-Robb, 2021; TX OAG, 2020). SB 72 created the statewide Human Trafficking Coordinating Council, which directed officials to develop a strategic plan ensuring state resources are used effectively through cross-agency coordination (Foos-Pierce & Grona-Robb, 2021; TX OAG, 2020). Additionally, Texas implemented Freedom in the 806: Coalition Against Trafficking, allowing intensive oversight and organization within law enforcement and social service agencies to increase community awareness for the prevention/identification of human trafficking victims, increase investigations and prosecutions of suspected traffickers, and provide coordinated/ comprehensive trauma-informed services to victims (Freedominthe806.org, 2021). Freedom in the 806: Coalition Against Trafficking has received state funding since its inception in 2015 and continues to expand efforts, increasing attention to human trafficking and providing additional education to social service professionals and community leaders throughout the state (Freedominthe806.org, 2021; OAG, 2020).

Michigan has been at the forefront of states implementing laws and practices addressing issues related to human trafficking (Whiteford, 2021). The Michigan

Banning Law was created in 2006 to eradicate human trafficking in the state (Whiteford, 2021). The legislature passed changes in 2010 and 2011 to strengthen the law and created the Human Trafficking Commission Act with the Michigan Attorney General's Office and a Human Trafficking Health Advisory Board within the Department of Community Health (Whiteford, 2021). The law aimed to provide law enforcement and healthcare officials with additional education and skills to recognize and effectively treat human trafficking victims (Whiteford, 2021).

Although Michigan has fought human trafficking for over a decade, in 2019, 364 human trafficking cases were reported, placing it 8th among states in the US for the highest number of occurrences (Resetar, 2021). These statistical rankings shocked communities, forcing leaders to strategize ways to address human trafficking that would provide significant changes (Resetar, 2021). Leaders formulated laws to help, not only identify victims of human trafficking, but also provide education to government officials (Resetar, 2021). Michigan legislators approved further legislation in 2021 that developed mandatory training standards on human trafficking for social service agencies, educators, counselors, law enforcement, and medical providers (Jarvi, 2021). Legislators included the new training requirements in the Human Trafficking Commission Act, which requires the Commission to create minimum training standards for professionals serving human trafficking victims (Jarvi, 2021).

Like Texas and Michigan, New Jersey has a comprehensive anti-trafficking strategy involving many sectors to include social service professionals, law enforcement officers, and government officials at all levels (Bruck, 2021). The legislature created the New Jersey Commission on Human Trafficking in 2013 to

educate, prevent, treat, and protect victims of human trafficking (Bruck, 2021). The commission consists of fifteen member agencies which includes law enforcement officers, victim assistance services, health care, child advocacy, social service agencies, and one survivor of human trafficking (Bruck, 2021). Commissioners are selected by the state Governor or receive recommendations from leading legislature members to serve an appointment (Bruck, 2021). The Governor of New Jersey recommended that the appointed commission work to create a multitude of trainings to help educate health care workers, social service professionals, law enforcement agencies, and government officials on human trafficking within the state (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDE], 2019). Training consists of material designed to strengthen communities by identifying and understanding what constitutes human trafficking and is provided by the New Jersey Commission on Human Trafficking's National Training Justice Center (NJDE, 2019).

Florida ranks third in the nation for reported cases of human trafficking with the third- highest number of calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (Singleton, 2020). South Florida is considered a gateway for human trafficking due to the area's proximity to international airports and Port Everglades (Singleton, 2020). South Florida is a mecca for human trafficking due to its high homeless population and 49% immigration rate (Coonan, 2003; Singleton, 2020). Such risk factors allow trafficking perpetrators, in the U.S. and abroad, to take advantage of victims in these types of environments (Florida Legislature, 2021; Singleton, 2020). Forced labor and the sexual exploitation of children are among the problems encountered due to the area's largely agricultural economy and location to major sporting and music events (Coonan, 2003; Florida Legislature, 2021). Large crowds related to professional

sports and entertainment create a venue for lucrative financial transactions for the sexual entertainment industry (adult entertainment clubs, escort services, and prostitution) and child sex traffickers (Coonan, 2003; Florida Department of Children and Families, 2020; Florida Legislature, 2021; Singleton, 2020). Although forced labor and sexual exploitation are related to the highest number of trafficking cases, domestic servitude, restaurant work, janitorial services, and sweatshop factory labor are also part of the equation (Florida Legislature, 2021).

Combating efforts of trafficking in Florida are led by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and the Office of the Attorney General (Florida Office of the Attorney General [FL OAG], 2021). Most human trafficking work in Florida centers on survivors who classify as minors (Singleton, 2020). DCF and DJJ work together to address cases by utilizing data combining agreements that allow them to cross-reference information called into the Florida Abuse Hotline on human trafficking cases with delinquency information (Singleton, 2020). DCF and DJJ are also at the forefront of trafficking identification, using a screening tool developed in 2015, Florida's Human Trafficking Screening Tool (Singleton, 2020).

Florida had a record of nonexistent or inadequate training for social workers, law enforcement officers, and social service agencies which perpetuated continued trafficking and failed to prevent new cases (Singleton, 2020). The Florida Office of the Attorney General formulated the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking, focusing on care options for victims (FL OAG, 2021). Care initiatives include developing comprehensive programs and services to certify safe houses/foster homes through DCF, strengthening the apprehension/prosecution of traffickers, and

enhancing coordination of responses (FL OAG, 2021). Participating in an annual statewide policy summit with institutions of higher learning was recognized as a method of building on state and local partnerships, which is a good start toward broadening education and training for social workers, law enforcement officers, social service agencies, etc. (FL OAG, 2021).

Florida legislators filed Senate Bill CS/SB 154: Human Trafficking Education in Schools in 2020 to revise health education in public schools to include instruction on the dangers and signs of human trafficking, which ‘died in messages’ (The Florida Senate, 2020). Instead, Florida has enacted mandating human trafficking awareness training to lodging establishments (hotel industry) employees only versus law enforcement officers, medical professionals, educators, and social service agencies etc. (Stanton, 2020). This service delivery model poses challenges to its effectiveness to mitigate human trafficking cases and extend training to all professionals involved (Powell et al., 2017). Most mandatory training is limited to new hotel industry hires and is not required on an annual or reoccurring basis, adding to sporadic education following employment (Powell et al., 2017; Stanton, 2020).

The lack of appropriate training for law enforcement officers, social workers, and social services agencies in Florida serving vulnerable populations experiencing human trafficking creates substantial concerns (Singleton, 2020). Singleton (2020) reports that victims undergo redundant interviews due to a lack of state training and education within agencies. As a result, retelling their stories can contribute to their trauma (Singleton, 2020). The author states that Florida agencies must strengthen their skills to develop a public health trafficking approach that avoids repetitively interviewing victims seeking services (Singleton, 2020). Additionally, the most

structured trainers must have a depth of human trafficking knowledge and adapt to individualized needs to mitigate further traumatization (Singleton, 2020).

