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Reintegration Experiences of Male Victims of Human Trafficking

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2025

Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Human trafficking continues to be a world-wide problem, despite attempts to mitigate it. Many human trafficking victims are saved each year, but many more do not make it out. When rescued, the victims of human trafficking need to be reintegrated back into society. Research on human trafficking survivors is mostly focused on female victims; there is little research focused on male victims. Due to this, the purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after they have been rescued from human trafficking. A phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after being rescued from human trafficking. Semistructured interviews were conducted with five male survivors of human trafficking. By focusing instead on the reintegration experiences of young men, this study can find possible barriers that have to be overcome by the victims. Barriers that were found included feeling like an outsider, lack of privacy, and being viewed as being associated with other men that hurt female victims of human trafficking. This in turn can lead to others finding possible solutions to them. This helps create positive social change.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal enterprises in the world and is second only to the drug trade (Evans, 2020). It is often referred to as modern-day slavery and is a very profitable criminal enterprise to take part in. Each year, the number of victims of human trafficking has been steadily increasing. However, the total number of victims of human trafficking is not known as it is a secretive operation (Haney et al., 2020). In America, the most common form of human trafficking is sex trafficking, as it is one of the most profitable forms of human trafficking (Leach, 2022). It is estimated that 84% of human trafficking victims are women, with 31% of these victims being minors (Leach, 2022).

Law enforcement officers around the world have successfully rescued many victims from human trafficking rings. However, the number of victims saved cannot offset the number being taken. When these victims are rescued, they still must be reintegrated back into society. This can involve things like dealing with various health problems that arise from being trafficked (Recknor et al., 2022). Recknor et al. (2022) stated that there is limited research on the health needs and aftercare of human trafficking victims. This is because most human trafficking studies focus on things like how to recognize the signs that someone is being trafficked or awareness of human trafficking (Haney et al., 2020). Additionally, studies that have been completed have not focused on young male victims. This is due to reasons like men being less willing to step forward and admit that they were once trafficked (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). By focusing on the

experiences of male human trafficking victims, researchers can potentially create programs to better help these victims.

In Chapter 1, I present the research problem on the experiences of male human trafficking victims during the reintegration process and the background on it. It is followed by a brief overview of important studies in the area. Afterwards, the purpose of the study, research question, definitions, limitations, and scope are touched upon. The nature of the study, assumptions, and theoretical foundation are discussed. Lastly, the significance of the study and its impact on the practice and social change are presented.

Background of the Study

Human trafficking is the act of obtaining some sort of labor or sexual exploitation from someone via force, fraud, or coercion (Sidun, 2025). However, for children who are the victims of human trafficking, force and coercion are not required (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Researchers have studied human trafficking and sought to examine the magnitude of the crime. These researchers found that there is a high prevalence of human trafficking, which is motivated by the need for low-wage workers and a high profit margin (Evans, 2020). It has also been found that there are negative health outcomes among victims of human trafficking, causing serious public health issues (Haney et al., 2020). From another perspective, human trafficking is a source of serious mental health issues. More recently, researchers have studied the concept of human trafficking as well as how it causes family separation in the United States (Treadaway, 2025). It was found that victims of human trafficking endure trauma because of the lengthy and unassured process of family reunification (Treadaway, 2025).

However, only a few studies can link human trafficking to adverse health outcomes since research on the subject is limited. Recknor et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review to uncover research approaches on health consequences and human trafficking, which supports the assertion. In their research, they also found that limitations on current research methods negatively influence what is known concerning human trafficking and health (Recknor et al., 2022). The authors concluded that there is a need for representative recruitment strategies meant to fully investigate the long-term health effects of human trafficking.

These assertions based on limited research concerning the relationship between health and human trafficking are corroborated by Twis et al. (2022). The researchers acknowledged that studies on human trafficking show that there is limited information specifically on the health needs of survivors of human trafficking. The researchers also asserted that there was a need for more input from the human trafficking survivors to better critique the aftercare provided (Twis et al., 2022). By gathering this knowledge, researchers could better help the survivors (Twis et al., 2022).

Male Victims of Human Trafficking

Research and the press have neglected men as victims of human trafficking. While the total number of victims of human trafficking is unknown, children and women dominate the estimates (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Statistical estimates vary, but on average, 70-80% of human trafficking victims are women, while 25-35% percent are children. The proportion of male victims of the crime is rarely factored into the estimates, raising concerns about the lack of information about men being affected by the crime.

This lack of knowledge is part of the reason male victims have been neglected (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020).

Hodge (2021) supported the view that men have been neglected as victims of human trafficking. They stated that when the world started to focus on combating human trafficking, they primarily focused on sex trafficking. As sex trafficking has a much higher risk for women and girls, these groups became the focus of antihuman trafficking efforts. However, men and boys are shown to be more likely to be trafficked when it comes to other forms of trafficking, like labor trafficking, than the female gender (Sidun, 2025). Additionally, male victims are less likely to come forward about being trafficked (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). This, in turn, leads to male victims being underrepresented in these studies.

Child Victims of Human Trafficking

Children are an easy target for child traffickers, and data shows worrying trends and experiences that they are subjected to. Child victims of human trafficking suffer from high levels of emotional insecurities and mental illness (Roney & Villano, 2020). They are also exposed to early pregnancy due to forced prostitution and are exposed to mental health problems. These children also suffer from low levels of self-worth. As human trafficking has increased around the world, the number of children being trafficked is continuing to rise as a result. Children who become victims of child trafficking are often from homes that have many problems, such as abuse and neglect (Roney & Villano, 2020). They are also less likely to access social services as well as treatment for health

issues they suffer from. The reason for the increase in the number of children who are victims of human trafficking is attributed to organized crime.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children through human trafficking is a significant public health concern (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). The reason is that many American and foreign youth have suffered both mentally and physically as a result of the crime. Roney and Villano (2020) stated that practitioners in the health sector play a pivotal role in identifying child victims of human trafficking. Many child victims of human trafficking have visited health care providers at some point during the course being trafficked. In addition, Franchino-Olsen et al. (2022) found that violence, deprivation, abuse, and even infections were integral parts of trafficking children. This produced many adverse physical, social, and emotional consequences that required treatment when these children were trying to undergo reintegration (Roney & Villano, 2020).

Roney and Villano (2020) and Franchino-Olsen et al. (2022) noted that child victims of human trafficking often show signs of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and trauma-related disorders. They should be provided with care by first interviewing them in private after trust and rapport have been built (Baba et al., 2023). Additionally, there are problems that can appear after the victim has been through the “reintegration process” due to a lack of proper aftercare. This can lead to the victim still having difficulties that were not addressed, and later, it can lead to the victim doing things like entering the sex industry (Baba et al., 2023). Similar studies in other parts of the world show that more

information is needed to address the problems with the reintegration of child victims of human trafficking (Baba et al., 2023).

Problem Statement

Human trafficking is a global criminal enterprise that continues to grow each year (Evans, 2020). Once a victim of human trafficking is recued, they still need to reintegrate back into society. However, there are many different health concerns because of trafficking that can create barriers during the reintegration process (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). As children are still developing, health problems from being trafficked can leave a lasting impact on them (Roney & Villano, 2020). Fear and mistrust of adults due to their time being trafficked can cause them to refuse to work with the professionals assigned to help them during the reintegration process (Surtees et al., 2022). Injuries from being trafficked, such as broken growth plates, can cause complications with future development and remind them of the trauma they went through (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Repeated use by others during their time being trafficked can also give a sense of worthlessness leading victims to believe they do not deserve help (Roney & Villano, 2020). All of these are barriers to reintegration.

While there are studies on child victims of human trafficking, there is a lack of focus on males as most focus is on the female population (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Studies have shown that there are developmental differences between the genders as children grow up (Mizokawa & Hamana, 2020). For example, boys tend to be more impulsive and aggressive, which can lead them to benefit less from help during reintegration (Mizokawa & Hamana, 2020). This can then lead them to go on to commit

crimes, causing these victims to be seen as perpetrators. Boys and girls also require different strategies for things like stress relief, as boys are impacted by their environment more than girls are (Mizokawa & Hamana, 2020).

Thus, it appears that findings about reintegration based on data gained from female-focused studies may not apply to male human trafficking victims. As a result, more research is required to explore the experiences of male children that have been rescued and successfully reintegrated back into society, as strategies that may work for girls will not be as effective for boys (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after they have been rescued from human trafficking. To explore these experiences, a phenomenological approach was used for this study. As such, I focused on the lived experiences of the participants. Young male victims of human trafficking have not been studied thoroughly (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020), which provides the justification for this research. By exploring these experiences, I may provide insight into the complications that male victims face during the reintegration process. By using men that are reintegrated back into society, this study may be able to help future researchers pinpoint ways to deal with complications that arise during the process. Lastly, the study can help bring awareness to the plight that male victims go through, with the hope of inspiring more to help.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after being rescued from human trafficking?

Theoretical Foundation

There are a number of theories that are applicable to human trafficking studies. For studies concerning the reintegration process of human trafficking victims, the theory of renewed self was a good fit. According to the theory of renewed self, there is a relationship between those that provide aftercare for the victims of trauma and the trauma victims (Curran et al., 2017). This theory states that this relationship is one that helps the trauma victim be successfully treated and reintegrated back into society by cooperating with the aftercare providers (Curran et al., 2017). This means the victim must work on reaching a predetermined goal for a renewed self and not just let the aftercare providers do everything (Curran et al., 2017). In order to make such a relationship work, a sense of trust must be built between the parties involved. Trauma victims need to be able to trust that aftercare providers have their best interests in mind and want to help them (Curran et al., 2017). On the other hand, aftercare providers need to be able to trust that the victims want to be treated and are willing to do what it takes to successfully complete their treatments (Curran et al., 2017).

Trauma victims successfully accomplish their renewed selves by following what is known as the process of renewal (Curran et al., 2017). Once achieved, this will allow the victim to achieve a sense of worthiness, connectedness, adaptability, and interdependence (Curran et al., 2017). Accepting that they, the victims of crimes such as

human trafficking, are just as responsible for their treatments being successful and working at getting through the treatments is part of what allows the victims to achieve a sense of worthiness (Curran et al., 2017). This theory states that there are four interconnected stages that lead to a renewed self. These stages are the awakened vision stage, the confronting reality stage, the re-salvaging autonomy stage, and the liberation stage (Curran et al., 2017). When exploring the experiences of male human trafficking victims, the efforts exerted by the victims to help themselves should be prevalent in their experiences according to this theory.

Nature of the Study

There are many different approaches that one can select from when considering a qualitative study. Approaches differ on points like the data collection instruments or even the questions that are asked to participants in the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). This study on exploring the experiences of the participants naturally aligns with the phenomenological approach. A study that uses the phenomenological approach is one where researchers explore the experiences and perceptions of the study participants in relation to the overall phenomena in question (Burkholder et al., 2020). In this study, the phenomenon in question was the reintegration process after being rescued from human trafficking. As the problem statement states, there is a lack of understanding of the experiences of male human trafficking victims during the reintegration process. Since the phenomenological approach focuses on experiences, the approach and the problem statement align.

Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a qualitative tradition, the analysis shifts back and forth between the participants' perceptions and the researcher's interpretation of the perceptions (Saldaña, 2025). This means that the approach aims to gather detailed examinations of personal lived experiences and create codes from the data, not codes that adhere to pre-existing theoretical preconceptions (Saldaña, 2025).

Definitions

Aftercare: Treatment or program with the goal of helping a victim of crime heal from physical and psychological wounds and reintegrate back into society (Curran et al., 2017).

Aftercare Provider: Someone who has a role in the treatment and reintegration process of a trauma victim (Curran et al., 2017). This includes anyone from doctors to program directors.

Human Trafficking: The act of illegally moving people from one place to another for purposes such as sexual exploitation or forced labor (Macy et al., 2023).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): A type of data analysis used for studies using a qualitative approach. This analysis results in codes that are generated from the data that was gathered instead of preconceived codes (Saldaña, 2025). This data analysis not only analyzes the perceptions of the participants but also the researcher's interpretations of the perceptions as well (Saldaña, 2025).

Modern Day Slavery: Human trafficking is often referred to as modern-day slavery due to the victims being exploited, usually against their will (Leach, 2022).

Reintegration: The process of returning someone back into society (Haney et al., 2020). This includes being an active member of society. The people being reintegrated in this case are the victims of crime.

Successful Reintegration: When a victim of trauma or crime returns to being a participating member of society (Curran et al., 2017).

Trauma: An experience that is deeply disturbing or distressing to the victim. (Hodge, 2021).

Assumptions

There are a few assumptions that were part of this study. These assumptions are things that are believed but cannot be demonstrated to be true. The first assumption was that a study participant who meets the requirements to take part in the study has truly met the requirements. One of these requirements is that the participant has successfully passed some sort of treatment program and reintegrated back into society. However, just because they managed to pass the treatment, or program does not mean it was successful in properly helping them. It also does not mean the success that was achieved was a complete success. This means that the data that could potentially be used to help make programs and treatments better for male victims of human trafficking may be flawed.

Another assumption was that the participants will be able to remember important things and events from their time during the reintegration process. Since the participants will have gone through the process as children, it is possible that they forgot or blocked out certain aspects of the process.

