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Enhancing Antitrafficking Initiatives Through an Interagency Collaboration Framework

Robert Louis Baxter
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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Robert Louis Baxter

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and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Enhancing Antitrafficking Initiatives Through an Interagency Collaboration Framework

by

Robert Louis Baxter

MPA, Troy University, 2012

BS, Alabama State University, 1990

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

The challenges individual agencies face in addressing the complex issue of human trafficking and how interagency collaboration can strengthen survivor-centered support are largely unknown. Organizations often lack formal alliances that combine expertise and resources to deliver more comprehensive care. The absence of such partnerships represents a missed opportunity to provide the essential services necessary for survivors' recovery, empowerment, and social reintegration. The purpose of the study was to use interagency collaboration to address the question: How can education, law enforcement, public health, and community-based organizations assess the barriers and benefits of interagency collaboration to create a more seamless support network for survivors of human trafficking? Responses from 11 semi-structured interviews were analyzed using deductive thematic analysis. Six major themes emerged: (a) victim identification challenges, (b) holistic well-being, (c) lack of interagency collaboration, (d) systemic constraints, (e) organizational culture and leadership buy-in, and (f) survivor empowerment and shared responsibility. These themes support strategic collaboration, which fosters networking, strengthens organizational commitment, and aligns collective efforts toward shared objectives, is needed using a cross-sector model of integrated resources to address survivors' multidimensional needs. Within public administration, interagency collaboration offers a practical framework for advancing social change, improving coordination, and establishing sustainable systems of care. Collectively, agencies can streamline processes, expand service access, and build stronger, more resilient networks of support for survivors of human trafficking.

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Dedication

I dedicate this journey to my mother, Jessie Youngblood. You have been my inspiration all my life. I value your guidance and support. You taught your children the importance of education. Not only have you inspired your biological children, but you have also inspired the kids in the community where you taught for over 34 years. Know that you are loved, and I thank God for blessing me with a mother like you. You have never turned your back on us. I dedicate this writing to express my appreciation for you.

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Section 1: Introduction

Eargle and Doucet (2021) noted that human trafficking remains a significant issue in the United States. It continues to flourish as a pervasive social and criminological problem. Globally, approximately 40,000,000 people are trafficked, highlighting the size of this issue (International Labour Organisation, 2017). This enslavement industry is valued at billions of dollars, ranking second only to drug trafficking in terms of profitability among illicit activities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). However, research on this issue is limited, primarily due to the complexities of identifying probable trafficking events. This creates challenges in accurately estimating the scale of human trafficking that is managed by the criminal justice system. The difficulty in detecting victims of human trafficking further complicates efforts. As Gholizadeh et al. (2020) suggested, the reliability of trafficking data is questionable, as victims often remain hidden in plain sight, unnoticed by those around them.

The United States is one of the top 10 human trafficking destinations. According to the U.S. Department of State (2023), the estimated number of trafficking victims within the United States ranged from 600,000 to 800,000 between 2020 and 2022. Nonetheless, these estimates are questionable due to fragmented data collection methods and the nonreplicable nature of data reported by various sites. Despite challenges, public awareness of human trafficking continues to grow. As a result, the criminal justice system and social service organizations are becoming increasingly conscious of the existence of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking, is often described as the 21st-century version of slavery. In this thriving, profit-driven criminal enterprise, victims are exploited for sexual favors or forced labor. Islam (2023) noted that individuals usually become targets of traffickers because they exploit their socioeconomic vulnerabilities, subjecting them to forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse. Men, women, and children are vulnerable to the exploitative demands of the human trafficking market due to multiple complex social and economic drivers, including poverty, illiteracy, and lack of awareness.

According to data from the United States Department of Justice in 2022 on human trafficking, most victims come from marginalized communities and face other vulnerabilities such as children in the child welfare system, those involved in the juvenile justice system, runaway and homeless youth, unaccompanied children, people without lawful immigration status, Black individuals and other people of color, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other Indigenous peoples of North America. It also includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex individuals, migrant laborers, people with disabilities, and those with substance use disorder (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Recognizing the true extent of human trafficking is essential, as millions worldwide are victims of forced labor and sexual exploitation, often subjected to coercion and other abusive circumstances (Kooffreh, 2024).