Georgia continues to be among the states experiencing significant issues related to human trafficking, especially in the capital region of Atlanta (U.S. Department of State [USDA], 2021). Atlanta has been a hub for human trafficking for many years due to its proximity to an international airport and major interstate connections (Georgia – National Human Trafficking Hotline.org, 2021). Approximately 65% of men soliciting young females for sex in Georgia do so in and around suburban and metro Atlanta, with 9% near the airport (Georgia – National Human Trafficking Hotline.org, 2021). In addition, approximately 374 girls between the ages of 12 - 14 are commercially exploited monthly by about 12,400 men paying for sex using Craigslist to lure victims (Georgia – National Human Trafficking Hotline.org, 2021).

Georgia has implemented a variety of laws and initiatives to combat human trafficking, and representatives are eager to comply with Federal programs promoting awareness and anti-trafficking agendas (Carmichael, 2021). House Bill (HB) 200, passed in 2011, provided human trafficking training for social workers, law enforcement, educators, and government officials (Carmichael, 2021). Carmichael (2021) argues that HB 200 was an essential step in the fight against trafficking in the state through training initiatives. Correctly identifying victims at the local and state levels is imperative to afford them with the necessary protections and therapeutic interventions (Carmichael, 2021). The law broadened the definition of coercion to recognize and encompass additional ways victims are forced into exploitation (Carmichael, 2021). The bill extended compensation for victims of human trafficking

experiencing serious mental and emotional trauma and increased punishment for the sexual exploitation of victims under age 16 (Carmichael, 2021).

In 2015, Georgia legislators created the Human Trafficking Task Force consisting of Federal, state, and local agencies to further address trafficking concerns (U.S. Attorney Office [USAO], 2021). The goal of the Task Force is to collaborate with law enforcement, health care providers/staff, and social service agencies to identify human trafficking, correctly identify victims, and prosecute offenders using training initiatives (USAO, 2021). The Task Force provides statewide coordination, communication, and collaboration to respond to human trafficking and has elevated the concern as an utmost priority of the Governor's office (Criminal Justice Coordinating Council [CJCC], 2021). As a result of this prioritization, CJCC carries the dedicated response to trafficking by addressing the need for unified strategies, including training professionals to combat this problem (CJCC, 2021). The CJCC financially and programmatically supports innovative programs and services throughout Georgia to help empower victims (CJCC, 2021).

Georgia continues to take legislative action to combat human trafficking and implement education and awareness platforms (Carmichael, 2021). In 2020, Senate Bill (SB) 435, The Survivors First Act, was passed and signed into law requiring human resource education for all state employees (Carmichael, 2021). SB 435 provides materials for private industry to use for teaching and partnering with authorities when human trafficking is suspected (Carmichael, 2021). Additionally, SB 435 created remedies for sex and labor trafficking survivors to clean up Georgia criminal records, vacating convictions, and restricting access to arrest records related to trafficking offenses (Georgia - Office of the Attorney General [GA OAG], 2020).

Such actions remove barriers to employment, housing, and other opportunities allowing survivors to heal from their traumatic experiences and begin anew (GA OAG, 2020). Initiatives implemented by the Georgia legislature have been lauded by advocates such as Shared Hope International on the excellent strength of laws to combat human trafficking (Carmichael, 2021; Shared Hope International, 2021). Georgia representatives have also been recognized for raising awareness and educating citizens throughout the state on the topic of human trafficking (Carmichael, 2021).

Continuing Education and Training

Enhancing the training of members of civil society, social service agencies, educators, law enforcement officers, and government officials, to increase the identification of victims is recognized as an essential method of combatting human trafficking (Christenson, 2012; Mahapatra et al., 2019; NAPCHT, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., 2018). Professional's stakeholders benefit from having a deep understanding of the adverse impact of human trafficking on society and can counteract human traffickers' tactics, techniques, and reduce vulnerabilities through education efforts (Christenson, 2012; NAPCHT, 2020). Collaboration among stakeholders is a paramount method of preventing and detecting human trafficking victims, with proper and continuous education at the forefront of techniques (Christenson, 2012; NAPCHT, 2020; U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2017). As such, the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking identified enhancing outreach and education efforts to prevent human trafficking as a top priority of the initiative (NAPCHT, 2020).

Incorporating effective continuing education initiatives for social workers

providing services to victims of human trafficking is an essential component to identifying this social injustice (Mahapatra et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., 2018; Tortolero, 2020). Tortolero (2020) adds that many organizations offer continuing education for social workers serving victims of human trafficking in the way of credit for simply reading or reviewing trafficking-related material and completing post-test assessments. The post-test assessments provide a basic evaluation of knowledge and self-efficacy in handling trafficking incidents, and do not measure the value added, nor demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes (Powell et al., 2017; Tortolero, 2020).

Developed Undergraduate and Graduate Courses on Human Trafficking

Tortolero (2020) and Powell et al. (2017) argue that undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education trainings for social workers and health care professionals in identifying trafficked victims are limited and seriously lacking. Although educational programs related to human trafficking for social workers have expanded globally over the decades, there is still evidence that programs remain inadequate (Powell et al., 2017; Tortolero, 2020). Current higher education curricula provide a “general working knowledge” of human trafficking identification, however, practitioners would benefit from increased training encompassing victim intervention strategies (Tortolero, 2020). Other programs with ineffective procedures include sporadic education and training, the lack of rigorous research to determine outcomes, and limited evaluation of exhibited behavior change from education and training initiatives (Powell et al., 2017; Stanton, 2020, & Tortolero, 2020).

Lutz (2018) reports that integrating human trafficking education into an established curriculum ensures students’ exposure to important content before

working with human trafficking victims. Mahapatra et al. (2019), Nguyen et al. (2018), and Okech et al. (2018) argue that improved education fosters increased awareness for social workers to adequately identify and assist victims of human trafficking. Currently, there is no requirement for colleges to have a standard curriculum for teaching students about human trafficking, which contributes to missed educational opportunities to identify and impact vulnerable populations in the practice setting (Lutz, 2018).

Undergraduate and graduate-level social work courses related to human trafficking have been implemented into various traditional and online platforms (Lewis et al., 2018; Lucio et al., 2020). Practices vary from general introductory knowledge of human trafficking and the extent of multiple activities involved (Lewis et al., 2018). Many professors focus on an international perspective as there is a critical need for international human trafficking education and global social justice advocacy (Lewis et al., 2018; Lucio et al., 2020). The authors state that integrating human trafficking education into the school of communicative social work courses will help practitioners guide practice when working with victims of human trafficking (Lewis et al., 2018; Lucio et al., 2020).