A third assumption that was necessary for the study is that the experiences being described were real. Participants may be over-focused on certain events while misremembering other details of their experiences. Selective memory is also a possibility, as the participant may be blocking out details. This is not really something that can be demonstrated to be true, as the data is the perceptions of the participants, not the facts.

Scope and Delimitations

The research gap that I explored was the experience of male human trafficking victims when they went through the reintegration process as children. The focus was specifically on male victims because human trafficking studies that include men do not have a lot of men or do not have any at all (see Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). By focusing solely on male victims, the gap can be filled. Participants who were children during the reintegration process were selected as studies involving child victims are a very vulnerable population. However, by selecting men who went through the process as children, I can potentially gather the experiences and perceptions of children without risking causing undue distress to vulnerable children.

As previously mentioned, the target population for volunteers was men who were trafficked, rescued, and reintegrated back into society as children. Furthermore, men who have a place to live, a job, or attend a higher learning institution are selected in order to make it more likely that the participants have successfully completed the reintegration process. Men that have not yet been successfully reintegrated or did not go through the process will be excluded. Female victims will also be excluded, as the gap in the literature is on male participation (see Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Victims that were

trafficked, rescued, and reintegrated will shift the focus as different countries will have different processes.

Limitations

Like with any study, there were limitations and potential barriers for this research. The first and likely biggest limitation was that there may not be enough participants to volunteer for this study. A reason why there is a gap in the first place is because not enough men have volunteered to participate in human trafficking studies. To overcome this limitation, participants were sought from human trafficking program volunteers. The hope is to find some people who volunteer their time to help other victims. This should make them more willing to participate in such a study, as they are already involved in helping others who are going through what they already went through.

Another limitation is potential researcher bias. This could be perceived by the participants and affect the answers that they give to the questions. Bias also has another impact on the study via the data analysis. As previously mentioned, the data analysis will be IPA. IPA involves researchers making interpretations of the data they collect (Saldaña, 2025). Bias could cause the researcher to interpret one set of data differently than the participant intended. To overcome potential bias, a third party was consulted on things such as the interpretation and coding of the data.

Another limitation was that the study participants may not remember everything they experienced during their time in the reintegration process since it would have been completed when they were children. This could potentially cause the study to miss out on

information that could have been useful to the study. Looking for volunteers in one of the programs should also help keep their memories of their time in the process fresh.

Lastly, the data may be transferable to victims of human trafficking in similar situations as participants in this study. However, different human trafficking programs and treatments often vary by location. They can vary from country to country or even state to state. As such, the programs and issues faced may be different for each participant.

Significance of the Study

Many of the studies on human trafficking focus on the signs of human trafficking (Haney et al., 2020). Those that do not focus on such things generally focus on things like health issues developed from being trafficked (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). These issues include things like PTSD, malnutrition, and wounds that never had the chance to heal properly (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). However, not everything can be properly planned for. What affects one person may not affect another. What affects a child may not affect an adult. An example of this is that since children are still growing and developing, things like malnutrition can stunt their growth, which is not something adults have to worry about. What is immensely hard for a male victim may be possibly more manageable for a female victim. An example of this is that men often find it hard to admit that they were the victims of things like sex crimes, as it makes them seem weak or they do not like to talk about how they feel (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). By exploring the experiences of each group of victims, it becomes easier to understand the difficulties that they went through during the reintegration process. The current is unique as it focuses on male

victims, leading to a better understanding of the reality for this particular group of human trafficking victims.

Researchers seek to create positive social change with their research. This is accomplished by contributing original work to their fields. In order to contribute original work, this study seeks to examine the experiences of male human trafficking victims. The significance of this is that it will help fill in the gap in the literature. Additionally, victims of human trafficking who experience difficult barriers to their treatment can be left with long-lasting issues. By exploring these barriers, it is possible to see them and understand how they impacted the victims. The data gathered from this study can help make reintegration programs better for victims of human trafficking. This in turn could better help the victims of human trafficking, as programs will be better suited to helping these victims. Help that is tailored to them will allow victims to have an easier time during the reintegration process. It could also be used to help train people in the community so that they can help support the victims during their reintegration process as well. This will create positive social change, which is the goal of every researcher.

Significance to Practice

As mentioned above, this study has the potential to impact human trafficking practices. As many of the studies on human trafficking are predominantly female victim-based, programs and practices are likely to be centered around what would help women victims best (Hodge, 2021). By exploring the experiences of male victims, this study can potentially help improve programs and practices for male human trafficking victims. Since this study is focusing on male victims going through the reintegration process as

children, the programs can further be directed towards male children that are victims of human trafficking. The result of this study has the potential to affect local communities. By exploring the experiences of male human trafficking victims, this study can help those who read it better understand the struggles that they go through. By understanding these struggles, people may decide to become more active in helping those who have been trafficked. By increasing awareness of the struggle that male victims go through, it can also help people spot victims that have not yet been rescued, such as noticing an injury common to the victims of human trafficking. This can lead to more victims being rescued. It could also help families decide to open their homes as foster parents and help the children that have been rescued from human trafficking and need homes. Lastly, it could also cause the communities to go to their elected officials for better laws and policies that better help male victims of human trafficking.

Significance to Social Change

As previously mentioned, the goal of researchers is to create positive social change through their studies. By using this research to help create better programs and treatments for male victims of human trafficking, this can help the victims reintegrate back into society. Since it could help improve the lives of these victims, this has the potential to create positive social change. As this study can help other studies find gaps in the literature or help create a framework for other studies, it can potentially create more positive social change through other studies. This study can also help the communities better understand the troubles the victims go through and invigorate them to help the victims, creating positive social change. Lastly, this can help people fight for better laws

and policies for male victims. For instance, laws like the Trafficking Victims Protection Act can be better tailored to help all victims.

Summary and Transition

Human trafficking is a global concern that has been going on for centuries (Leach, 2022). Researchers have been conducting studies on human trafficking and its victims to help create positive social change. Many of these studies focus on things like health issues that are the result of being trafficked or the signs that someone is being trafficked (Curran et al., 2017). However, there is a gap when it comes to the experiences the victims go through during their aftercare (Curran et al., 2017). This is especially true for the experiences of male victims, as many of the studies focus predominantly on female victims while not representing male victims to the extent that there is a gap in the literature (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). As such, the purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after they have been rescued from human trafficking. These experiences should include efforts by the victims to help themselves successfully pass treatment and reintegrate back into society, like the theory of renewed self states (see Curran et al., 2017). The exploration of these experiences makes this study a qualitative one that uses the phenomenological approach. The data gathered from this study will be analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis and IPA coding. This study should be able to help create positive social change. This will be done by doing things like helping other researchers create programs better equipped to help male victims of human trafficking. It will also help researchers find other gaps in the literature to further help these victims.

Human trafficking is something that has been happening for many years. As a result, it has been documented and studied by many people looking to conduct social change in the world. Despite all the studies conducted, there are still gaps in the knowledge such as the one selected in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Human trafficking is a world-wide crisis. It is a profitable criminal enterprise that continues to grow each year (Leach, 2022). Despite the information that is disseminated on human trafficking, many people have trouble recognizing human trafficking victims (Evans, 2020). This remains true for populations like law enforcement and health care workers that may deal with human trafficking victims without knowing they are (Roney & Villano, 2020). Such reasons have caused human trafficking to expand, and the number of victims continues to increase each year. Due to the secretive nature of human trafficking, research on the subject is limited (Heney et al., 2020). What limited research has been done on the subject is usually on recognizing human trafficking victims (Haney et al., 2020).

As most of the research on human trafficking focuses on discovering the signs of its occurrence, there is a gap in the research on the aftercare of the victims (Curran et al., 2017). Victims of human trafficking who are rescued have a plethora of issues to deal with after being rescued. This includes issues like health complications, drug addictions, and reintegration into society. By focusing on the aftercare of human trafficking victims, researchers can help fill in the gaps in the literature and create positive social change. Such research will help show the difficulties that human trafficking victims deal with to better help program developers understand aftercare issues to focus on when creating programs.

The research that has been done on human trafficking has focused on female victims of human trafficking (Trouson & Pfeifer, 2020). This is because sex trafficking of

women is often the most common (Leach, 2022). As a result, sex trafficking is often the focus of government programs and movements (Recknor et al., 2022). This has caused efforts to deal with other forms of human trafficking to be stifled (Sidun, 2025), causing research involving male victims of human trafficking to be severely lacking (Trouson & Pfeifer, 2020). Men are also more unwilling to participate in studies on human trafficking or admit they were trafficked (Sidun, 2025).

Research into child victims of human trafficking is also lacking. This is because of reasons such as children involved in human trafficking not trusting adults after being victimized by adults (Baba et al., 2023). However, it is estimated that almost half of all trafficked victims in the United States are children (Roney & Villano, 2020). Additionally, children are a protected class in America. As such, studies need special permission to use children as subjects. This is why this study will focus on men who were trafficked as children.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of men who have been rescued from human trafficking and reintegrated into American society as children. Focusing on the experiences of men who went through the process as children will help fill in the gap in the literature. In Chapter 2, the literature search strategy is discussed alongside the theory of renewed self as the theoretical foundation. This is followed by a literature review, which is wrapped up with the conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

Several databases were used when researching the gap in the literature for human trafficking. The primary sources that were used were the Walden University library and

Google Scholar. Walden University Library had many of the articles in their archives. However, a few of the articles were redirected to other databases. Meanwhile, Google Scholar had more options to choose from, but the sources were from third-party databases. These databases included SAGE Publications, ProQuest, PsycINFO, and ELSEVIER. The search included books, peer-reviewed articles, and dissertations. The majority of these sources were copyrighted within the last 5 years, with a few key exceptions. These exceptions were primarily focused on the theory of renewed self, which serves as the theoretical framework.

The keyword *human trafficking* was the first key word to be searched during the literature review. After reading multiple sources on the subject, further keywords were searched as the gap in the literature became visible. These keywords included *sex trafficking, labor trafficking, aftercare, reintegration, male victims of human trafficking, children, child development, gender differences in child development, theory of renewed self, health issues, United States,* and *mental health issues.* The literature search was broken into a total of 17 months. The initial period was a 13-month period, followed by another 4-month period. This second period occurred after the COVID quarantine ended and was needed for sources copyrighted within the last 5 years.

Theoretical Framework

Once a victim of human trafficking is rescued, the long process of aftercare begins. This aftercare consists of things like medical care and organizations that help the human trafficking survivor reintegrate into society. Despite the importance of the aftercare process, there are significant gaps in the literature on it (Curran et al., 2017).

This includes studies focusing on evaluations and experiences from the human trafficking victims themselves (Curran et al., 2017). As a result, organizations that help survivors of human trafficking are often modeled after organizations that help victims of other traumas, such as domestic violence (Curran et al., 2017). Due to this, survivors of human trafficking need to play an active role in their aftercare to successfully reintegrate back into society.

In simple terms, the theory of renewed self states that the survivor takes the lead role in their recovery (Curren et al., 2017). The survivor works alongside aftercare providers through mutual collaboration to achieve this (Curren et al., 2017). This means that the survivor is not a passive victim who requires intervention to facilitate their recovery. This mutual collaboration between the aftercare provider and the survivor is built on trust and dependability. By making the survivor the primary in the aftercare process, the hope is that the process will be tailored to the survivor (Curren et al., 2017). This in turn will reduce the resources used on less beneficial aspects of aftercare while increasing its effectiveness.

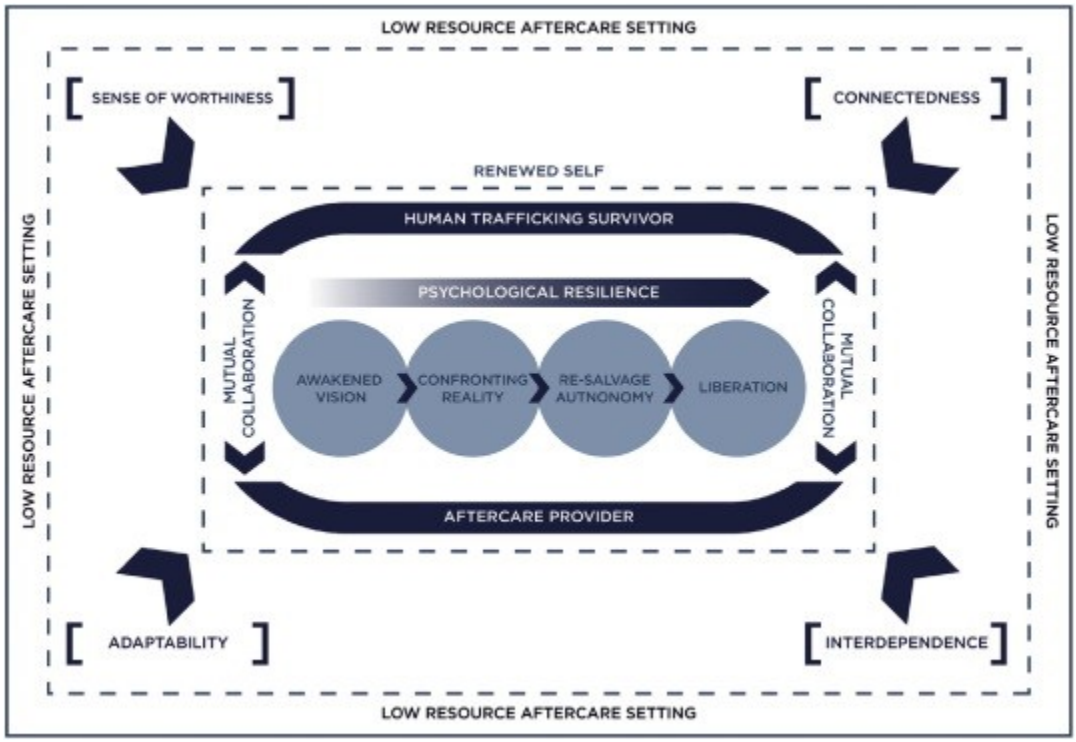
Theory Description

The theory of renewed self is a theory about the human trafficking victim who has participated in aftercare and emerged with a renewed sense of self (Curren et al., 2017). This grants the human trafficking victim a sense of worthiness, connectedness, adaptability, and interdependence (Curren et al., 2017). The theory of renewed self is about a process towards a renewed sense of self, which is comprised of four stages. These stages are awakened vision, confronting reality, re-salvage autonomy, and liberation

(Curren et al., 2017). Going through these stages builds the survivor's psychological resilience, which helps the survivor cope with their trauma. The model shown in Figure 1 was developed by Curren et al. (2017), showing the stages associated with the theory of renewed self.