Cho et al. (2014) explained that human trafficking has become a growing phenomenon over the last few decades. The illicit trade of human beings across borders

violates the human rights of victims, threatens national security, and damages the health of economies and societies, making it one of the most severe transnational crimes of the 21st century. Addressing human trafficking effectively requires cooperation, collaboration, and partnerships, illustrating the shared goals and commitments between multiple entities. Partnerships are essential for helping victims recover from their traumatic experiences and regain control over their lives. Furthermore, partnerships can be described as mutually beneficial relationships. They are well-defined collaborations formed by two or more organizations to achieve shared goals, which are essential for practical solutions when dealing with the complexity of human trafficking issues. These problems greatly affect victims' social and economic well-being.

Jones and Lutze (2016) drew research from Clawson et al. (2006) and Sheldon-Sherman (2012) to clarify the theoretical view of interagency collaboration. That research helps guide those working to fight human trafficking by sharing their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. This mutual learning enables a deeper understanding of the issue, the development of new ideas for responses, and a greater appreciation of the organizational context in which collaborative partners operate. Jones and Lutze described interagency collaboration as a strategic partnership that enables organizations to effectively fight human trafficking by pooling financial and human resources. This collaborative approach supports a variety of anti-trafficking efforts, including advancing research, enhancing education, increasing public and professional awareness, and offering targeted training. This helps practitioners identify and respond efficiently to cases of human trafficking.

Furthermore, a collaborative approach involves providing technical assistance and offering specialized support to agencies and organizations involved in anti-trafficking efforts. This approach also enhances the criminal justice response, especially by improving law enforcement and prosecutorial capabilities. Equally important, it focuses on delivering comprehensive victim services to ensure survivors receive the support and care they need. As Jones and Lutze highlighted, this integrated and collaborative framework increases the overall effectiveness of anti-trafficking initiatives by leveraging the collective strengths of participating entities (Jones & Lutze, 2016).

The U.S. G.A.O. (2007) noted interagency collaboration as an effective way to combat human trafficking. Since the 2000 enactment of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, federal agencies have (a) investigated allegations of trafficking crimes, leading to 139 prosecutions; (b) provided training and implemented state and local initiatives to support investigations and prosecutions; and (c) established organizational structures, agency-level goals, plans, or strategies, according to the office. Through their strategic framework for enhancing interagency collaboration, agencies have also sponsored outreach and training for state and local law enforcement, nongovernmental organizations, and the public, utilizing a toll-free complaint line, newsletters, national conferences, and model legislation. Establishing a strategic framework to investigate and prosecute trafficking in persons crimes, as developed by federal agencies to address the unique challenges posed by these crimes, could help federal agencies enhance and sustain the collaboration needed to expand their efforts to combat trafficking crimes.

Integrating an interagency collaboration framework is a valuable strategic effort for organizations aiming to build alliances and support human trafficking victims. This collaborative process allows agencies to combine efforts, achieving outcomes that surpass what each could accomplish independently. Such a shared agenda can amplify the effectiveness of services, enhance outcomes for service recipients, address existing service gaps, and foster focused interventions that collectively improve support for survivors of human trafficking.

Organization Background and Problem Statement

This study highlights the various public sectors that may interact with or serve victims of human trafficking, including education, law enforcement, public health, and community-based organizations. Growing support from these organizations encourages strategic alliances. These alliances can provide practical ways to offer impactful, vital, and comprehensive services for human trafficking victims, including safe housing, trauma-informed programming, and pathways to self-recovery.

Organizational leaders are increasingly focusing on empowering victims to envision and pursue a prosperous future marked by dignity and hope. They envision that partnerships are the pathway to comprehensive care, which is key for victims who have been sexually exploited to gain a sense of hope, support, and the tools needed to pursue their dreams and live a life of freedom. These partnerships enable resource sharing, enhanced service delivery, and coordinated care that is holistic and effective.