The University of Georgia has tried to arm officials and service providers around the globe with accurate and trusted data to better address human trafficking (McGinty, 2021). The School of Social Work at the University of Georgia recently received \$15.75 million from the U.S. Department of State to expand programs and research to help reduce human trafficking (CENHTRO, 2021; University of Georgia [UGA], 2019). The award will help step up the University of Georgia's current-based African Programming and Research Initiative to End Slavery (APRIES) by providing

more resources to develop courses and research opportunities around human trafficking (CENHTRO, 2021; UGA, 2019). The University of Georgia developed APRIES courses to collect data on reducing human trafficking worldwide (CENHTRO, 2021; UGA, 2019). APRIES include researchers who are housed at The University of Georgia (US) and The University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom (UK, CENHTRO, 2021; UGA, 2019). The project utilizes an innovative, collaborative impact approach that encourages participation from various government officials (CENHTRO, 2021; UGA, 2019). The researchers also make efforts by using a collective impact approach in researching and policy intervention to achieve the goal of reducing human trafficking and modern slavery in selected regions (CENHTRO, 2021; UGA, 2019). The data collected from these courses will inform government policy and provide enhanced programs for social work students interested in human trafficking (CENHTRO, 2021; UGA, 2019).

Some universities have programs that provide education and training on identifying human trafficking victims, but it is not widespread. For example, Florida State University and Vanguard University in California offer programs that supply an overall understanding of human trafficking and what it looks like, partly due to the high numbers of human trafficking cases reported in each state.

In 2019, 896 human trafficking cases were reported to officials in the state of Florida, which continues to rise each year (Lopez, 2021). Due to the alarming number of human trafficking cases in Florida, The School of Social Work at Florida State University, and the Center on Academic and Professional Advancement (2021) have launched a new online course called Professional Certification in Human Trafficking Prevention and Intervention. School officials thought it was necessary for students to

understand the importance of knowing how to identify a victim of human trafficking (Florida State University, 2021). This course allows social work students to develop the knowledge, skills, and ability to understand the dynamics of human trafficking, its adverse impact, and how to recognize that a crime has occurred (Florida State University, 2021). The course provides significant information on how to identify victims of human trafficking and what skills are needed when working with identified clients (Florida State University, 2021). When taking this course, students are expected to complete the seven chapters to include researched-based reading, scenarios, multi-media materials, assignments, and quizzes (Florida State University, 2021).

Vanguard University, a private Christian school in Orange County, California, developed an Anti-Human Trafficking Certification program to address educational gaps (Vanguard University, 2021). The certification is open to graduate students seeking to improve their expertise in the subject area to mitigate future cases in the state (Vanguard University, 2021). Participants develop the necessary skills and expertise to recognize human trafficking occurrences and intervention strategies (Vanguard University, 2021). The College of the Canyons, located in Santa Clarita, California, provides additional training on human trafficking and is open to all students and community professionals free of charge (College of the Canyons, 2020). Like the Anti-Human Trafficking Certification program at Vanguard University, participants develop their knowledge and skills related to identifying human trafficking victims and understanding of providing competent support practices (College of the Canyons, 2020).

A review of the significant literature created an understanding of how the lack

of formal education and training adversely impacts social workers providing services to victims of human trafficking (Christenson, 2012; Mahapatra et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., Powell et al., 2017; Tortolero, 2020). The review also illustrated how an inconsistency in the use of proper identification tools exists, and the challenges created that impact professionals trying to identify human trafficking victims (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2019; Davy, 2016; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Pate et al., 2021). Ludwig von Bertalanffy's Systems Theory (1964) provides a conceptual understanding of how interrelated and interdependent parts interact within complex systems comprising individual, small, and global systems. The theoretical approach allows social work practitioners to identify and understand the multitude of factors involved in the multi-layer relationships that develop from within victims of human trafficking (Banson et al., 2018; Johnson, 2019; Walker, 2019). Moreover, Systems Theory provides a practice model to explore the psychological, sociological, and biological implications of human trafficking to create effective interventions (Banson et al., 2018; Meshelemiah & Lynch, 2019; Walker, 2019). It also helps social workers understand clients' interactions within a larger environment and explain resulting behaviors in terms of reciprocal relationships (perpetrator/victim) within the system (Masilo, 2018).

The literature review provided a venue to explore themes related to the adequacy of education and training on identifying victims of human trafficking in the practice setting (Christenson, 2012; Mahapatra et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., Powell et al., 2017; Tortolero, 2020). The review demonstrates how current procedures in identifying human trafficking victims are lacking due to inconsistencies in identification tools and sporadic undergraduate, graduate, and

continuing education practices (Powell et al., 2017; Tortolero, 2020). Systemically there are gaps in education for social workers working with human trafficking victims (Powell, 2018). Researchers describe current education as inadequate, limited, and serious lacking for social workers and health care professionals in identifying human trafficked victims, which creates barriers to effective interventions (Christenson, 2012; Powell et al., 2017; Tortolero, 2020). Additionally, while many Federal and state public policies, laws, and programs exist to address human trafficking, states subsequently implement practices differently, adding to the challenges of adequately educating stakeholders (Christenson, 2012; Mahapatra et al., 2019; NAPCHT, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., 2018). For example, some states require mandatory education for medical professionals and social workers, while others train employees in the hospitality industry (Carmichael, 2021; Coonan, 2003; Jarvi, 202; NJDE, 2019; Singleton, 2020; Stanton, 2020). Gaps in educational standards adversely impact service delivery for identified stakeholders, as many are not equipped to correctly identify victims of human trafficking (Carmichael, 2021; Coonan, 2003; Jarvi, 202; NJDE, 2019; Singleton, 2020).

Information related to the lack of appropriate educational practices in undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education curricula in identifying victims of human trafficking in social work is well-documented (Christenson, 2012; Mahapatra et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., Powell et al., 2017; Steiner et al., 2018; Tortolero, 2020). Fernandes et al. (2020) argue that education is a crucial element for social work delivery to adequately identify human trafficking victims. The research did not uncover any controversial issues, and it provided an understanding of the challenges related to formally educating and training stakeholders. Data collection

substantiated that integrating human trafficking education into established curricula is necessary to expose students to important content before entering the field (Christenson 2011; Fernandes et al., 2020; Lutz 2018). Fernandes et al. (2020) argues it is a crucial element to effective social work delivery. A gap in the literature exists explaining the best methodology to incorporate to improve formal education curricula before working with victims of human trafficking. Current ideas remain to be studied to improve formal education practices for social workers.

Summary

Human trafficking is a global billion-dollar criminal enterprise (Hu, 2019). Nonetheless, equipped social services agencies could effectively detect and deter human trafficking with the proper education and training resources. Section one provides a base for the study and a comprehensive review of the academic literature on human trafficking and how social workers may not identify potential victims adequately. The scope of ongoing human trafficking has placed enormous demands on social work practitioners (Hu, 2019). Social workers are essential elements of the human trafficking community, and the need for training on identifying victims grows daily (Hu, 2019).