Figure 1

Theory of Renewed Self



From "A theory for aftercare of human trafficking survivors for nursing practice in low resource settings," by R. L. Curran, J.R. Naidoo, and G. Mchunu, 2017, *Applied Nursing Research*, *35*, p. 84. (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnr.2017.03.002)

According to the theory, the process of renewing oneself starts with the survivor recognizing the reality of their situation (Curren et al., 2017). This is the awakened vision stage of the theory of renewed self. During this stage, the survivor builds a relationship

and trust with the aftercare provider (Curren et al., 2017). A safe environment is established, and the two sides begin the process of dealing with the trauma.

After the awakened vision stage is the confronting reality stage. During this stage, the survivor reconstructs their perspective of themselves (Curren et al., 2017). They do this by deconstructing their preexisting perspective of themselves and reestablishing one more beneficial to their recovery (Curren et al., 2017). The role of the aftercare provider in this stage is to listen to the experiences of the human trafficking survivor and help them adopt healthy coping strategies. This helps the survivor find meaning and purpose in their experiences (Curren et al., 2017).

Re-salvaging autonomy is the next step in the process of renewing the self. During the time that the human trafficking survivor was being trafficked, control of themselves was taken from them (Curren et al., 2017). This step in the process is to help the survivor regain the control and self-reliance that were taken from them. To help facilitate this, aftercare providers ensure that the decision-making power is left to the human trafficking victim (Curren et al., 2017). This is done by explaining the options that the survivor has available to them and letting them decide how to proceed.

According to the theory of renewed self, the last step in the process is liberation (Curren et al., 2017). During this step, aftercare providers help the survivor set goals for themselves and plan ways to achieve these goals (Curren et al., 2017). This is the step where human trafficking victims work on reintegrating back into society. This can take the form of things like pursuing a college degree, acquiring job training, and obtaining

licenses. While the trauma will always remain, survivors of human trafficking will have the tools and confidence to deal with it each day.

Origins

The theory of renewed self was created by Curren et al. (2017) when they were conducting a study involving human trafficking victims in South Africa. They used a grounded theory approach, and the theory of renewed self was the theory they came up with. This theory was the result of the data they collected and was based on the work of Freire, (1968/1970). Freire stated that the aftercare of a victim needed to be based on the victim's perspective about their wellbeing. The aftercare provider would then provide care according to the survivor's experiences (Freire, 1968/1970). As such, Freire championed active involvement on the part of the survivors.

Application

The theory of renewed self was originally created for survivors of human trafficking receiving aftercare in a low-resource setting. However, this can easily be applied in settings with ample resources. Additionally, as this theory was created especially for human trafficking survivors, applying it to studies concerning human trafficking survivors keeps with the creators' intentions. By basing aftercare on the experiences of the human trafficking victims, aftercare can be tailored to best help the survivors. This is aligned with this study as it seeks to collect the experiences of human trafficking survivors during the reintegration process.

Key Variables

During the literature review, key variables emerged that ultimately led to the gap in the literature being examined in this study. The key variables are human trafficking, aftercare, healthcare, reintegration, gender, and children.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is often referred to as modern-day slavery since it is essentially the same thing (Leach, 2022). Of the various definitions of human trafficking available, the one used by the United Nations is one of the more widely used. The United Nations (UN) defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, and detainment of people through the use of coercion, abduction, or deception (Coverdale et al., 2020). According to the UN's definition, this is done for the exploitation of the victims (Coverdale et al., 2020). This is considered a broad definition by many, and it covers a wide range of crimes.

Slavery and human trafficking have been a part of human culture for a long time. While the enslavement and trafficking of African people are often the most recognized today, human trafficking has been around long before then. Slavery and human trafficking have been found occurring in medieval Europe, ancient civilizations in Asia, among the tribes of Africa, and even among the Native Americans (Evans, 2020). Some of the best-known examples in history of human trafficking are the slave systems of the Roman Empire and Egypt. These slaves were a mixture of people who were taken as prisoners of war, forced into slavery to pay debts, or were sold into slavery by themselves or family members. Slavery and human trafficking are even mentioned in the Bible,

along with rules on how to treat slaves. Despite the long history of human trafficking, human trafficking was not recognized as an international issue until the 1990s (Leach, 2022). Once recognized, it still took until the year 2000 for human trafficking to be defined in an international sense (Leach, 2022).

Human trafficking is a global epidemic that affects the lives of millions of people around the world (Recknor et al., 2022). As with many crimes, human trafficking affects more than the victims and their loved ones. According to available research, human trafficking is most prevalent in Africa and East Asia (Coverdale et al., 2020). However, an argument can be made that human trafficking is more prevalent in these places simply because these places have more people living there than continents like Europe or North America. Not every country is willing to admit that human trafficking occurs in their country. Some countries define human trafficking differently from the rest of the world, which is why there is more than one definition for human trafficking (Leach, 2022). There are countries that only recognize women and children as victims of human trafficking (Leach, 2022). There are also countries that see forced labor as a viable option of punishment for citizens they deem criminals (Leach, 2022).

There are multiple forms of human trafficking that occur. The most recognized form of human trafficking is sex trafficking (Recknor et al., 2022). Labor trafficking is the most recognized form of human trafficking after sex trafficking (Evans, 2020). Interestingly, labor trafficking is usually the most common form of human trafficking (Hodge, 2021). However, due to the lack of concrete statistics on human trafficking victims, there is debate if labor trafficking truly is more common (Hodge, 2021). Labor

trafficking includes victims of debt bondage, forced domestic servitude, and forced labor (Leach, 2022). Depending on the study one reads, these two forms of human trafficking can make up to 99% of human trafficking occurring in the world (Evans, 2020). Many victims involved in labor trafficking are also victims of sexual exploitation (Evans, 2020). Human trafficking of victims for things like organ harvesting, forced military recruitment, and even forced suicide bombing make up the rest (Evan, 2020).

Due to the secretive nature of organized crimes, human trafficking statistics are not readily available (Hodge, 2021). As such, there are only estimates when it comes to the number of trafficked victims. However, researchers of human trafficking believe that human trafficking has affected more people now than at any other time in history (Evans, 2020). Human trafficking organizations often operate in multiple countries at a time. This makes it harder to track them down and hold them accountable for their crimes (Leach, 2022). One of the key aspects of human trafficking involves taking people from one place and moving them to another, which makes the victims significantly more difficult to track down. This enterprise has been found operating in every country (Coverdale et al., 2020). People in positions of power and even celebrities have been caught participating in human trafficking (Recknor et al., 2022). As these people typically do not want the poor reputation that would come with being involved with human trafficking, they would naturally use the power and resources to keep things hidden. This would also give traffickers leverage over such people to help them keep their crimes from being discovered.

There are many reasons why human trafficking is able to maintain its secrecy. One reason why human trafficking is hard to pin down is that victims often get mistaken for criminals (Haney et al., 2020). Human trafficking victims have been mistaken for prostitutes, thieves, and illegal immigrants. Another reason is that human trafficking victims do not like to identify themselves as human trafficking victims (Mary et al., 2023). This is caused by multiple reasons, such as stigma, shame, fear of the authorities, fear of the traffickers, and a lack of belief in a better option (Haney et al., 2020). On top of victims refusing to self-identify, local law enforcement and health care providers often lack the necessary training to spot these victims (Haney et al., 2020). There are screening tools that can help them, but these tools are not often made known to those who could use them. Lastly, there is a prevalence of myths when it comes to human trafficking. Myths like men being unable to be victims of sex trafficking or that trafficking victims are only trafficked by strangers are rampant in the world (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). One of the biggest beliefs people have about human trafficking is that it does not happen in rural areas or areas that they are in (Haney et al., 2020). Such beliefs hamper the ability to effectively combat human trafficking.

Many people would agree that kidnapping other people and selling them is a morally bad thing to do. With that being the case, it is easy to wonder how so many people come to take part in the criminal enterprise. The main reason is that human trafficking is extremely profitable for the criminals that take part in it (Evans, 2020). Human trafficking is the most profitable criminal enterprise after the drug trade (Leach, 2022). Money can be earned at every part of the process. Each kidnapped person can

bring large amounts of money to the kidnappers at low costs. Smuggling the human trafficking victims to other places makes money for the smugglers. Also, the “dealers” can sell the victims to the “buyers” for large sums of money. Then people can pimp the victims out for sex trafficking and make large amounts of money as well. There are other people in the process of human trafficking who also make a lot of money. All the money that is made through trafficking is enough to get many people to give up their morals and participate in such a criminal enterprise (Leach, 2022).

While those involved with human trafficking make a lot of money, it costs a lot of money for law enforcement to combat it (see Sidun, 2025). Even in well-developed countries with strong funding for law enforcement agencies, there is often a lack of funds to properly combat criminal organizations like human trafficking. Such a disparity can led human traffickers to believe that trafficking is a low-risk but high-reward crime. Additionally, there are many law enforcement officers that have not been trained in recognizing the signs of human trafficking (Haney et al., 2020). In countries like America, it is not uncommon for local law enforcement to believe that human trafficking does not occur in their area (Haney et al., 2020). As previously stated, law enforcement tends to mistake human trafficking victims as criminals and arrest them for perceived crimes (Haney et al., 2020). Add on the fact that human trafficking victims often fear law enforcement officers, and effectively identifying and combating human trafficking becomes difficult (Coverdale et al., 2020). Even when law enforcement does find and arrest human traffickers, only a small portion of them will face prosecution (Leach, 2022). Efforts to combat human trafficking have led to things like prostitution becoming

illegal in some countries, like the US (Sidun, 2025). However, this often results in sex trafficking victims being mistaken for prostitutes and obtaining criminal status (Twis et al., 2022).

Anyone can be a victim of human trafficking. The focus is on the sex trafficking of women and children (Recknor et al., 2022). However, men are also victims of human trafficking. This is the case when it comes to trafficking like labor trafficking and organ trafficking (Hodge, 2021). While anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, there are things that put certain people at risk of being victimized. There are risk factors that are specific to certain genders or age groups, but there are a few risk factors that apply to all. People that have an increased risk of being trafficked are those that have recently relocated, typically through migration, and those in desperate need of work (Treadaway, 2025). Other risk factors include those suffering from mental health illnesses and those with substance abuse problems (Haney et al., 2020). There are also a good number of people who make it out of being trafficked and then go back to being trafficked (Coverdale et al., 2020).

Traffickers use many tricks to apprehend their victims. One of the most common methods used is the exchange method (Evans, 2020). This is when traffickers promise their victims food, shelter, or something else needed by the victim in exchange for themselves (Evans, 2020). Another method is to start a relationship with the victim, then coerce the victim into being trafficked (Twis et al., 2022). Family members have also been known to sell human trafficking victims to traffickers (Roney & Villano, 2020). In fact, it is believed that traffickers are usually someone that the victims know rather than a

stranger (Roney & Villano, 2020). Human traffickers have even been known to purchase unborn children from their parents. Another popular method is to put up false job advertisements and force the desperate people that arrive into human trafficking (Baba et al., 2023). This is a common tactic for traffickers, like those pretending to be modeling agencies and then kidnapping the women that arrive.

Aftercare

After a human trafficking victim manages to be freed or is rescued, the aftercare process begins. As the focus on human trafficking is typically on recognizing the signs of human trafficking, the aftercare process is often overlooked (see Sidun, 2025). As previously stated, the focus is often on the sex trafficking of women and girls (Hodge, 2021). As such, the resources for the aftercare of human trafficking are often aligned with the expectation that they will be used for women and girls. This can cause complications when it comes to helping victims who are men or transgendered people. This is because what works for women may not work for them. Even for aftercare programs designed for women and girls, a one-size-fits all solution is insufficient. Each survivor of human trafficking has their own unique experiences, and each will have their own specific needs for overcoming the trauma of being trafficked (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). Unfortunately, there is limited research into the experiences of human trafficking victims, which hampers efforts to help them (see Twis et al., 2022). That, coupled with the fact that there is a lack of human trafficking survivor involvement in the creation of aftercare programs, creates setbacks when trying to help survivors (Twis et al., 2022). The little research conducted on evaluating aftercare programs for these survivors supports this. Such

research often indicates that survivors believe in a need to overhaul the aftercare programs to be more effective (Twis et al., 2022).