Recognizing the unique needs of each survivor, organizations are intentionally collaborating with other entities to deliver personalized support programs encompassing

trauma-informed care, comprehensive life skills training, and individualized care plans. However, there are distinguishable gaps in services for victims of sex trafficking. Organizations that work alone are often ill-equipped to provide the essential services needed for long-term recovery for human trafficking victims. These gaps significantly undermine the ability to provide consistent, long-term support, ultimately hindering survivors' progress toward complete healing and successful reintegration into society.

Forging strategic partnerships with other entities to combat human trafficking can be beneficial. It is critical for these sectors to work together comprehensively to create supportive services that extend beyond their program's timeframe. Hemming et al. (2016) underscored the urgency for comprehensive support for trafficking survivors, given the high prevalence of physical and sexual violence experienced before and during trafficking, as well as the range of health problems posttrafficking, including depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Comprehensive needs assessments, trauma-informed care principles, and cultural sensitivity are essential for providing adequate care and facilitating multiagency collaboration to address challenges (Hemming et al., 2016). Through strategic collaborations, organizations should aim to bridge critical gaps. This can enhance their capacity to provide thorough, long-term support to survivors, ensuring sustained empowerment and quality of life.

By acknowledging critical gaps in services for victims, organizations realize these efforts are not viable for reclamation or autonomy. While offering vital immediate support is good, it often lacks the specialized resources needed for long-term healing and

recovery. By partnering with other entities, the potential is endless to provide essential services that complement existing care, empowering survivors to rebuild their lives and achieve their full potential. Hypothetically, a lack of collaborative effort is a missed opportunity to systematically address the complex needs of this vulnerable population.

Without a strategy focused on interagency collaboration, their reintegration may be hindered. There is a tendency for victims' progress to be obstructed, creating significant obstacles to their efforts to regain control over their lives. This lack of essential partnership capabilities negatively impacts the support services provided to victims, forming barriers to accessing vital resources. As a result, the long-term sustainability of comprehensive recovery programs is compromised, affecting the organization's ability to facilitate survivors' full rehabilitation and reintegration. Without a strategic approach to identifying and establishing partnerships with other agencies, the long-term prospects for survivors' quality of life may be diminished.

Addressing human trafficking requires a collaborative approach involving multiple agencies. A holistic strategy that considers the mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of survivors is essential. Interagency collaboration is critical to providing this comprehensive support. According to Jones and Lutze (2016), drawing on research by Braun (2003) and Sheldon-Sherman (2012), interagency collaboration can lead to a network of contacts for individuals and agencies involved in anti-human trafficking efforts, thereby increasing knowledge about whom to contact and where to refer victims. This network can improve communication between agencies, enhance information sharing about human trafficking cases, and streamline case

processing and follow-up for the rehabilitation of victims. Such collaboration can lead to more holistic and comprehensive responses to victims of human trafficking. Essential partnerships are crucial; without them, comprehensive supportive services for human trafficking victims could face significant disruptions, delays, or outright prevention of their reclamation.

Purpose

In this research, I used a generic qualitative approach to explore the perspectives, barriers, and collaborative experiences of individuals working in organizations that aim to support victims of human trafficking. Hopefully, the study offers insight into best practices and strategies. It highlights opportunities for interagency collaboration as a creative and practical approach to building alliances that better serve victims of human trafficking. The central research question was, how can the education system, law enforcement, public health agencies, and community-based organizations effectively assess both the barriers and benefits of interagency collaboration as a strategic approach to creating a more seamless and comprehensive support network for survivors of human trafficking? This qualitative approach provides a deeper understanding of interagency collaboration in addressing the plight of human trafficking victims.

This research has implications for future policy implementation and practices that strengthen support services for survivors through effective interagency collaboration. Complex social issues such as human trafficking require a collaborative approach for long-term resolutions. Single agencies often struggle to achieve long-term solutions without the strength of partnerships, highlighting the effectiveness of interagency

partnerships. Notably, this research underscores how collaboration can achieve ultimate objectives more effectively by emphasizing the importance of networking, shared goals, and mutual commitments.