I used a qualitative research design to determine if social workers have the necessary formal training to identify human trafficking victims adequately. Section two will include the research design, methodology, data analysis, ethical procedures, and summary. Section three will focus on the methodology, recruitment of participants, data collection, and analysis of the data.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

Social work practitioners providing services to victims of human trafficking are ill-equipped to adequately identify victims, in part, due to education gaps (Carmichael, 2021; Christenson, 2012; Mahapatra et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Okech et al., Powell et al., 2017; Singleton, 2020; Stanton, 2020; Steiner et al., 2018; Tortolero, 2020). Education on how to identify victims of human trafficking in the practice setting needs to improve (Nsonwu, 2019). Knowledge is crucial for direct service professionals to fully understand the complexities of identifying human trafficking victims, especially in efforts to prevent victims from withholding that they are involved in a trafficking situation (Scannel & Conso, 2020). Yet there is limited research and data on social workers and if they have formal training to adequately identify human trafficking victims in the practice setting (Hu, 2019).

This section contains a description of the research design, methodology, data analysis, and ethical procedures for this study. Within the research design section, I include the research questions and social work practice problem and explain how basic qualitative research fits this study. Next, I examine the data collection measures, instrumentation, and participants' responses in the methodology section. Lastly, I address and provide the process for analyzing the data and the ethical procedures that I followed.

Research Design

Researchers have reported that human service providers are ill-equipped to identify victims of human trafficking adequately (Williams et al., 2018). In Georgia, I have observed social workers assessing clients and not asking specific questions related to human trafficking or identifying behaviors. Social workers appear to ignore

critical environmental factors and signs of human trafficking, resulting in essential clues being missed in the information gathering process. For example, an unsafe environment may include the victim being found in a hotel room and not disclosing the perpetrator. Social workers may miss opportunities to identify victims and thoroughly assess situations, which may allow the victims to return to being trafficked. However, there are sporadic education and training programs available for social workers to identify human trafficking victims (Birks, 2021; Nsonwu, 2019; Williams et al., 2018). It is essential to determine if relevant training is available for social workers to identify and properly serve this vulnerable population (Birks, 2021; Nsonwu, 2019). This study was thus conducted to answer the following:

- RQ 1: What are social workers experiences with formal education received in the identification of human trafficking victims?
- RQ 2: What training experiences do social workers receive in the identification of human trafficking victims?

I interviewed social workers employed in the human trafficking department because they evaluate clients daily. The unique position of these practitioners offered a front-line view to answering the research questions because they directly served this vulnerable population. The methodology and data collected may provide practitioners with potential explanations for understanding the need to improve education and training focusing on specified situations and localized solutions. The method aligned well with the research topic because it offered a close partnership between the researcher and interested social workers in identifying potential education training gaps.

Methodology

I requested permission in writing via electronic mail from two directors of a child advocacy agency at two different locations to interview social workers in the social work department. I asked the directors to disburse the electronic message to designated staff (social workers only). Once distributed, the social workers were instructed to reply to me, request an informational letter, and obtain informed consent. After potential participants reviewed the letter and informed consent form and agreed to participate, social workers responded via electronic email, stating, "I consent."

Those who agreed to participate returned a signed copy of the informed consent form using email. I contacted each practitioner to schedule an interview through Microsoft Teams Communications. I selected Microsoft Teams Communications platforms because it offered a virtual venue to videoconference participants using technology-based platforms and allowed me to record each session. Within the informed consent form, the participants were notified that they would be recorded. I assigned each participant a code (i.e., Interviewee 1) to conceal their identity and ensure confidentiality.

Semi structured interviews were used for this study (Bradford & Cullen, 2012). The use of semi structured interviews helped me explore the level of education and training social workers possessed to adequately identify human trafficking victims in the practice setting. This data collection was a flexible tool to gather data and explore the education and training of the participants.

Following the interviews, I transcribed each interview in detail prior to member checking. I used member checking to verify the accuracy of the information with the participants once I completed the collection of information (Naidu & Prose,

2018). Each participant was sent a transcript for verification.

Participants

I requested permission to speak with 10 social workers from two directors of a child advocacy agency in two different locations. Interviewing 10 social workers provided an opportunity to ascertain their experiences and determine the level of education and training received to adequately identify victims of human trafficking. I requested the directors to disburse the electronic message to designated staff (social workers only). Once the electronic messages were sent to the social workers, the social workers replied to me and requested an informational letter. I sent an informed consent form to the participants. After the social workers reviewed the interview information and consent form, they replied to me via electronic message with “I consent.” Once the social workers sent the signed consent forms, I scheduled the sessions to be completed on a Saturday. The interviews were completed through Microsoft TEAMS and each session was recorded.

Instrumentation

I developed a set of interview questions (Appendix A) to use during the semi structured interviews, exploring the education and training of social workers to identify human trafficking victims adequately. I ascertained answers by meeting with the social workers individually via Microsoft TEAMS. The questions sought to understand the richness of responses from social workers who work with human trafficking victims daily. The interviews began with introductions and thanking them for participating in my study. I started asking the questions following the brief introduction. The data received was saturated, so I did not ask the participants follow-up questions.

Data Analysis

After conducting the semi structured interviews with the participants, I established codes, categories, and themes within the data collected. The first step was to code the data collected. Coding is a data analysis strategy in which some aspect of the data is assigned a descriptive label that allows the researcher to identify related content across the data (Illinois Library, 2023). In vivo coding was used to emphasize the words of the research participants. I wrote the words used by the participants on a sticky note and placed each on a large poster board to develop the coding. The participants' words were used to summarize and label the text of extracted data to ascertain recurring themes and patterns. These patterns allowed me to determine categories or themes that ultimately answered the research questions for this study.

The second step was categorizing the information by grouping codes using similar words that the participants used during the interviews. Categorizing consists of identifying and grouping data to form a collective whole for retrieval and review (Oworkers, 2023). The third step was to place each category into themes, or an outcome phrase or sentence that features the participants' accounts characterizing perceptions and experiences relevant to the research question (The University of Huddersfield, 2023). The results added to the rigor and quality of the study by analyzing local problems and guiding inquiry to develop an understanding of the problem through the participants' professional experiences. While categorizing the information, I continually used reflexivity to mitigate potential research bias while creating reliability, trustworthiness, and credibility of the findings.

Ethical Procedures

Following Walden University Institution Review Board approval (12-29-22-

0675607), I began the recruitment process. Ethical procedures were implemented to ensure the safety, privacy, and confidentiality of participants and the professional conduct of the researcher. Each participant was assigned a code name and number (i.e., Interviewee I). As stated in the informational letter and informed consent, the participant's identity was not documented in the interview transcription.

I shared the information letter pertaining to the nature of the study with the research participants via electronic mail. The information letter included an informed consent form for participants to sign and return to me via electronic mail. The informational letter and informed consent forms allowed the participants to read and consider their decision to participate. I requested participants to reply within 7 calendar days from the initial receipt of the electronic mail to allow time to reflect on participating in the study. I sent a follow-up email to answer any questions or clarify concerns within the 7 calendar days. I stored the collected data according to Walden University guidelines in a locked filing cabinet to ensure the ethical protection of participants' names and responses which I will only have access to. Disposal of information will commence after 5 years using manual shredding procedures.