The survivors of human trafficking often suffer from various injuries and illnesses because of their traumatic experience (Twis et al., 2022). This often causes setbacks in their aftercare. These victims often have things like PTSD, STDs, malnutrition, substance abuse, mental health illnesses, and unhealed injuries (Coverdale et al., 2020). Even if treated properly during the aftercare phase, these illnesses and injuries will continue to plague the survivor (Recknor et al., 2022). This has been known to last a lifetime in cases like mental health disorders. Survivors of human trafficking also have high rates of suicide and self-harm (Coverdale et al., 2020). Someone who has given up and loses hope makes aftercare significantly more difficult. Additionally, the coping strategies human trafficking survivors develop because of their trauma can sometimes confuse aftercare providers (Roney & Villano, 2020). This in turn leads to an improper diagnosis, which then causes the wrong treatment to be administered. Complications like these are the reason that survivors rarely make it out of being trafficked on their first try (Twis et al., 2022).

Children have their own complications during the aftercare process. Children do not possess the ability to fully understand their situation, which adds to the difficulty they face during the aftercare process (Roney & Villano, 2020). In cases involving children, human trafficking has also been shown to affect their development (Jones et al., 2022). Children that have been trafficked have been shown to have an increased risk of developing mental disorders like ADHD and depression (Roney & Villano, 2020). These

children have also been shown to develop bad habits like substance abuse as a coping mechanism (Jones et al., 2022). Unfortunately, children who have been trafficked are also at increased risk of committing crimes, including violent crimes (Jones et al., 2022). These are things that aftercare providers often must help the child survivor work through. Children that are trafficked often have preexisting trauma or mental health illnesses that make aftercare harder to administer (Haney et al., 2020).

Aftercare for a survivor of human trafficking is not always successful. Aftercare programs for these survivors are not tailored to the individual experiences and complications of each survivor (Twis et al., 2022). For instance, some victims of human trafficking get involved with trafficking in exchange for things like food and housing (Evans, 2020). Aftercare programs that do not address these needs will naturally have a harder time helping the survivors. This has sometimes caused human trafficking survivors to go back to their captors and resume being trafficked (Coverdale et al., 2020). As the experiences of each survivor differ, the resources needed are going to differ (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). Aftercare programs and providers that are not able to provide these resources will have a harder time successfully helping survivors. An example of this can be found in men who are the victims of labor trafficking. These male victims often fall into labor trafficking because of being desperate for work (Hodge, 2021). A former labor-trafficked man who needs job opportunities may not find an aftercare program designed for women coming out of sex trafficking to be helpful. Being the victim of human trafficking often causes victims to feel ashamed or stigmatized (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). To avoid the shame, some survivors may not attend

aftercare programs. Lastly, there are some survivors of human trafficking who do not want to leave the life of being trafficked (Baba et al., 2023). It is extremely difficult to help someone who does not want to be helped, no matter how amazing the resources provided.

Aftercare programs and providers face many challenges as they attempt to aid human trafficking victims after their time being trafficked. However, even with all the assistance provided by these programs and providers, survivors often need additional support. This often takes the form of support groups like church groups, or an involved family dedicated to helping the survivor face their challenges (Twis et al., 2022). Human trafficking often experiences things like a sense of worthlessness and shame (Surtees et al., 2022). This often causes them to not seek help or to not attend aftercare programs (Baba et al., 2022). A strong support system will motivate survivors to seek the help they need and help keep them involved in the programs.

Healthcare

The survivors of human trafficking often have health issues because of their time being trafficked (Recknor et al., 2022). This is in addition to any mental or physical health issues they may have had that increased their risk of being trafficked (Haney et al., 2020). Some of the more common health issues that survivors walk away with include PTSD, STDs, unhealed injuries, mental illnesses, and malnutrition (Coverdale et al., 2020). Victims of human trafficking have been shown to have higher rates of mortality and disease (Haney et al., 2020). Substance abuse is also very common among survivors of human trafficking (Coverdale et al., 2020). For survivors of human trafficking,

substance abuse is sometimes forced upon them when they are trafficked to keep them controlled (Sidun, 2025). These survivors keep abusing substances as they have become addicted to them and to cope with their trauma (see Baba et al., 2023). Human trafficking survivors are also at an increased risk of harming themselves and committing suicide (Coverdale et al., 2020). Unfortunately, there is limited research on the health issues of human trafficking victims, much like the other topics associated with human trafficking (Recknor et al., 2022).

Each form of human trafficking has health issues that are more common for its victims when compared to other forms of human trafficking. For instance, sex trafficking tends to have higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases (Coverdale et al., 2020). This not only affects the victims but also the ones that use their "services." It is difficult to determine the impact sex trafficking is having on public health due to its secretive nature (Hodge, 2021). Studies that have been done on the health issues of sex trafficking often to focus on HIV as the primary concern (see Krushas & Kulig, 2023). However, there are other common health issues that result from sex trafficking that need to be researched. These health issues include reproductive health issues. Sex trafficking victims have high rates of pregnancies, abortions, and miscarriages (Haney et al., 2020). This has been shown to cause infections, sexually transmitted diseases, damage to sex organs, and sterility (Haney et al., 2020).

Labor trafficking also has its own sort of health issues that are associated with it. Victims of labor trafficking are often placed in poor living conditions and adverse working conditions (Recknor et al., 2022). Such poor conditions naturally cause health

issues. For instance, some human trafficking victims are used in mines that are not well ventilated or properly maintained. As such, respiratory issues from poor ventilation or injuries from collapsed mining tunnels are health issues these victims suffer from. Some victims of labor trafficking are forced to work in dangerous situations without proper safety equipment (see Recknor et al., 2022). This can cause a whole slew of health issues as well. Common health issues that labor trafficking victims suffer from are malnutrition, physical injuries, mental health disorders, and substance abuse (Coverdale et al., 2020). Additionally, many victims involved in labor trafficking are also being sexually exploited (Evans, 2020). That means that health issues often found in sex trafficking victims will be found in these labor trafficking victims as well. There is a lack of research into health issues related to human trafficking as the focus is on sex trafficking (Recknor et al., 2022). That means there is even less research into the health issues of labor trafficking.

As with labor trafficking and sex trafficking, the other forms of human trafficking also have health issues that are commonly associated with them. For instance, organ trafficking victims will often have complications associated with the organs that were removed from them (Recknor et al., 2022). While not every removal of an organ will cause death, in cases where organs like the heart is removed, death is the outcome for these victims. Human trafficking involving forced military service also has high mortality rates, with the accompanying health issues associated with soldiers coming back from combat. There is a gap in the literature when it comes to these lesser known forms of human trafficking, and this remains the same when it comes to the health implications of these forms (Recknor et al., 2022).

Many human trafficking victims are in the hospital at one time or another (Mary et al., 2023). This puts medical personnel in a unique position to discover and report these human trafficking victims. However, many providers and nurses are not trained on how to identify the victims of human trafficking (Mary et al., 2023). Studies have also shown that nurses in emergency departments typically believe that human trafficking victims are going to be young foreign females (Haney et al., 2020). These beliefs make it harder to identify other types of human trafficking victims, like male sex trafficking victims. When cases of human trafficking are discovered, there is no set standard for response protocols (Mary et al., 2023). This can cause confusion about what a health provider should do if they discover a human trafficking victim.

There are screening tools that have been created to assist hospital personnel in discovering these victims, but most are unfamiliar with them or how to use them (Mary et al., 2023). These screening tools are typically reliant on the victim answering sets of questions about themselves. Even those who are aware of the screening tools and know how to use them can run into complications. For instance, it is possible for human trafficking victims to not realize they are human trafficking victims (Mary et al., 2023). Issues like language barriers also make the utilization of these screen tools a bit more difficult (Mary et al., 2023). In the cases of child human trafficking victims, children do not possess the cognitive ability to fully understand their situation (Roney & Villano, 2020). As such, the children may not be able to answer the questions in the screening tools correctly. This naturally makes it a bit difficult for providers to discover and aid victims who are minors.

Reintegration

The goal of aftercare programs is to assist human trafficking survivors in reintegrating back into society. This reintegration process is an ongoing battle for the survivors of human trafficking, even after a successful reintegration (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). Reintegration often involves the reunification of families. For survivors that have been smuggled into other countries, this can take a while as the aftercare providers assist survivors in finding their families. This can mean that for child survivors in countries like America, they may get placed into foster homes until their families are found (Baba et al., 2023). It is important that the survivors' families are found, as support from their families is critical for successful reintegration (Surtees et al., 2022). More research into the reintegration of victims is required, as there is even less of it present than in the aftercare process (Surtees et al., 2022).

Efforts are being made to help human trafficking survivors reintegrate back into society. Countries like America have certain laws and provisions to help with this. For instance, America allows for human trafficking survivors to obtain visas for those victims that are smuggled into America (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2025). These visas allow the survivors and their immediate family members to stay in America and not be deported (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2025). Human trafficking survivors are also granted benefits like medical coverage and employment opportunities (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2025). This is essential as health issues need to be treated and family support helps the reintegration process (Twis et al., 2022). As many victims become trafficked due to promises of employment opportunities, job training and

placement are important to help with the reintegration process (Treadaway, 2025). These provisions are allotted for in the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). Other countries have their own laws and provisions, as combating human trafficking organizations and helping their victims is a worldwide endeavor.

There are barriers that human trafficking survivors face when attempting to reintegrate back into society. Some human trafficking victims end up returning to trafficking situations as part of the aftercare and reintegration process due to unmet needs (Coverdale et al., 2020). Despite the attempts to help survivors of human trafficking, survivors often find themselves having difficulty obtaining housing and employment (Mary et al., 2023). There are other issues that include language barriers and cultural differences (Mary et al., 2023). Difficulties in obtaining employment can also hamper the reintegration process (Mary et al., 2023). As previously stated, many human trafficking victims become trafficked as they seek employment opportunities (Treadaway, 2025). This need for employment would continue even after being trafficked. Some of these individuals were seeking work to assist their families. This means finding employment after being trafficked may be a greater concern, as they were unlikely to be able to assist their families when being trafficked.

It is not uncommon for human trafficking victims to not want to reintegrate back into their families (see Surtees et al., 2022). Reasons for this include the victims feeling ashamed or believing that their families will not be supportive of them (Surtees et al., 2022). Despite the attempts to help survivors of human trafficking, survivors often find

themselves having difficulty obtaining housing and employment (Mary et al., 2023). Not being able to find work and obtain money can cause the survivor to be too ashamed to return to their families (Baba et al., 2023). Additionally, human trafficking victims are more likely to be trafficked by someone they know (Roney & Villano, 2020). In cases involving human trafficking of children, only about 9% of victims are trafficked by strangers (Roney & Villano, 2020). The majority are trafficked by family members (Roney & Villano, 2020). It is understandable that some do not want to reunite with their families when the person responsible for the victims are being sold into human trafficking by a family member. However, a supportive family is crucial to a successful reintegration and a family complication would reduce their chances of a successful reintegration.

Gender

Efforts to combat human trafficking focus on the sex trafficking of women and girls (Hodge, 2021). In fact, some countries only recognize women and children as the victims of human trafficking (Leach, 2022). This leads these countries to concern themselves only with the statistics of sex trafficking among these populations (Sidun, 2025). As the focus is on women, most of the funding and research is typically on the sex trafficking of these women and girls (see Trouson & Pfeifer, 2020). Even in countries like America, the focus is on the trafficking of women. This can be seen in things like the American Psychological Association passing a resolution in 2017. This resolution seeks to help the APA understand the risk factors associated with the trafficking of women and the psychological impact it has (Coverdale et al., 2020). This focus on women victims of

human trafficking has led to more protections being offered to female victims than their male counterparts (see Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). While there is a need for more attention to male victims of human trafficking, women are more at risk of being trafficked overall (Haney et al., 2020). Gender has even been found to have a difference in people's willingness to combat human trafficking. Studies have found that women are more empathetic towards victims of human trafficking and more willing to help (Haney et al., 2020).

Research that has been done on human trafficking is lacking when it comes to men, boys, transgendered people, or any other gender not classified as female (Recknor et al., 2022). Systematic reviews of research on human trafficking have often shown very few studies involving males and even less all male studies (Hodge, 2021). Men are harder to identify as victims, as men are believed to be less vulnerable to being victimized (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). As a result, it is often believed that males are less likely to be victimized in crimes like human trafficking (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). In fact, sometimes it is believed that male victims are willing participants (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Such beliefs can hurt efforts to combat human trafficking. An example of this is that male victims of human trafficking are not usually offered the same protections as female victims (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Healthcare professionals are less likely to identify male victims of human trafficking than other victim populations (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020).