Strategic partnerships are crucial for organizations' long-term success and greater impact, especially those focused on complex social issues. By building strong connections with complementary agencies, organizations can develop a seamless network of ongoing services that often go beyond what any single entity can offer. Collaborative alliances foster a more comprehensive and sustained approach to addressing diverse needs. This creates a continuum of care that yields more profound and lasting outcomes.

Organizations dedicated to supporting survivors of human trafficking can significantly strengthen their impact by strategically cultivating alliances. Collaborations should be carefully designed to address the multifaceted needs of survivors as they navigate reintegration into society and strive for a meaningful quality of life. Specifically, collaborations can be formed to enhance the provision of critical resources, including safe housing, nutritious meals, and other essential healthcare services.

Furthermore, targeted collaborations can improve access to ongoing, trauma-informed care, ensuring survivors receive the specialized emotional and psychological support needed for healing. Partnerships focused on providing practical life skills training, including financial literacy, job readiness, and educational opportunities, are crucial for fostering independence and self-sufficiency. As organizations unite as partners, their impact will become vital for meaningful recovery, helping victims reintegrate into society. Diverse collaborations can establish this comprehensive and

sustained support network with a holistic approach to healing. This can empower survivors of sexual exploitation and human trafficking to reclaim control over their lives, rebuild their futures, and thrive within their communities.

Highlighting human trafficking as a critical issue requiring enhanced interagency collaboration for victim support services is vital. It emphasizes the need for stronger partnerships and outlines specific strategies for improving collaboration among social service agencies and other public service entities. By doing so, the impact has the potential to enhance the sustainability of support services and more effectively combat human trafficking.

Summary of Data Sources and Analysis

My action-oriented research used a generic qualitative approach focused on organizational interest and willingness to collaborate among different entities to deliver long-term services for victims affected by human trafficking or sexual exploitation. Interviews gathered detailed information on the collaboration process, challenges, and outcomes, supplemented by data from publicly available sources and organizational documents. The data will broadly evaluate how interagency collaboration influences the effectiveness of organizations in fighting human trafficking and supporting survivors.

I conducted semistructured interviews with participants from the education system, law enforcement, public health, and community-based sectors to gather their perspectives and provide valuable insights. Understanding these individuals' views on interagency collaboration is essential for tackling human trafficking and offering comprehensive support services. A thematic framework, comprising open-ended

questions in an informal setting, was employed to engage key stakeholders and underscore the importance of effective interagency collaboration.

Definitions

The terms in this study require understanding and explanation. As terms are employed throughout the study, their importance elucidates the complexity of this social issue and its significance to public administration theories around strategic partnerships. As some organizations strive to collaborate with other entities to heal and restore victims, these terms are essential for the study's concept.

Coercion: Any scheme, plan, or pattern intended to cause a person to believe that failure to perform an act would result in serious harm to or physical restraint against any person (Boyle-Laisure, 2023).

Human trafficking: A crime that involves exploiting an individual for labor, services, or commercial sex (Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000).

Interagency collaboration: A means for individuals from different agencies to work together to share their knowledge about a topic, perspectives on a problem, and experiences responding to an activity, thereby pooling their financial and human resources to achieve common goals (Jones & Lutze, 2016).

Sexual exploitation: Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another, stating this was a broad term which encompassed several acts, including transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex and exploitative relationships (United Nations, 2017).

Sex trafficking: A phenomenon that encompasses the range of activities involved when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to compel someone, including a minor, to engage in a commercial sex act. There is an exchange of sex for money or something else of value, such as food, drugs, or housing (U.S. Department of State, 2022).