Summary

Section 2 outlined the research design and data collection process in detail to adequately research the education and training social workers have to identify victims of human trafficking in practice. A semi structured interview for collecting data was the methodology selected for this research. Next, I provided a detailed method for analyzing the data, including in vivo coding, purposeful sampling, and member checking. Finally, I discussed ethical procedures to ensure participant confidentiality, informed consent, information protection, and proper retrieval, storage, and

destruction. Section 3 presents the data analysis techniques used and the findings to answer the research questions.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

This qualitative study was conducted to explore social workers' level of education and training to identify human trafficking victims in the practice setting correctly. Currently, limited research studies address social workers' preparedness levels to identify human trafficking victims adequately. Social workers play a vital role in advocating for vulnerable populations (Cox, 2018; Nsonwu, 2019). Evidence demonstrates that people experiencing trafficking will commonly seek attention, especially from social service departments which presents a rare opportunity to identify and support those in need (Dols, et al., 2019). However, their ability to identify victims of human trafficking has remained limited (Gonzalez-Pons, 2019; Nsonwu et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018).

Few research studies have explored the education and training social workers are provided to adequately identify human trafficking victims and its impact on serving this vulnerable population. Within this study, I spoke with agencies that provide services to human trafficking victims. The agency's social work practice included meeting the needs of sexually and severely physically abused women and children through prevention, intervention, therapy, and collaboration. The research focused on two research questions: What are social workers' experiences with formal education received in the identification of human trafficking victims, and What training experiences do social workers receive in the identification of human trafficking victims? I collected data from social workers employed in agencies that specialized in serving victims of human trafficking. Ten interview sessions were scheduled and conducted using remote technology. I initially planned interviews for a 2-hour block; however, each took 1 hour or less. All participants held social work

degrees (e.g., graduate level, licensed/unlicensed) and provided services to human trafficking victims. Section 3 introduces the purpose of the study, data collection methods, and the data analysis. This section also includes a discussion of the professional demographics of participating members, data analysis techniques, validation procedures, limitations, and findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

Eleven social workers expressed interest in participating in the semi structured interviews. I eliminated one social worker due to residing outside the State of Georgia. I began scheduling interviews after receiving the requested information from the social workers who consented to participate in the research study. The entire data collection process took 2 weeks. While speaking with the participants via email, I intentionally ensured they provided me with the time and date they were available to complete the interview (see Appendix B).

To begin validating the procedures used in the research process, I manually transcribed the audio recordings to prepare for data analysis. After manually transcribing the audio recording, I began member-checking by having study participants review and confirm their interview transcripts. I used member-checking to ensure the accuracy of the information as articulated by the interview participants (Motulsky, 2021). I contacted participants through email to provide them with the interview transcribed data. Each participant emailed me to confirm that the results reflected their experiences within one business day.

I encountered several limitations at the beginning of this study. I contacted two county directors requesting permission to interview 10 social workers within their agencies. One county director never responded. The other county director responded,

stating that she would email me the following week with her decision for approval. After waiting 2 weeks for a response, I contacted the county director via telephone. She stated that she had to obtain permission from the agency's legal department. After receiving the information, I emailed my capstone chair to request a meeting to discuss my concerns. My chair and I met to consider the limitations and brainstorm other options for completing the research interviews.

After meeting with my chair, I contacted a different county director to ask permission to speak with their social workers for the research. She approved but stated she had to confer with the human resources team for permission. I completed the request for change IRB form and submitted it electronically. After contacting IRB, I received approval to add a new county director to conduct the research. I sent the invitation via email to the county director. After sending the invitation to the county director, I received a telephone call stating the human resource department approved the interviews; however, the legal department still needed to review my request. After the legal department did not approve the interviews, I searched for other agencies providing services to human trafficking victims. I found two agencies, contacted them, and introduced myself and my research. Both agencies permitted me to complete the study. I finished the request for an IRB change and resubmitted it electronically. I obtained IRB approval to add the two new agencies and sent both agency directors the invitation through email for permission to interview their social workers.

Findings

I used a semi structured interview approach and asked the same open-ended questions (Appendix A) in each interview and in the same order. I used the semi

structured interview method as it elicits narratives that can be highly meaningful, as they turn questions about a given topic into storytelling invitations (Mahat-Shamir et al., 2021). Semi structured interviews allowed participants to reply freely, meaning the recorded data was not changed to correct grammar or wording, which is reflected in the responses. All questions were asked as written and approved by the institutional review board to mitigate potential bias or influence of the findings (Friedman, 2022). Each interview session lasted an hour or less. I asked clarifying and follow-up questions on unclear information. Each participant was provided a code (using numbers 1–10) via Microsoft TEAMS at the beginning of each interview session to protect confidentiality.

Demographics

Participants were of different age ranges, ethnicities, and experience levels. The age range of the participants was 24 to 50 years of age (see Table 1). There were five African American female participants and five Caucasian female participants. All 10 participants held a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, and three were Licensed Mastered Social Workers (LMSW).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

| Participant | Race | Education Level | Social Work Licensure | Specialty Area of Service |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Participant 1 | Caucasian | Master's degree | None | Individual counseling/resource referral |
| Participant 2 | Caucasian | Master's degree | None | Resource acquisition/basic needs – food, clothing, shelter |
| Participant 3 | African American | Master's degree | LMSW | Child Advocacy |
| Participant 4 | African American | Master's degree | LMSW | Child Protective Services |
| Participant 5 | Caucasian | Master's degree | None | Child Protective Services |
| Participant 6 | African American | Master's degree | LMSW | Child Advocacy – individual/ group counseling |

| | | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|------|--|
| Participant 7 | African American | Master's degree | None | Child Advocacy – victim assistance services (employment/shelter) |
| Participant 8 | African American | Master's degree | None | Medical Case Management |
| Participant 9 | Caucasian | Master's degree | None | Child Advocacy – counseling |
| Participant 10 | Caucasian | Master's degree | None | Child Protective Services – foster care placement |

Ten social workers participated in the interviews. Participant 1 currently works as a social worker and provides resources and individual counseling to human trafficking victims. Participant 2 currently works as a social worker and provides resources to human trafficking victims such as food, clothing, shelter, and counseling. Participant 3 currently works as a social worker within a child advocacy center for human trafficking victims. Participant 4 currently works as a social worker with child protective services and has 10 years of experience. Participant 5 currently works as a social worker within child protective services. Participant 6 currently works as a social worker with the child advocacy center providing group and individual counseling and has more than 15 years of experience. Participant 7 currently works as a social worker with the child advocacy center, providing victim assistance such as housing and employment resources. Participant 8 currently works as a social worker specializing in medical care referrals for human trafficking victims and has more than 15 years of experience. Participant 9 currently works as a social worker within the child advocacy center providing counseling to human trafficking victims. Participant 10 currently works as a social worker within the child protective service agency within the foster care unit.

Interview Questions: Data Results

The following provides an outcome summary of every question discussed in the interview sessions.