Men and boys are more commonly victimized when it comes to trafficking, like labor trafficking (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). However, homosexual and bisexual males

are at an increased risk of sexual exploitation (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Not every country recognizes male victims of human trafficking. In fact, some countries use forced labor as punishment or a way to repay debts (Leach, 2022). When male victims of human trafficking are found, they are more likely to have some sort of legal trouble (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). While human trafficking victims have been found to be reluctant to identify themselves as victims, research has shown that males are even less likely to identify themselves as victims (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). One reason for this is that males are taught from an early age to adhere to masculine norms (Jones et al., 2022). This can lead to males feeling shame and believing that being victimized hurts their masculinity. Additionally, things like feelings and needing help are often seen as "feminine," and males are taught to avoid such things (Jones et al., 2022).

Children

Human trafficking is a global epidemic that victimizes people of every race, gender, and age. Many human trafficking victims start being victimized when they are children (Haney et al., 2020). In countries like the United States, the trafficking of minors is considered an act of child abuse (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Additionally, the trafficking of minors does not require the use of force, coercion, or fraud to be considered human trafficking (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). This is because of reasons like children not being able to understand the situations they find themselves in (Roney & Villano, 2020). Research into the child victims of human trafficking is very limited, especially in countries like America (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). This is because children are considered a vulnerable population and need to be protected from things that could

worsen their trauma (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Researchers also have issues finding children to partake in their studies for reasons like children not wanting to be identified as criminals, feeling shameful about what happened to them, and being worried that their abusers may try to find them (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Family members of the trafficked children also tend to prevent researchers from talking to the children (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). This hampers research into human trafficking in countries like America, where it is estimated that half of the human trafficking victims are children (Roney & Villano, 2020).

Certain populations of children are at an increased risk of being trafficked, much like their adult counterparts. Many of the children that are trafficked are runaways (Coverdale et al., 2020). Some studies even estimate that about 90% of minors that are trafficked are runaways (Coverdale et al., 2020). These children are often trafficked in exchange for essentials like food, clothing, and shelter (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Often, children that are trafficked are already experiencing some sort of trauma before their trafficking (Roney & Villano, 2020). This increases their risk of being trafficked. Other children at increased risk of being trafficked are those in foster care, those with unstable home lives, and those involved with the juvenile system (Roney & Villano, 2020). Some studies have also found children who were the victims of sexual abuse were at an increased risk of being trafficked (Haney et al., 2022).

In countries like the United States, programs are administered to children to help prevent them from being abducted. Many are familiar with things like “stranger danger” because of these programs. However, only a small portion of children are trafficked by

strangers (Roney & Villano, 2020). Some studies put the number as low as 9% of minor trafficking being committed by strangers to the victims (Roney & Villano, 2020). Most people who traffic minors are members of the minors' families (Roney & Villano, 2020). Research into this has found that mothers are more likely to sell their children into trafficking than fathers (Haney et al., 2020). However, in these cases, it was found that there was usually a secondary trafficker involved (Haney et al., 2020). Some of these children are sold to traffickers before the child is born (Haney et al., 2020). Such children are used in things like adoption agency scams.

Identifying children who are victims of human trafficking can be difficult. As previously mentioned, many are runaways (Roney & Villano, 2020). These victims often fear the authorities, as they are afraid of getting into trouble or being brought back to where they ran away from (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Child victims often experience a sense of shame and fear stigma associated with being victims of human trafficking (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Some children also believe that the authorities will not be able to protect them from their traffickers (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). This can be seen in cases where the child is trafficked by a relative. Male children are less likely to identify as victims for similar reasons as adult men (Jones et al., 2022). Admitting to something like being sex trafficked can be perceived as something that would hurt their masculinity (Jones et al., 2022). Like adults, minor trafficking victims will receive medical attention at some point (Roney & Villano, 2020). This means that health care practitioners are in the best position to identify children involved in human trafficking.

Children that are exposed to adverse childhood experiences, like human trafficking, affect their development in a negative way (Jones et al., 2022). Children that are trafficked have an increased risk of developing mental health illnesses like anxiety and depression (Jones et al., 2022). Mental disorders like PTSD and ADHD are also common for children who experience adverse childhood experiences (Roney & Villano, 2020). These children are often experiencing preexisting trauma, like sexual abuse, prior to being trafficked (Roney & Villano, 2020). These traumas can compound with each other, increase their likelihood of developing a mental health disorder, and make it harder to treat (Roney & Villano, 2020). Children that are trafficked also suffer from the same health issues as the adult victims. This means children that are sex trafficked will often suffer from reproductive issues, STDs, and substance abuse like adult victims (Haney et al., 2020). Children that are labor trafficked will often have physical injuries and malnutrition like the adult victims (Coverdale et al., 2020).

Children are not able to completely process the situations they find themselves in (Roney & Villano, 2020). This can cause the children to react differently because of their adverse experiences. For instance, boys tend to internalize their pain, which leads to external behaviors (Jones et al., 2020). These behaviors often include physical aggression, committing crimes, and substance abuse (Jones et al., 2020). This often results in children who have been trafficked being involved with the juvenile system if they were not already (Jones et al., 2020). These children tend to develop survival and coping techniques that can confuse healthcare workers and lead to an improper diagnosis of their condition (Roney & Villano, 2020). This can lead to the wrong care being

administered and can potentially harm the child more (Roney & Villano, 2020). Those that are trafficked by family members can also develop trust issues, as those that are supposed to be caring for them are the ones hurting them.

Summary

Human trafficking is a global pandemic that has been around for a long time (Evans, 2020). Despite the efforts of each country, the secretive and complex nature of organized crime has kept it going strong (Leach, 2022). There are multiple forms of human trafficking, like sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and organ trafficking. However, many associate human trafficking with sex trafficking. This focus on sex trafficking has hampered efforts to combat other forms of trafficking (Sidun, 2025).

Overall, there is a lack of research into human trafficking (Haney et al., 2020). The research that has been completed is starting to become old and outdated (Haney et al., 2020). The limited research that has been done focuses on the sex trafficking of women (Recknor et al., 2022). This has left gaps in the literature for things like labor trafficking and the trafficking of men (Hodge, 2021). This means that research, like this one, into these parts of human trafficking will help to slowly fill in the gaps. The research design and methodology for this research were explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Research into human trafficking and its victims has multiple gaps that need to be explored. The research that has been completed typically focuses on the sex trafficking of women (Recknor et al., 2022). Additionally, the research that has been completed is starting to become old and outdated (Haney et al., 2020). The hope of conducting this study is to help fill in some of these gaps in the literature. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after they have been rescued from human trafficking. In Chapter 3, the design of the study and methodology are explained. I also discuss the role of the researcher and the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

There are two major gaps in the research that helped lead to this study. The first is the lack of focus on male victims of human trafficking (Hodge, 2021). The second is that there is a lack of research on human trafficking victims during the reintegration phase after leaving the human trafficking situation (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). Other gaps in the research include the lack of attention given to child victims and the barriers that survivors face during the aftercare process. Seeing these gaps, I was determined to explore the lived experiences of male human trafficking during the reintegration process. Specifically, the population that is selected for this study are the men that went through the process as children. While there is a significant gap when it comes to male victims of human trafficking, it was decided to focus on male children. This is due to the fact that children are more likely to be identified as victims of human trafficking (Trounson & Pfeifer,

2020). The hope was that this decision would make finding participants for this study slightly easier. However, as children are a protected population in America, guardians are less willing to let their children participate in studies (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). As such, using boys instead of men wasn't a feasible solution.

Exploring the lived experiences of the participants in this study means that their perceptions and opinions are the data that is gathered. The collection and analysis of nonnumerical data like this means that the study is qualitative (Burkholder et al., 2020). The phenomenological approach is a qualitative approach that investigates the experiences of the participants in the study (Saldaña, 2025). This approach is in line with this study, and as such, it was chosen for this study. Phenomenological research typically involves interviewing subjects and analyzing their views about their experiences (Saldaña, 2025). After analyzing the data, common themes among the shared experiences of the participants in a phenomenon are identified as part of the phenomenological approach (Saldaña, 2025). This further supported the choice to go with a phenomenological approach for this study.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to collect the opinions and viewpoints of the participants in the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). In a study that uses the phenomenological approach, like this study, the researcher's task is to obtain the perspectives of the participants by examining their experiences (Saldaña, 2025). In this study, my role was to conduct interviews with the participants. During these interviews, I observed, recorded, and documented the responses of the participants. After the

interview, the researcher then reviewed the recorded video calls to further analyze the participants' responses to the questions. After analyzing the data, my role was to create codes from the data to develop themes. In this study, I was only an observer, as I am not a victim of human trafficking. There was also no need for the me to play an active role among the group of participants.

I had no previous relationship with the participants. However, I was a public safety officer at a hospital when I was looking for participants. As the literature on human trafficking mentions, human trafficking victims usually get medical attention at some point in time (Mary et al., 2023). As such, it is possible that I have come across victims seeking medical attention at the hospital without realizing it. Other than this possibility, the only relationship the I had with victims of human trafficking was contacting them and interviewing them in this study.

Researcher Bias

When conducting a study, researcher bias is something that needs to be avoided. Researcher bias is when the researcher's beliefs, values, or expectations influence the research being conducted (Burkholder et al., 2020). This can take place in any part of the study, like the data collection or the participant selection. This bias on the part of the researcher can cause them to analyze the data in ways that align with their beliefs and expectations. This will naturally distort the results and lead to false conclusions. This researcher bias can be intentional, but it is often unintentional (Burkholder et al., 2020). This is why researchers must come up with ways to avoid it before performing their studies.

When I conducted this study, researcher bias was something that I had to contend with. Religious beliefs and experiences are different for each person. As such, it was possible for my religious beliefs to cause me to emphasize data where the participants had positive results when interacting with Christianity. It could also lead me to downplay experiences that paint churches as judgmental and detrimental to a victim's circumstances.

Another thing that could cause researcher bias is the fact that I was raised with typical masculine norms. This has led to beliefs like women and children need to be protected while men should be able to handle their own problems. As my participants are men, this could have potentially caused the experiences of the participants to be minimized. Additionally, not everyone handles the same experiences similarly. These mean that while some men could potentially work through their trauma, others may never be able to get through it without outside help. Victims of traumatic experiences like human trafficking deserve help, whether or not they can "handle their own problems."

There are other researcher biases that had to be avoided during this study, like sex trafficking being worse than labor trafficking. However, steps were taken to ensure that these biases did not affect the study. First and foremost, professionalism was always maintained, and no assumptions were made at any point. This was done by doing things like only exploring the experiences of the participant and not considering what they could handle or not. Interview questions were repeatedly reexamined to ensure that religious beliefs did not influence the experiences explored. If there was any confusion or need for clarification, participants were reached to further explain their experiences. As this study

was part of a dissertation, there was assistance provided by university staff members. This assistance was used to help ensure that research bias did not influence the study. If this were a normal study, peers would have been used to examine all parts of the study to help prevent researcher bias.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of men who went through the reintegration process as children after being trafficked. As such, the population chosen for this study were men who were victims of human trafficking while they were children. An additional requirement for this population was that these men successfully go through the reintegration process afterwards. Participants that did not complete a reintegration program were excluded, as it would be difficult to determine if the participants did complete the reintegration process. Men who went through this process as children were chosen instead of child participants. This is because in research children are considered a vulnerable population and have more protection afforded to them (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). Also, families of child victims tend to prevent the children from participating in things like studies to keep the children safe (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2022). As such, participants considered for this study were 18 years old and older. While some members of the target population are still experiencing difficulties from their time being trafficked, this does not exclude them. So long as they successfully completed a reintegration program, they were eligible to participate in the study.

Finding participants was a little difficult for this study. Male victims of human trafficking are less likely to identify themselves as victims (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020).

The goal of this study was to find 10 participants, with the understanding that five should suffice. However, there is a significant gap in research when it comes to male victims of human trafficking (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). As such, saturation was unlikely to be achieved for male victims of human trafficking. In fact, due to the unique experiences of human trafficking unique to each victim (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020), it is possible that saturation would not be reached if a study were conducted multiple times. In order to find these participants, known programs for the reintegration of these victims were contacted.

Instrument

There are multiple data collections that could be used in studies, like interviews or surveys. Since this is a phenomenological study, the data collection method that was chosen was interviews. Specifically, a semistructured individual interview was chosen for this study. This type of interview allowed for open-ended questions and follow-up questions to be created as needed (Saldaña, 2025). Any follow-up questions to these interviews were created after the initial interviews. They were then presented to the participants to better understand their experiences. These interviews focused on the experiences of the participants during the reintegration process. This included the focus of the programs and whether the participants thought the programs helped. This also included the barriers that the participants faced during this time and what they wish the reintegration programs had assisted them with. There were also open-ended questions for the participants to explain any significant things they faced that were not already asked about.

Procedures

Recruiting participants was a little difficult, as the population that was searched tends to not identify themselves as victims of human trafficking (see Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Reintegration programs for victims of human trafficking were contacted to help find potential participants. There was also a plan originally to use the snowball strategy to find more participants. This is when a participant is identified and then asked to find other potential participants (Saldaña, 2025). However, during discussions with the institutional review board (IRB), it was pointed out that this could potentially cause coercion to the vulnerable population. As such, the snowball strategy was dropped. Potential participants were also sought from among people that had already come forward as victims of human trafficking to the public, but none were found.

As previously stated, the goal for this study was to recruit 10 participants, with five being considered an acceptable number. Other than the participants being willing to partake in the study, the only other requirement was that the participant be a man who, as a child, went through the reintegration process after being trafficked. There was no requirement for anything, like having participated in another study or this study being their first study. Before any participant was confirmed to participate in this study, they were required to sign a consent form that explained the details of the study. This was to ensure that informed consent requirements were adhered to.

Once the informed consent forms were acquired, the interviews were scheduled. There were two options when scheduling the interviews. The interviews were conducted over video calls. This allowed for the calls to be recorded with the built-in recorder. For

participants who lived near the researcher, in-person interviews were offered. However, video-call interviews were recommended instead of in-person interviews. This was because it simplified things for reasons like the lack of a need to travel. The recordings of the interviews were then reviewed for further evaluation. The interviews were 30 minutes to 2 hours long, depending on the length of the participant's answers and follow-up questions. Participants were contacted for additional interviews when needed. These additional interviews were to help better understand the experiences of the participants and ask questions created after reviewing the recordings. This helped prevent the researcher from assuming anything and introducing research bias into the data.

After the end of the interview, participants were debriefed and informed they may be contacted for further questions. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time. This meant that even after the interviews, they were able to withdraw and have their interviews erased. Additionally, the participants were promised a transcription of the interview, should they wish. The participants were then given the researcher's contact information in case they remembered anything else they wished to have included. Lastly, participants were informed that no identifying information of theirs would be in the study.

Once the interviews and follow-up meetings were completed, the data was analyzed. In a phenomenological study, the raw data was used to create codes. These codes are then used to create themes (Burkholder et al., 2020). The interviews and notes from the interviews were transcribed and then coded. By conducting interviews, coding the data, and creating themes, this meant that the study was using interpretative

phenomenological analysis (Saldaña, 2025). As IPA seeks to explore the experiences of the participants during a given phenomenon, this aligns with the study.

Trustworthiness

It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the quality of the study. This is done by establishing the trustworthiness of the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Trustworthiness is the degree of confidence others have in the data, interpretation, and methods used in the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). To establish the trustworthiness of a study, one must first confirm the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Once trustworthiness is established, the readers will know that the research is sound and usable. This is important as researchers seek to help create positive social change through their research. If their research cannot be used to help create this change because of a lack of trustworthiness, then there is no point to the research.

Credibility refers to how true the findings of the study are (Burkholder et al., 2020). If the data collected and the results drawn from them are inaccurate, then the research has no credibility and cannot be used to create positive social change. To ensure creditability in this study, I used member checking. Member checking is a method where the researcher shares the data collected with the participant and validates the accuracy of the interpretations of the data (Burkholder et al., 2020). This has the bonus of helping to prevent researcher bias. By validating the accuracy of the findings with the participant, the researcher ensures that there were no misinterpretations (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Data and analysis were also reviewed with the dissertation chair for this study to further strengthen its credibility.

Transferability in research is to what extent the results of a study are relevant in other circumstances or settings (Burkholder et al., 2020). To ensure transferability in this study, the strategy of thick description was used. This simply means that detailed observations and interpretations are used to explain the experiences of the participants in this study. I expected to have trouble reaching saturation while completing this study. This means that transferability was affected, as it may be possible to get different results from this study under different circumstances. I also had trouble finding participants for the study. As such, all willing participants who met the requirements were asked to participate. I gathered male participants for this study while keeping in mind the need for variation.

The dependability of a study is how repeatable the study is by another researcher (Burkholder et al., 2020). This means that if another researcher were to conduct the same study, they should receive the same results. In this study, dependability was ensured using an audit trail. This audit trail was to allow the readers to follow the researcher's logic and conclusions to determine if the study could be repeated (Burkholder et al., 2020). This also allowed the dissertation chair to review the notes and data to ensure that the study could be replicated.

Confirmability in research is the objectivity of the research and its conclusions (Burkholder et al., 2020). To ensure confirmability, researchers show the readers that the research was not influenced by researcher bias (Burkholder et al., 2020). As mentioned

previously, researcher bias can influence the results of the data and lead to false conclusions. For this study, participants were thoroughly briefed on the purpose of the study, the nature of the interviews, the duration of the interviews, and the nature of the interview questions. This was done to get as detailed information as possible from the participants. Follow-up questions were also asked to ensure the experiences were properly understood. After that, member checking helped ensure the accuracy of interpretations and helped establish the confirmability of this study. Then, with the dissertation chair checking over everything, researcher bias was further avoided, and confirmability was further established.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures are important in a study or dissertation to ensure the safety and well-being of the participants. In this study, participants were required to provide consent prior to participating. This was done by when I read the consent form to each participant prior to the interviews. The consent form details things like the nature of the study, expectations, safety measures, and interview process. This was to ensure that informed consent was acquired. Participants were informed that they could withdraw themselves and their answers from the study at any point up until the publication of the dissertation. Participants were also informed that their names and any identifying information would be withheld in the dissertation. As a part of informed consent, participants were informed of the questions ahead of time. This was to ensure that they were okay with thinking back on these experiences. References for local counseling were also offered to the participants if they needed them. Only after the participants said " I consent" did I

conduct the interviews. Lastly, as this was a dissertation, I had to obtain the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval was granted, I was assigned the IRB number 10-09-24-0755100. This board helped to ensure the safety of the participants on top of steps that were already taken.

Special procedures for the treatment of the data gathered from participants were generated and followed. This further helped protect the well-being of the participants. All interview recordings were placed on an encrypted flash drive. Additionally, the names of the participants were changed to single letters to ensure anonymity. All notes and transcriptions were saved in Word documents that also went into the encrypted flash drive. This flash drive was then stored in a safe equipped with biometric locks. After 5 years pass after the completion of the study, the flash drive will be wiped and physically destroyed to ensure nothing can be taken off it.

Additional concerns during this study included the adherence to HIPPA laws and regulations. To further protect the anonymity of the participants, no potential participants who had a prior relationship with the researcher were considered for the study. The dissertation chair was also consulted for any ethical concerns that were not already considered. Additionally, no incentives were offered during the study.

Summary

This chapter explored the research design and methodology of the study. It was determined that this study was a qualitative study that used a phenomenological approach. Specifically, this study used interpretative phenomenological analysis. This aligned with the purpose of the study, as the purpose was to explore the experiences of

men in America who went through the reintegration process as children after being trafficked. The role of the researcher in this was to conduct the interviews for the study and avoid any researcher bias. Steps were taken to ensure the well-being of the participants and to adhere to ethical guidelines. Ways to establish the trustworthiness of this study were stated in this chapter as well. Finally, details on the storage and use of the data gathered in this study were laid out in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, the results of the study were explored. This includes the setting of the interviews, and the demographics of the research conducted. Data collection was also be discussed in the next chapter. This includes where and how the data was collected. This also includes any unusual circumstances encountered when collecting the data. Details on the coding of the data were al touched upon. Lastly, evidence of trustworthiness is explored in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after they have been rescued from human trafficking. The interviews and data that was collected helped fulfill this purpose and answer the research question concerning these lived experiences of the male participants. This was relevant in helping to create positive social change because there is a lack of research concerning male participants in human trafficking studies (see Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Studies that have been conducted typically focus on female participant (Recknor et al., 2022). Additionally, these studies have started to become outdated (Haney et al., 2020). In this chapter, the different aspects of the study were explored. This includes the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results.

Setting

In a study, different conditions can influence participants during their time in the study. These influencers can originate from the surroundings, the participants' private lives, or even the researcher. These conditions can influence the data that is gathered, how it is analyzed, and the study results. For instance, while the participants were being gathered and interviewed, there was a change in U.S. presidents. The new American president had vocalized a desire for strong actions to be taken when it concerned immigration. In turn, immigrants in America came under increased scrutiny. This may have made some participants fearful to participate in a study.

Demographics

The participants only had four relevant demographics that were required to participate in the study. The first was that they were all male. This study was focused on the lived experiences of men who went through the reintegration process as children in America after being rescued from human trafficking. This means that not only were they male participants, but they were required to be males during the time of their experiences as well. This was the second requirement. While it would have been interesting to explore the experiences of members of the transgender community that faces similar circumstances, it would not have aligned with the purpose of this study. As such, these explorations will have to be conducted in future studies. The third demographic requirement was that the participants had to successfully complete a reintegration program. This requirement was to ensure that the participants weren't still struggling with the process. This was a safeguard built into the study requirements to protect the participants. It also helped ensure that the participants had experiences relevant to the study's focus. While it can be difficult to determine the participants' success in the reintegration process, having completed a reintegration program increases the likelihood of success. The last requirement of the participants was that they had no prior relationship with the researcher. This means I never worked with, worked under, worked over, or even met the participants previously. This was to help protect the participants from any sense or coercion. Other demographics, like age or education level, was not considered as it was not relevant to the study. As the participants were already a part of a high-risk population, not asking for other demographics was meant to help protect them.

Data Collection

When finding participants for the study, the bare minimum number of participants was five. However, the goal was to find 10 participants if possible. This goal was set in an attempt to reach saturation. However, as there is a significant gap in the research when it comes to male participants in a human trafficking related study (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020), data saturation was understood to be unlikely. Unfortunately, only five participants were found in the end. Additionally, there were another four participants that were originally found to be a part of the study. However, all four participants dropped out of the study before finding the minimum number of participants required. Several of them dropped out shortly after the election of a new president. There were no variations in the participants selected from what was listed in chapter three. This is because very strict requirements were approved for participant selection as the population was considered a vulnerable population. Any changes that could have been made, if it did not change the purpose of the study, would have required additional approval from the IRB.

Interviews were the chosen instrument for data collection in this study. These interviews were conducted over the phone and averaged approximately ten minutes. This was shorter than originally anticipated as answers were shorter than originally expected. This was to better safeguard the participants from potential harm. It also made things more convenient as the participants could participate in the study from a place, they felt safe and comfortable. It also made things convenient for me as I did not need to travel to meet the participants. It was unknown where the participants were during the time of the interviews as the only requirement was for the participants to be somewhere they felt safe

and secure. This helped protect the participants from potential harm as well. Once the interviews were conducted, the researcher than conducted follow up interviews to better understand the experiences of the participants. Four of the five participants were chosen to undergo follow up interviews. There was no variation from the originally proposed data collection plan in chapter three as this would have required new approval from the IRB as well.

Interviews were recorded using a separate recording device. These recordings were encrypted and stored on a flash drive that was kept from devices connected to the internet. This was a safeguard put in place so the recordings could not be copied or stolen. This was the same for all follow up interviews that were conducted. When used, the flash drive and recordings were used on a laptop not connected to the internet or any Bluetooth devices. When not in used, the flash drive was locked in a safe. Additionally, the transcriptions of the recordings were stored on the encrypted flash drive as well. When participants expressed their desire to drop out of the study, all recordings and files were deleted. This is in accordance with what was stated in Chapter 3 and agreed to by the IRB.

Data Analysis

This study was a phenomenological study looking into the experiences of the participants. To analyze the data gathered in this study, the IPA was used. IPA is used when a researcher explores the experiences of their participants during a phenomenon (Saldaña, 2025) which aligned with this study. Then the researcher then examines their interpretation of the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon. This analysis has the

researcher taking the data they gathered and creating codes from the data. The data is what the codes are derived from and not from pre-existing theoretical preconceptions the researcher expects the data to adhere to (Saldaña, 2025). These codes are then grouped into categories and themes. These codes and categories are shown in the tables below. Not all the data collected agreed with each other. This was considered when creating a theme in which the majority determined the theme.

Table 1

Subject 1 Codes & Categories

Data	Codes	Categories
Did you complete a program designed to help you reintegrate (return) into society?: Yes, I did.	Completed reintegration program	
Do you believe that you have successfully reintegrated into society?: Yes, I do.	Successful reintegration belief	Successful reintegration
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: Yes, it was.	Program helped reintegration	
To be a part of the community	Community	
Like having a job: someone that goes to work	Employment	
Pays bills: goes Christmas shopping	Makes payments	Normal person
Like to a bar, goes on dates	Leisure	
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: Yes, it was.	Program helped reintegration	Program assistance

Data	Codes	Categories
Help me find a job: pass an interview	Job assistance	
They regularly checked on me to make sure I was doing ok.	After program assistance	
A place to live: helped discuss the lease with my landlord	Living arrangements	
I don't think so. They were very helpful: Nothing comes to mind. They were very helpful like I said. I'm very thankful for their help.	No difficulties	No issues
Was there anything about the program that you went through that could've been better tailored to help you?: No.	No improvement needed	
Would you recommend the program to another human trafficking survivor?: Absolutely.	Would recommend	Positive recommendation
They were very helpful like I said. I'm very thankful for their help.: They really seemed to care about me and everything I went through. It felt like I wasn't a burden, and I appreciate all they did for me.	Positive experience	

Upon analyzing the data collected from the first participant, 14 codes were created from the data. The first code was *completed reintegration program.* This simple code came to be because the participant stated that he did create a reintegration program. The second code was *successful reintegration belief* as the participant believed he did successfully reintegrate back into society. The codes *community*, *employment*, *makes payments*, and *leisure* where created based on the participant's viewpoint of what reintegration into society entail. According to the participant, he believed that reintegration involves being a "normal person", being a part of the community, and having a job. When asked to define what a normal person is to him, he stated that it meant things like "paying bills", shopping for Christmas, "going to the bar", and "going on dates." The next codes were *job assistance* and *living arrangements*. These were based off the participant stating that the program helped him find a place to live and trained him on passing a job interview. The code after *program assistance* was created because the program regularly checked on the participant after he completed the program. The *no improvement needed* code was created because the participant could not think of improvements the program could've made to make things easier for him. Meanwhile, the participant stated that he would recommend others to go through the program led to the code *would recommend*. Lastly, the code *positive experience* came to be because he thought the program cared about him and helped him a lot.