Please Describe Your Formal Educational Experiences Related to the Identification of Human Trafficking Victims

Participant 1 stated,

I got into the Bachelor of Social Work program at the University of Georgia for social work and narrowed down my interest to sexual abuse. My first experience was at the Child Advocacy Center for working with victims of sexual assault. That is when I was introduced to human trafficking and how to identify the victims. I also took an elective once I got into the master's program.

Participant 2 stated, "I have sexual violence formal education, but no deep dive into human trafficking." Participant 3 stated, "I didn't have any." Participant 4 stated, "In my profession, I do deal with quite a few individuals who are identified as sexual abuse victims or trafficking, so that requires a bit of training, formal and informal."

Participant 5 stated, "I don't have any formal education in identifying human trafficking victims." Participant 6 stated, "Well, um, I have a Master's in social work from Valdosta State University. That's it as far as formal education." Participant 7 stated, "In graduate school, I took one class on human trafficking victims, and we focused on how to identify the signs, indicators of abuse, people who are most vulnerable, and things of that nature." Participant 8 stated, "I went to a one- or two-day training, but it wasn't on identifying victims. That's it." Participant 9 stated, "I have my bachelor's and master's in social work. In my bachelor's, we had multiple people come to speak to us in class such as the police. In my master's I don't remember any human trafficking education." Participant 10 stated,

I don't think I have extensive formal training in CSEC [Commercial Sexual

Exploitation of Children] victims. I think it's mostly continuing education that I will have to seek out myself. Or it may have been a part of other training.

Among the 10 interviewees, 20% stated they have formal educational experiences related to the identification of human trafficking victims. The other 80% reported they have no formal educational experiences related to the identification of human trafficking victims. These responses provided that there is little to no formal education on the identification of human trafficking victims being provided to social workers who work with human trafficking victims.

What Educational Background in the Identification of Human Trafficking Victims Do You Believe is Required for Your Social Work Position?

Participant 1 stated,

I feel like having a background in how to communicate with children is important as well as learning the vulnerabilities that are going on in our populations and communities. That's important. Also just taking trauma-informed classes and learning the language and how to communicate to trafficked victims is important with building trust.

Participant 2 stated,

Basic one on one on what CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children] is, what it looks like, what healthy relationships are, the behaviors, learning the language of victims, etc. Social workers will need to look for children creating sexual acts of themselves and selling it, which is considered human trafficking as well, making sure the language is victim-centered and not victim blaming.

Participant 3 stated,

Anything in social services or human services field because you would need to know how to interact with people or how to communicate with people. You need to learn social interaction with people in general. That would be the steppingstone for it.

Participant 4 stated, "I think ongoing training is needed because again, it changes all the time whether it's male or female, locations, identities, LBGTQ folks because there has been an increase in those sexual abuse cases." Participant 5 stated, "For my position, I work with students in school, so there is a large network that supports students. I don't think it's necessary but it's not something that would be irrelevant." Participant 6 stated, "I think that more um, more knowledge about how to identify the victims, as well as strategies to keep them safe." Participant 7 stated, "Being able to identify verbal and nonverbal, physical communication when people are feeling threatened, I work in a hospital setting so you can see different things, you need to know the verbal cues and the nonverbal cues." Participant 8 stated, "For my position, I would say none because I don't do direct client work anymore." Participant 9 stated, "Good question. Probably more training on how to identify victims, yearly or every other year, making it a little more tailored to the work setting." Participant 10 stated, "I think everyone needs to be clear on what human trafficking is and what it looks like because it looks very different within the media. Also, some level of practice and shadowing someone, kind of like a peer review."

Question number 2 provided that 90% of the participants reported that there needs to be education and training on how to identify human trafficking victims, what the environment for human trafficking may look like, nonverbal and verbal cues, etc., for their social work positions. Only one participant provided that she did not need

any education and training on the identification of human trafficking victims for her social work position. This information shows that most social workers believe there needs to be some education and training on the identification of human trafficking victims for their social work positions.

Please Describe Training Other Than Formal Education You Experienced on the Identification of Human Trafficking Victims

Participant 1 stated,

I work with CSEC which is Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, so we cover things like home environments, whether have they been sexually abused, are they running away, internet safety, keeping phone secure, changing passwords, meeting friends their caregivers don't know about, learn to use the same language the children use, learn how to stay on toes. No case looks the same.

Participant 2 stated, "CSEC 101 which includes what human trafficking looks like, the language, poly victimization, other issues that led up to this point, and learning about childhood experiences."

Participant 3 stated,

I've gone to training, not through my agency, but outside of my agency such as lightness to darkness training, generic training with definition on human trafficking, and CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children] training. General information training, training on how to keep teens from human trafficking, different ways that children are lured into trafficking through social media, etc.

Participant 4 stated, "Working with the hospital has been huge, noticing different

bruises and marks, and noticing how they communicate and express. That has been training in itself.” Participant 5 stated,

I feel like the most I’ve heard or understood was small info sessions like lunch and learns during our breaks, but a lot of them were resources to offer people if you know they are a victim. I don’t have any training with identifying victims.

Participant 6 stated, “I’ve been to quite a few professional development trainings, what we call CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children] training throughout the year, especially when we saw it becoming more of a trend.”

Participant 7 stated, “It’s been a while now. My last training was probably four or five years ago. I can’t remember the specific topics that were covered.” Participant 8

stated, “I’m trying to think if I’ve done any other ones. Nope, because I can’t

remember, but I don’t remember so I will say none.” Participant 9 stated, “I don’t

think I’ve had any other ones, maybe some things were mentioned briefly in sexual harassment for employers, and maybe in child sexual abuse, but nothing specific.”

Participant 10 stated, “I think most of the training is pretty basic, like warning signs.

The rest is experimental, like case by case.”

In question number 3, 30% of the participants provided that they had some training on the identification of human trafficking victims. The other 70% provided that they have not had any education or training on the identification of human trafficking victims. These responses demonstrate that there is little to no training provided to social workers on the identification of human trafficking victims.

What Training on Identifying Human Trafficking Victims is Provided to you Through Your Employer, If Any?

Participant 1 stated, “Several pieces of training that people with lived experience that give their opinions are provided. Also, community vulnerability training, training throughout the year, and training on what other states are doing.”

Participant 2 stated, “CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children] response training in which they provide and host training with people from all over the country.

West Coast Institute that has a human trafficking identification tool that we use also provides training.” Participant 3 stated, “None were put on from my agency. All those

trainings were provided by other agencies that I keep up with for my role with my agency. There is nothing in my agency that is formal.” Participant 4 stated,

We usually have a few mandatory that we do every 6 months that are online and specific for the agency we work for. It includes how to identify, what services to implement, and how to move forward with assisting those clients who are in need.

Participant 5 stated, “There’s not any.” Participant 6 stated, “Just pretty much basic introduction training on how to identify victims of human trafficking, where to refer

them, etc.” Participant 7 stated, “There is no training on how to identify human

trafficking victims within the hospital.” Participant 8 stated, “I can’t tell you the name

of it, but there is a training available that is self-paced, we do have access to a system where courses on identifying human trafficking victims are available.” Participant 9

stated, “So far I have not seen any training provided for in-person held by our

agency.” Participant 10 stated, “I had to complete an advocate training, but it wasn’t

solely on human trafficking. There were some bits about human trafficking but not

identification.”

In response to question number 4, 60% of participants provided that there is no education and training on the identification of human trafficking victims offered to them through their employers. The other 40% stated that their employers do provide some education and training on the identification of human trafficking victims.

However, it appears over half of employers offer very little education and training.

How Would You Evaluate Your Experiences With Training in Identifying Human Trafficking Victims Provided by Your Employer, If Any?

Participant 1 stated,

I would say my employer does a really good job with getting feedback from the team, so we request different things we would like to learn about. We get training on identifying human trafficking victims and other things we need to learn about to strengthen the knowledge we already have.

Participant 2 stated, “I feel very confident in my ability to identify a child that has been trafficked.” Participant 3 stated, “None has been provided by my agency, but the training has been okay. They are starting to be redundant because they are not updating data outside of adding victim experience training.” Participant 4 stated,

I’m at about a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10. We don’t have a whole lot with our agency. We can use more. I think our agency must implement more training on the identification of human trafficking victims.

Participant 5 stated, “There’s not any, so I say low.” Participant 6 stated, “I would say basic, poor to basic because it’s limited, we need more repeat training, and it needs to be consistent, and it needs to be for all social workers.” Participant 7 stated, “I would evaluate my experience as low through my employer. You can come across different

types of people, so you need different types of training.” Participant 8 stated, “On a scale from 1 to 5, I would give my employer a 2 because they did provide training, there is policy, however, it is not a part of the annual training provided. There is no consistency.” Participant 9 stated, “I have not had any, so it will be none.” Participant 10 stated, “I wish I had more opportunities. I wish we had continuing training on how to identify.”

In response to question number 5, 80% of the participants rated their employers very low in evaluating their experiences with training in identifying human trafficking victims. The other 20% reported being very satisfied with the training provided through their employer on the identification of human trafficking victims. These responses demonstrate that there are social work agencies that are not making education and training on the identification of human trafficking victims a priority for the practitioners serving this vulnerable population.

Based on Your Experiences, What Knowledge and/or Training do you Believe are Needed to Identify Human Trafficking Victims Adequately?

Participant 1 stated,

I think you need to get training from human trafficking victims themselves because they are doing the work. You also need to speak with sexual assault centers and advocacy centers to see what they are seeing just so we can identify before it gets to trafficking.

Participant 2 stated, “Basic understanding of what CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children] is or what human trafficking is.” Participant 3 stated, “The basic thing we need to do in general, and I don’t know how we will do this because you have to get over public misconception but have a concrete knowledge of what

human trafficking is.” Participant 4 stated, “We need training across the board such as locations, racially, identifying sexually, what it looks like, what drugs are involved, etc.” Participant 5 stated, “Training specific to what type of work you do would be helpful. The way I would identify, it would look different than someone one on one with a victim or someone from a shelter.” Participant 6 stated, “I think being able to identify some of the main characteristics, particularly our foster kids too because a lot of our kids are going into that rim, we need to be able to identify certain characteristics.” Participant 7 stated, “The training I think would need to include rape, age group, location as far as geography, states that are related, what it looks like demographically for different populations and major highways.” Participant 8 stated, “In addition to initial training, there needs to be follow-up training that includes being able to identify the signs, and areas where it occurs.” Participant 9 stated, “Probably mandatory onboarding training to get a baseline knowledge of what we are looking for.” Participant 10 stated, “That’s a great question. I think we all need a basic level of understanding. It can be geared towards child advocacy, maybe someone who screens reports, what triggers to look for, but it needs to be specialized sometimes.”

In response to question number 10, 100% of the participants report that there is a need for education and training on the identification of human trafficking for social workers. The participants made it very clear that training on the identification of human trafficking victims is essential for social workers to identify trafficked victims adequately.

This qualitative study aimed to identify if social workers have the education and training to identify human trafficking victims adequately. The overall findings answered the two research questions concerning the formal education and training

social workers receive to identify human trafficking victims in the practice environment. Participants agreed that they do not have substantial education on adequately identifying human trafficking victims nor receive proper training in their employment settings.

Themes

The following information extrapolated from the data identifies the common themes, main points, and outcomes explained by the interview participants (see Table 2). The coded answers discussed by the participants were summarized to provide an overview of their professional experiences.

Table 2

Employment Provided Training by Topic and Evaluation Practices

| Identification Training | Communication Training | Proficiency Evaluation |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| None: 6 participants | None: 5 participants | None: 8 participants |
| High: 2 participants | High: 2 participants | High: 2 participants |
| No Answer: 2 participants | No Answer: 3 participants | |

Theme 1

Social work participants reported there is no training on identifying human trafficking victims through their employment. Participants in each interview session overwhelmingly agreed that there is very little to no training provided to them on the identification of human trafficking victims within their employment.

Theme 2

Social work participants reported that training in communication skills is needed for practitioners. Participants in each interview session overwhelmingly concurred that improved communication skills are required to identify human

trafficking victims in their employment positions to ensure victims are identified correctly and their basic needs are met.

Theme 3

Social work participants evaluated their experiences with training provided by their employers as low in identifying human trafficking victims. Most participants in the study reported that their employers do not provide training for the identification of human trafficking victims. The participants reported that they must find training themselves to ensure they have the skills to identify human trafficking victims adequately.

Unexpected Findings

The current study addresses whether social workers have the education and training to identify human trafficking victims correctly. One unexpected finding included two social workers evaluating their employers highly regarding the training received to pinpoint human trafficking victims adequately. Another unexpected result included three social workers reporting formal educational experiences in identifying human trafficking victims. Most respondents stated they had not received formal education on identifying human trafficking victims due to this population not being as prominent when they attended college.

Summary

The overall findings answered the two research questions concerning social workers' experiences and the level of formal education and training received to identify human trafficking victims in the practice environment adequately.

Interviewed participants acknowledged that no formal instruction for social workers includes identifying human trafficking victims. Participants also acknowledged that

there is very little on the job training and evaluation practices provided to social workers related to properly identifying human trafficking victims. Participants agreed that social workers require education and training on identifying human trafficking victims within the field to adequately service and communicate with this vulnerable population.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify what formal education social workers have in the identification of human trafficking victims. I also sought to identify the training experiences, if any, social workers receive in the identification of human trafficking victims. This qualitative research included 10 interview sessions with 10 social workers serving human trafficking victims. Data were collected over 2 weeks. Participants reported that a need exists to increase training related to the identification of human trafficking victims as there is very little available. Participants also reported that they did not have any formal education in identifying human trafficking victims.