After creating the codes, they were then grouped into categories. Codes *completed reintegration program*, *successful reintegration belief*, and *program helped reintegration* were grouped into category successful reintegration. Codes *community*, *employment*,

makes payments, and *leisure* were grouped into category normal person. Codes *program helped reintegration*, *job assistance*, *after program assistance*, and *living arrangements* became the category program assistance. Codes *no difficulties* and *no improvement needed* became category no issues. Lastly codes *would recommend* and *positive experience* were placed into category positive recommendation.

Table 2

Subject 2 Codes & Categories

Data	Codes	Categories
Did you complete a program designed to help you reintegrate (return) into society?: I think so.	Completed reintegration program	Successful reintegration
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: It assisted me.	Program helped reintegration	
I think it means to be like everyone else and feeling like a normal person	Normal person	Normal person
I mean as far living like an ordinary person, I do all the stuff they do	Ordinary person	
Holding down a job	Employment	
Going to the gym	Leisure	
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: It assisted me.	Program helped reintegration	Program assistance
They helped me get clean: but they helped me join a support group that I was a part of until I got off the drugs.	Drug use assistance	
They helped me get clean and healthy	Get healthy	
Some of the volunteers convinced me to stick it out.: The staff were nice and seemed like they really wanted to help. They tried to help as much as they could	Staff assistance	
But the things I've done and been through are not something most people have ever dealt with, and I'll be dealing with the rest of my life.	Aftermath struggles	Program issues
But I still feel that I'm more of an outsider rather than a member of society.: I'm not sure they really understood what I went through.	Feeling like an outsider	
Do you believe that you have successfully reintegrated into society?: Not really.	Unsuccessful reintegration belief	
	Only male	

Data	Codes	Categories
I was the only guy in the group sessions which made things awkward: I was the only guy and I felt like I wasn't a part of the group.		
Almost decided not to continue the program: I wasn't a fan of the group sessions like I said	Wanted to quit	
It would have been nice to be in a group with other guys that went through what I did. I wouldn't have felt so out of place if I was in such a group: I think if there were more guys in the group	More males needed	Program improvements
If there were only one on one sessions it would have helped more	Individual sessions	
Something is better than nothing right? So, I guess, yes?	Would recommend	Positive recommendation
The staff were nice and seemed like they really wanted to help. They tried to help as much as they could	Caring staff	

The data from the second participant led to the creation of 18 codes. The code *completed reintegration program* came from the participant completing a reintegration program. However, the participant did not believe that he had successfully reintegrated back into society, which led to the code *unsuccessful reintegration belief*. The code *normal person* was created because the participant defined reintegration as "to be like everyone else and feeling like a normal person." Despite not believing he had successfully reintegrated, he stated that the program helped with the reintegration process. This created the code *program helped reintegration*. The reason he did not believe that he had successfully reintegrated was because he still felt like an outsider to this day. This created the code *feeling like an outsider*. When asked why he felt this way, he stated that he does everything an ordinary person does, what he dealt with and

continued to deal with was not something others had to deal with. This created the codes *ordinary person* and *aftermath struggles*. The participant then defined an ordinary person as someone that held a job, code *employment*, and went to the gym, code *leisure*. The codes *drug use assistance* and *get healthy* were created because the program helped him get clean and healthy. The participant stated that he was the only male in the program and at times he wanted to quit. This led to the codes *only male* and *wanted to quit*. When asked about improvements, the participant stated that there should have been other guys and one on one sessions. This created the codes *more males needed* and *individual sessions*. The last codes created were *would recommend* and *caring staff*. This was because he stated that "something is better then nothing" and the staff seemed to care about him.

Codes completed *reintegration program* and *program helped reintegration* led to the category ***successful reintegration***. Codes *normal person*, *ordinary person*, *employment*, and *leisure* were grouped into category normal person. Then codes *program helped reintegration*, *drug use assistance*, *get healthy*, and *staff assistance* created category program assistance. Codes *aftermath struggles*, *feeling like an outsider*, *unsuccessful reintegration belief*, *only male*, and *wanted to quit* created category program issues. The codes *more males needed* and *individual sessions* were grouped into category program improvements. Lastly codes *would recommend* and *caring staff* became category positive recommendation.

Table 3

Subject 3 Codes & Categories

Data	Codes	Categories
Did you complete a program designed to help you reintegrate (return) into society?: Yes.	Completed reintegration program	
Do you believe that you have successfully reintegrated into society?: Yes.	Successful reintegration belief	Successful reintegration
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: Yes.	Program helped reintegration	
To rejoin everyday life alongside everyone else.	Community	
Things like working a job	Employment	
Going to the bank, buying groceries, paying bills	Financial management	Everyday life
Going to a restaurant	Leisure	
Things like doing yard work: buying groceries	Home management	
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: Yes.	Program helped reintegration	
I needed to find a job and they helped me find one	Job assistance	Program assistance
Helped me better my English: They had a translator helping me	Language training	

Data	Codes	Categories
Could help me bring my little sister to America	Reuniting family	
I had some trouble understanding what people were saying sometimes. They had a translator helping me, but he couldn't be around all the time.: it was hard sometimes when both the teacher and the translator were talking	Language barrier	Language barrier
Would you recommend the program to another human trafficking survivor?: Yes.	Would recommend	
They were able to help me with things I may not have been able to figure out on my own. Since they could help me, they could help others like me.: I think they did the best they could	Helpful	Positive recommendation

After reviewing the data from participant three, 14 codes were created. The code *completed reintegration program* was created because the participant completed a reintegration program. The code *successful reintegration belief* was created because he believed he successfully reintegration back into society. Afterwards the codes *community*, *employment*, *financial management*, *leisure*, and *home management* were created. This was because the participant believed that reintegration included rejoining "everyday life alongside everyone else." This included having a job, going to the bank, buying groceries, paying bills, going to restaurants, and completing yard work. The participant stated that the program helped him reintegrate by helping him find a job, reuniting him with his sister, and helping improve his English. These created codes *program helped reintegration*, *job assistance*, *language training*, and *reuniting family*. When asked about difficulties he encountered, he stated that he had issues understanding people due to a language barrier. This created the code *language barrier*. Lastly the codes *would recommend* and *helpful* were create. This was because the participant stated he would recommend the program and that they helped him when he needed it.

These codes led to the creation of five categories. Codes *completed reintegration program*, *successful reintegration belief*, and *program helped reintegration* created category **successful reintegration**. The codes *community*, *employment*, *financial management*, *leisure*, and *home management* led to category **everyday life**. Then codes *program helped reintegration*, *job assistance*, *language training*, and *reuniting family* were grouped into category **program assistance**. The code *language barrier* became

category **language barrier**. Finally, codes *would recommend* and *helpful* created category **positive recommendation**.

Table 4

Subject 4 Codes & Categories

Data	Codes	Categories
Did you complete a program designed to help you reintegrate (return) into society?: Yes.	Completed reintegration program	
Do you believe that you have successfully reintegrated into society?: Yes I do.	Successful reintegration belief	Successful reintegration
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: Yes I think so	Program helped reintegration	
Become a member of society again	Community	Rejoin society
Like with a job	Employment	
Going to church	Religion	
They helped me afford my medical bills	Financial assistance	Program assistance
Getting an insurance plan	Health care	
They also helped me with some cooked meals	Cooked meals	
They had me attend therapy. I didn't need it, but it was a requirement for the program.	Forced therapy	Improvement recommendation
Having less people involved would have been nice: seemed like their whole church knew about me and my problems which was frustrating at times	Privacy needed	

Data	Codes	Categories
I don't remember anything like that.	No obstacles	No obstacles
Would you recommend the program to another human trafficking survivor?: Yes.	Would recommend	Positive recommendation
Good people who were trying to help	Helpful	

Analyzing the data from participant four led to the creation of 14 codes as well. The code *completed reintegration program* was created because he completed a reintegration program. He stated that he believed that he did reintegrate back into society which created code *successful reintegration belief*. According to the participant, reintegration meant "becoming a member of society", having a job, and going to church. This created the codes *community*, *employment*, and *religion*. According to the participant, the program helped him reintegrate back into society by helping him with his medical bills, obtaining insurance, and providing some cooked meals. This created the codes program helped *reintegration*, *financial assistance*, *health care*, and *cooked meals*. The code *no obstacles* was created because he did not remember having any issues with the program. When asked about improvements that could be made, he mentioned that he didn't need the therapy that was provided, and that more privacy would have been appreciated. This led to the codes *forced therapy* and *privacy needed*. Lastly the codes *would recommend* and *helpful* were created based off the participant's answers. He, like the others, recommend the program as he found it very helpful.

These codes were grouped into six categories. Codes *completed reintegration program*, *successful reintegration belief*, and *program helped reintegration* created

category **successful reintegration**. Then codes *community*, *employment*, and *religion* became category **rejoin society**. Meanwhile codes *financial assistance*, *health care*, and *cooked meals* were grouped into category **program assistance**. Codes *forced therapy* and *privacy needed* were grouped into category **improvement recommendation**. The code *no obstacles* became category **no obstacles**. Lastly codes *would recommend* and *helpful* led to the creation of the category **positive recommendation**.

Table 5

Subject 5 Codes & Categories

Data	Codes	Categories
Did you complete a program designed to help you reintegrate (return) into society?: Yes.	Completed reintegration program	Successful reintegration
Do you believe that you have successfully reintegrated into society?: Yes.	Successful reintegration belief	
Was the program you completed able to assist you in successfully reintegrating?: Yes	Program helped reintegration	
To be a regular person	Normal person	Regular person
That is gainfully employed: like working a job	Employment	
Paying taxes	Taxes	
The program taught me how to handle my negative emotions and stress: how to meditate and that my past does not define me: had me practice keeping a journal so that I could work on sorting my thoughts and focusing on what's important	Coping mechanisms	Program assistance
I lived in a sort of group housing with other people like me: we all knew what each other was there for: living in the same place as the others made it harder	Lack of privacy	Program issues
Some of the girls there would sometimes flinch when they saw me: I was a victim like them, but I was lumped in with their abusers	Mistaken association	
I think not being around the other's, especially the girls, would have been better.	Individual assistance	Recommendations

Data	Codes	Categories
I think having our own living spaces away from the others would have been better.	Separate living spaces	
Would you recommend the program to another human trafficking survivor?: Yes.	Would recommend	
Because in the end I got the help I needed and so did others	Received aid	Would recommend
I don't think things would have worked out for me if I had to do it all on my own.	Assistance was required	

The data from the fifth and final participant was also grouped into 14 codes. Like the others, the code *completed reintegration program* was made as this participant completed one such program. Since the participant believed he had successfully reintegrated back into society, the code *successful reintegration belief* was created. The code *program helped reintegration* was created because the participant stated that the program did help. When asked what it meant to reintegrate, he stated that it meant to be a regular person. When asked what he meant by a regular person, he stated that it meant things like having a job and paying taxes. This resulted in the creation of the codes *normal person*, *employment*, and *taxes*. The participant stated that the program "taught me how to handle my negative emotions and stress" through things like meditation and keeping a journal. This created the code *coping mechanisms*. The participant did have some issues with his program. One issue included his presence making the female program goers uncomfortable that lived in the same building as him. This was placed into the code *mistaken association*. He also had an issue as he thought there was not enough

privacy. This led to the code *lack of privacy*. Improvements for the program were an increase of men in the program and separate living spaces for male and women program goers. These improvements were represented by codes *more men* and *separate living spaces*. Despite his troubles, the participant stated that he would recommend others to his program. He stated that he could not have done it on his own and that the program did help him. This was grouped into codes *would recommend*, *received aid*, and *assistance was required*.

When these codes were grouped into categories, six categories were created. The codes *completed reintegration program*, *successful reintegration belief*, and *program helped reintegration* were grouped into the category **successful reintegration**. The codes *normal person*, *employment*, and *taxes* were grouped into the category **regular person**. The code *coping mechanisms* became the category **program assistance**. The codes *lack of privacy* and *mistaken association* were placed into the category **program issues**. The codes *more men* and *separate living spaces* led to the creation of the category **recommendations**. Lastly the codes *would recommend*, *received aid*, and *assistance required* were placed into the category **would recommend**.

Table 6

Themes

Subject	Category	Theme
1	Successful reintegration	
2	Successful reintegration	
3	Successful reintegration	Successfully reintegrated back into society
4	Successful reintegration	
5	Successful reintegration	
1	Normal person	
2	Normal person	
3	Everyday life	Belief that successful reintegration means to become a normal member of the community
4	Rejoin society	
5	Regular person	
1	Program assistance	
2	Program assistance	
3	Program assistance	Reintegration programs provided needed assistance for program attendees
4	Program assistance	
5	Program assistance	

Subject	Category	Theme
1	No issues	More often than not, reintegration programs have issues that hamper the progress of male attendees
2	No obstacles	
3	Program issues	
4	Language barrier	
5	Program issues	
2	Program improvements	Reintegration programs need improvements to better help male attendees
4	Improvement recommendation	
5	Recommendations	
1	Positive recommendation	Male attendees would still recommend attending reintegration programs despite obstacles that may be present in programs
2	Positive recommendation	
3	Positive recommendation	
4	Positive recommendation	
5	Would recommend	

After reviewing the data, codes, and categories; several themes emerged. The first theme was that the participants successfully reintegrated back into society. The second theme was that belief that successful reintegration means becoming a normal member of the community. The next theme was reintegration programs do provide needed assistance for their program attendees. Despite this, reintegration programs often have issues that hamper the progress of their male attendees. The next theme that emerged was that there were ways the reintegration programs could improve to better help male attendees. The last theme was male attendees would still recommend attending reintegration programs despite obstacles that may be present in the programs.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The researcher of a study is responsible to ensure the quality of their study. They accomplish this when they establish the trustworthiness of their study (Burkholder et al., 2020). The trustworthiness is established through the implementation of the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2020). When the researcher accomplishes the establishment of trustworthiness, the research is sound and usable. This means that others can then take the researcher and use it in their attempts to create their own positive social change. In Chapter 3, methods to ensure the trustworthiness of this research were established. These methods were strictly adhered to while conducting the research.

In Chapter 3, credibility was defined as how true the findings of the study are (Burkholder et al., 2020). The method chosen to ensure the credibility of the findings was member checking. Member checking is when the researcher reviews the data that was

collected, and the interpretations of the data, with the participant (Burkholder et al., 2020). This allows the participant to confirm the data they contributed and validate the interpretations that came from it. Member checking was conducted after the interviews were completed, transcribed, and coded. Once the participants confirmed their answers and my interpretations, then themes were established. All the data and data analysis were then sent to the dissertation chair as mentioned in chapter. This was to further strengthen the study's credibility and ensure there wasn't anything that could potentially harm the participants.

Transferability is established when a study is shown to be relevant in other circumstances (Burkholder et al., 2020). The strategy mentioned in Chapter 3 to establish transferability was thick description. In simple terms, this means exploring the meaning and interpretation of something through detailed accounts. This was accomplished through follow up questions. For instance, when a participant said that they thought reintegration meant being a normal person, a follow up question asking what they thought was a normal person was asked. However, it is believed that saturation was not reached in this study due to the sizable gap in the research concerning male participants and the low number of participants that were found. This was mentioned in Chapter 3 and does affect the transferability of this study.

To establish the dependability of a study, the researcher must show that the study can be repeated by another researcher (Burkholder et al., 2020). This means similar results should be achieved when another researcher conducts the same study. The strategy mentioned in Chapter 3 for this was the use of an audit trail. An audit trail is a

detailed record of the research process that shows the researcher's steps throughout the study. An example of this for this study are the figures in this chapter depicting the coding process. Using the details in this study, another researcher should be able to conduct a similar study and achieve similar results. However, dependability was believed to have been impacted in this study due to a lack of saturation.

When a researcher shows that their research was not influenced by their bias, then confirmability is established (Burkholder et al., 2020). Confirmability is the objectivity of the research and its conclusions (Burkholder et al., 2020). In this study, I explained the different aspects of the study to the participants in detail. These details included the nature of the interviews, their duration, and the purpose of the study. Only after the participants acknowledged that they understood all of it, and provided their consent, were the interviews conducted. This was done at the same time as when the consent process was conducted. Follow up questions were asked to better understand the participants experiences and member checking was used to ensure no bias leaked in. Everything was then sent to the dissertation chair for review to help ensure accuracy and lack of researcher bias. This adhered to what was mentioned in Chapter 3 and established confirmability in this study.

Results

What are the lived experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after being rescued from human trafficking? This was the researcher question I sought to answer during this study. There was no one answer to this question as each participant had their own experiences to share with their own

perspectives. While all stated that they had completed a program and reintegrated back into society, not all felt that they had done so successfully. This was because he did not believe he was like everyone else which he considered to be the mark of a successfully reintegration. In fact, all the participants believed that becoming a normal member of the community was the mark of a successful reintegration. However, while the one participant felt he had not successfully reintegrated, he agreed that he did reintegrate back into society. All the participants agreed that these programs helped them and recommended that others in similar situations attend them. However, while a few participants had no issues and could not think of improvements that could be made to their programs, the majority found that there were necessary changes that needed to be made. Only two participants mentioned issues that had to do with them being male in these reintegration programs. In the end, more data is needed to better answer the research question that was purposed.

Conclusion

While these male participants would recommend going through a reintegration program, there are some things that can be improved upon to better help other male program attendees. These issues experienced include things related to the participants' gender but also included things like language barriers. Despite the conclusions that can be drawn from this study, more data is needed to better understand the experiences of male victims of human trafficking during the reintegration process in America. In Chapter 5, the findings of this study and their implications were explored.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Exploring the experiences of men who have been through the reintegration process as children in America after they have been rescued from human trafficking is the purpose of this research. Human trafficking is a crime that operates in secret and, as a result, has an unknown number of victims (Haney et al., 2020). Despite this, it is believed that children and women make up most trafficking victims (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Due to reasons such as this, most research into human trafficking focuses on women and children (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). This naturally means that men are neglected which creates a gap in the literature. The research that does focus on males, or at least includes, struggles to fill the gap in research as male victims have a tendency not to reveal themselves as victims of human trafficking (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). I focused on the male victims to help fill this gap and help create positive social change. However, as human trafficking victims are a vulnerable population due to their traumatic experiences, it was decided to focus on the reintegration process. This was in the hope that this period for the participants was far less traumatic. Additionally, this helps fill the gap of human trafficking victims' reintegration and aftercare process. Lastly, men who went through the experience during childhood was selected as I was not able to interview children as they are too vulnerable. Men who went through the experience could have been chosen instead of men that went through reintegration as children. However, as previously stated, research available focuses more on women and children. This means there are more studies to draw from when focusing on male children rather than men.

I used a phenomenological approach for this study. This allowed for the exploration of the participants' experiences during their reintegration process. Interviews were conducted with the participants to these experiences with follow up interviews conducted as needed. After the interviews were conducted, IPA. was used to analysis the data and code it. Once this was complete, the participants were then contacted to ensure accuracy. When accuracy was confirmed, the themes were created from the data.

The themes that emerged from the data are the key findings of this study. The first is that the participants successfully reintegrated back into society. This was less a finding but rather a participation requirement as I was looking for participants that had successfully reintegrated back into society. The next was the participants believed that successfully reintegrating meant becoming a normal member of the community. The third finding was that reintegration programs provided needed assistance for the program attendees. While some participants could not think of any issues they had with their respective programs, most did. The fifth finding was that reintegration programs need improvements to better help male attendees. Lastly, the male participants would recommend their respective reintegration programs despite obstacles that they experienced during their time in the programs.

Interpretation of the Findings

There is a gap in the research when it comes to male human trafficking victims (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). There is also a lack of research focused on the reintegration process for human trafficking victims (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). This research was an attempt to help fill the gap. While the first finding does not impact the knowledge from

chapter two, the difficulty in finding participants that met the requirement does. Male victims of human trafficking do not often admit to being a victim of human trafficking (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). The difficulty in finding participants for this study confirms this. Only five participants were found in the end and just as many were found and dropped out of the study. The added requirement of having successfully completed a reintegration program only made things harder.

The second finding of this study was that the participants believed a successful reintegration meant becoming a "normal" person. This extends the knowledge found in chapter two. If it is believed that a successful reintegration means becoming like everyone else, then those that don't may believe that they have not been successful. This lack of success of becoming a normal person may explain why a male victim may refrain from coming forward about their situation. Those struggling with issues as a direct result of their trauma may believe that they cannot be normal. This means it is important for reintegration programs to help survivors to feel a sense of normalcy.

I found that reintegration programs do help attendees in their fight to move past their trauma and reintegrate back into society. So, while male attendees are generally attending programs created with female victims in mind (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020), they are still helpful. This can be paired with another study finding that the male participants would recommend other male victims attend these programs. This is the case even for the participants that felt the need for programs to be altered to better assist them. In chapter two it was stated that these reintegration programs need feedback from program attendees to better assist them (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). Furthermore, more male participation is

needed to better these programs (Krushas & Kulig, 2023). These two findings from this study expand upon the literature in chapter two by stating that while the programs need to be adjusted to better male victims, they are still helping them.

Reintegration programs have issues that can hamper the progress of male attendees according to the findings of this study. These issues range from male specific issues to more general issues that are not gender specific. For instance, one participant stated that the female program attendees were uncomfortable around him due to his sharing a gender with the ones that victimized the female attendees. Another participant felt uncomfortable being the only male attendee in his program while another had difficulty with the language barrier. This confirms what was stated in Chapter 2 as human trafficking efforts focus on women (see Leach, 2022). It also confirms that programs should use attendees to better tailor themselves to better help their attendees.

The participants of these studies gave multiple ways that their reintegration programs could improve to better help them. These improvements included suggestions like one-on-one sessions instead of group therapy and separate living spaces away from female attendees. This led to the study finding that these reintegration programs have improvements that can be made to better help their male attendees. This confirms the literature in Chapter 2 that program attendees should be consulted on improvements for these programs. This is because the suggestions from this study's participants primarily came from the obstacles they faced during their time in their programs. If also expands upon the literature as male attendees scaring the female attendees may not have been a

consideration when creating a reintegration program as the expectation may have on female attendees.

The findings of this study align with the theory of renewed self that was mentioned in theoretical framework of this dissertation. According to the theory of renewed self the person receiving care takes an active role in their recovery (Curran et al., 2017). In this case, the participants had to take the lead role in completing their reintegration program and successfully reintegrating back into society. The participants believed that reintegration meant becoming a normal member of the community. To be a normal person in the community meant things like doing yard work, going to church, and having a job. While the program assisted the participants with these things, it required active participation from them to happen. For instance, the participants had to regularly go and work each day. The program may have helped them find a job, but they had to work it each day. These programs also had obstacles that these participants had to overcome during their process of reintegration. If the participants had given up, like one admitted he almost did, then they likely would not have successfully reintegrated back into society.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations that arose during this study that affected the trustworthiness of the study. The first was the small number of participants in the study. This affected my ability to reach saturation. This was an expected limitation as male victims of human trafficking do not come forward (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). This was made more difficult with the high dropout rate of participants. Another limitation to the

study was the fact that I sought participants who experienced the phenomenon while they were children. However, another requirement was that the participants had to be adults. This meant that there was a gap between when the participant completed the reintegration program and when they participated in this study. To protect the participants, detailed information about themselves and their lives were not sought. This means there could have been a long time between the two events. Such a gap in time can cause the participants to not remember things clearly or at all. It is also a possibility that the participants were not truthful in their answers and there was no way to guarantee that they were telling the truth. Lastly, there is no one singular reintegration program for human trafficking victims. This means that different programs can provide different experiences for different survivors. As such, when trying to replicate this study, researchers may find that the experiences differed due to a difference in what reintegration programs were attended.

Recommendations

There are many recommendations to be made for future research. The first and foremost is to gather more male participants. The more participants, the closer to saturation the research will be. Another recommendation is to use participants that went through the experience as adults. There is less literature on men than male children, which is a bigger gap in the research. Another recommendation is to focus on participants that are transgender, specifically women that were boys during the time they experienced the phenomenon. Lastly, another study that could be conducted would be focusing on participants from a specific reintegration program. There are so many gaps in the research

when it comes to studying human trafficking victims that it should not be difficult to settle in on one. I plan to continue researching human trafficking victims' experiences in the future in the hopes of creating positive social change.

Implications

This study has the potential to help create positive social change. According to this study's findings, the reintegration programs need to be altered to better assist male attendees. Human trafficking survivors already have a lot to deal with as a result from their traumatic experience. Anything that can help them, such as programs more in line with their needs, will naturally create positive social change. This study can also help create awareness for people to understand some of what male human trafficking survivors go through while attending reintegration programs. This in turn can inspire them to go out and help these survivors and create their own positive social change. An example of this are the program workers consulting with their program attendees on how to better help them. Lastly, this study can be used to help other researchers conduct their own research. These future studies will then go on to create their own positive social change.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is a global epidemic that continues to increase its impact each year (Recknor et al., 2022). Many survivors of human trafficking are rescued each year, but being rescued is not the end. These survivors then need to go through the aftercare and reintegration process, which is often a difficult time for the survivors. This can involve things like dealing with health issues (Haney et al., 2020) and reuniting with their families. Research into human trafficking often focuses on recognizing the signs of

people that are being trafficked (Haney et al., 2020). These studies often focus on female victims of human trafficking (Recknor et al., 2022). This is because human trafficking is often associated with female victims. On top of this, male victims are often reluctant to identify themselves as victims of human trafficking (see Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). This study attempted to help fill in the gap in the literature for male survivors to help create positive social change. Specifically, this study looked at the experiences of male survivors during their time reintegrating back into society. This is because there are even less studies looking into the reintegration process of male survivors. In the end, this study found that reintegration programs do need to be altered to better help male survivors. Despite needing these improvements, the participants of this study found that the programs did help them and recommended other male survivors to attend them.

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