The findings inform social work practice about the reasons why employment-related training and formal education (undergraduate/graduate) on the identification of human trafficking and effective methods of communicating with survivors are necessary for social work providers. The research findings demonstrate the necessity to assist social service agencies and institutes of higher learning with designing education and training opportunities for social workers within the practice field. This contribution to the research literature may enhance social work practices for agencies by implementing targeted training programs to address the identification and communication skills needed to assist human trafficking victims adequately. Section 4 reviews the application of professional ethics and recommendations for social work practice. Section 4 also outlines the implications for social change in support of social workers to improve preparedness for identifying and effectively communicating with of human trafficking victims.

Application for Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

All the participating social workers who contributed to this research work with human trafficking victims or have worked with human trafficking victims in the past. The 10 interview sessions represented four decades of social work practices. Each possessed outstanding social work cultural competence and professional ethics essential to effectively interacting with clients (NASW, 2017).

Developing a level of cultural competence and professional expertise to demonstrate proficiency in the identification of and proper communication with human trafficking victims in the social work environment are ethical principles associated with this research (NASW, 2017). Providing services in the human trafficking setting can be challenging if social workers are unaware of or understand the cultural dynamics, biases, and stigma surrounding the human trafficking environment (Fukushima et al., 2020). Understanding the characteristics, distinguishing attitudes, habits, institutional reinforcement, and providing sympathetic responses related to human trafficking incorporates effective practice within this unique culture (Fukushima et al., 2020). Understanding the characteristics of the human trafficking population also provides social work practitioners with insight to help individuals gain independence and become more open to receiving services (Fukushima et al., 2020).

The current study addressed whether social workers have the education and training to identify human trafficking victims adequately, another ethical guideline of professional social work practice (NASW, 2017). By identifying current trends impacting social workers and their ability to identify human trafficking victims, this study helps contribute to the knowledge base of the social work profession (NASW,

2017). The findings support the need for social workers to consistently complete education and training to identify human trafficking victims adequately (NASW, 2017). This contribution to academic literature may also assist social service agencies with implementing effective education and training programs to support the human trafficking population.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

This research was a qualitative study designed to address whether social workers have the education and training to identify a human trafficking victim adequately. There are significant opportunities for further research regarding social workers' preparedness to identify human trafficking victims. While human trafficking is not a new occurrence, researchers are beginning to understand best practices and identify training proficiencies surrounding the identification of human trafficking victims (Wilson, 2020). Many social workers will encounter victims of the human trafficking, which is why awareness and training efforts related to human trafficking are essential for helping to identify victims correctly (Wilson, 2020).

The study results provide knowledge to address the gap in whether and to what degree of education and training social workers may have to identify a human trafficking victim. To further the findings of this study, taking the knowledge gained from this study and continuing further research may be beneficial for social workers to acquire the education and training to identify human trafficking victims appropriately. Further research would also benefit from expanding education and training for human trafficking globally.

The research's limitations included difficulty locating participants, which was unanticipated for this study. Three county directors declined the participation of their

social workers. The strength of this research project was the results. The results indicate that the research project was successful, and the participants provided knowledge about human trafficking. The strengths also included the participants providing information about the types of education and training required to help practitioners identify human trafficking victims successfully.

Implications for Social Change

Human trafficking impacts individuals, families, and communities (Recknor et al., 2022). Research from 2022 reports that human trafficking has impacted 25 million victims globally (Recknor et al., 2022). When I began this study in 2019, resources from a study completed in 2016 found that over 313,000 people globally experienced human trafficking, of which 79,000 were minors and youth (Mostajabian et al., 2019). Human trafficking has increased within the last 5 years and has more than tripled (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023). The numbers have increased significantly since the beginning of this research.

Survivors may develop serious psychological, physical, and emotional issues from their trafficking exposure (Recknor et al., 2022). Human trafficking survivors may need various services to help them heal and navigate the world. However, many social workers may not be prepared to identify them correctly to address the various issues of these survivors (Recknor et al., 2022). This issue could be related to social workers not identifying human trafficking victims appropriately due to agencies not providing the education and training needed. In this study, 20 % of participants reported that their agency provided them with training to identify human trafficking victims. Eighty percent of the participants reported that their agencies did not provide them with training to identify human trafficking victims adequately. The gap

illustrates that social workers do not have the tools to identify human trafficking victims.

This research highlights the need for more education on human trafficking victims. Several formal education programs, such as bachelor's and master-level social work courses, have been developed over recent years. However, providers still lack education on identifying human trafficking (Lee H et al., 2021). This study contributes to social change by encouraging agencies to provide social workers with additional formal and informal education and training. Education and training will help social workers better identify victims correctly and provide them with the services needed. Agencies and organizations understanding the importance of identifying human trafficking victims may increase the interventions offered and possibly change policies and practices.

Organizations and academic institutions can also accomplish positive social change by improving the formal education and training for social workers who desire to work with human trafficking victims. Social workers who can effectively identify human trafficking victims may help survivors at the beginning of treatment, mitigating re-traumatization and the time involved in a trafficking situation. Enhanced, educated, and supported social workers may mean a higher quality of global services to human trafficking victims.

Summary

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery that significantly impacts its victims. Social workers need to identify human trafficking victims adequately to help end this horrific crime. Their level of preparedness will vary based on experiences, training, and support. Any missed opportunities by social workers to

identify victims of human trafficking is a missed opportunity to provide victims with the needed services to save their lives. Participants in this research study discussed the importance of enhancing training and education in identifying human trafficking victims. In the social work profession, additional research and trainings are needed to identify human trafficking victims adequately. This research can be used for social service staff education and training as well as training associated stakeholders working with the human trafficking population.

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Appendix: Focus Group Research Questions

The following questions will be asked during the focus groups.

1. Please describe your formal educational experiences related to the identification of human trafficking victims?
2. What educational background on identification of human trafficking victims do you believe is required for your social work position?
3. Please describe trainings other than formal education you experienced on identification of human trafficking victims? What topics were covered?
4. What trainings on identifying human trafficking victims are provided to you through your employment, if any?
5. How would you evaluate your experiences with trainings in identifying human trafficking victims provided by your employer, if any?
6. Based on your experiences, what knowledge and/or trainings do you believe are needed to identify human trafficking victims adequately?

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

| Participant | Day | Date | Time |
|----------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|
| Participant 1 | Tuesday | January 31, 2023 | 10:00 am EST |
| Participant 2 | Wednesday | February 1, 2023 | 10:00 am EST |
| Participant 3 | Wednesday | February 1, 2023 | 04:30 pm EST |
| Participant 4 | Wednesday | February 1, 2023 | 6:00 pm EST |
| Participant 5 | Thursday | February 2, 2023 | 6:00 pm EST |
| Participant 6 | Thursday | February 9, 2023 | 10:00 am EST |
| Participant 7 | Thursday | February 9, 2023 | 2:00 pm EST |
| Participant 8 | Thursday | February 9, 2023 | 3:30 pm EST |
| Participant 9 | Saturday | February 11, 2023 | 11:00 am EST |
| Participant 10 | Sunday | February 12, 2023 | 3:00 pm EST |