Significance

The study's significance lies in its potential to foster meaningful social change within public administration and support services for survivors. Kim et al. (2018, p.187) clarified that the "faces" of human trafficking victims are as diverse as the lands they come from, based on socioeconomic factors like the unemployed, single mothers, homeless children, or underpaid men, which push them into involuntary servitude, a form of modern-day slavery. According to Dovydaitis (2010), the United States has become a major destination for human trafficking worldwide, with a significant rise in reported cases between 2004 and 2010. Traffickers exploit vulnerable individuals worldwide for commercial sex and forced labor across a variety of legal and illegal industries. Over the past 20 years, Congress has focused on combating human trafficking through three main pillars: prevention, prosecution, and protection (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

As a response to human trafficking, it is necessary to incorporate approaches that provide the best services and support for the victims, whether through interventions, prevention, or protection. Collaborative efforts are needed among service providers to benefit survivors and those vulnerable due to social disadvantages. Establishing an interagency collaboration approach is fundamentally crucial in providing quality services for victims of human trafficking.

Jones (2023) emphasized that interagency collaboration is vital in the fight against human trafficking. When organizations build transparent and mutually beneficial relationships to achieve shared goals, this collaboration becomes crucial for both parties. For those involved in anti-trafficking efforts, it is that partnership that helps prevent and combat human trafficking. It requires coordinated efforts among human and social services, victim service providers, and related professionals to create effective short- and long-term solutions to this crime, as well as supportive services that help victims regain a good quality of life.

This study highlights the importance of interagency collaboration for supporting survivors and building capacity. Such collaboration can improve long-term care and support for survivors of exploitation and abuse. Jones (2023) outlined the challenges encountered in collaborative efforts and suggested strategic approaches for developing a strong support network. These strategies focused on organizational teamwork, building alliances, and sharing resources to maximize their impact. As agencies collaborate, there is potential to develop a stronger, more comprehensive support system that improves survivors' quality of life.

I employed a generic qualitative approach because it enables a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in collaborative efforts. It explores a gap in public administration practice by exploring the dynamics, barriers, and benefits of collaborative models in survivor support services. The findings can offer valuable information that informs policy decisions and promotes meaningful social change. The

insights from this study may inform policy decisions related to survivor support and the prevention of exploitation.

Tseng et al. (2011) generalized findings from previous studies on interagency collaboration as a critical strategy in human service delivery systems. Their thorough analysis demonstrates the effectiveness of such collaborative efforts. The results highlight several positive outcomes, including the expansion of interagency linkages, diversification of interagency activities, enhanced collective power among participants, improved attitudes toward collaboration, and increased exchange of information and referrals. These outcomes should serve as a source of encouragement and motivation for all involved in combating human trafficking.

Summary

Human trafficking is a significant public concern and a booming global business driven by a mixture of social circumstances. These profit-driven criminal groups exploit adverse social determinants such as poverty and joblessness in vulnerable populations. This study demonstrates the impact of collaborative partnerships, which have proven to be valuable in tackling the challenges of human trafficking and helping its victims.

Interagency collaboration is a strategic framework for entities combating human trafficking. This approach, guided by the theory of relational exchange, underscores the importance of organizations recognizing the interdependence of their problems. By establishing and nurturing reciprocal relationships, organizations can effectively address the shared challenges of human trafficking, thereby enhancing their collective impact.

Employing an interagency collaboration framework can help organizations bridge critical service gaps and enhance their capacity to provide comprehensive, long-term support to survivors. This approach ensures sustained empowerment and an improved quality of life for those affected. To dismantle human trafficking and support its survivors, a robust and interconnected partnership is essential. This necessitates seamless cooperation, proactive collaboration, and transparent communication across various stakeholders. United by their commitment to eradicating this crime and supporting its victims, organizations must collaborate to maximize their collective capacities.

In Section 1, I offered context, placing human trafficking as a critical public administration challenge. The argument is that collaborative approaches are essential to survivor support, and using a generic qualitative approach is indispensable for generating actionable insights. Insights can inform effective policies, enhance service delivery, and contribute to positive social change for vulnerable populations. In Section 2, I examined the scholarly literature in relation to the concept of interagency collaboration as a crucial strategy for combating human trafficking and providing comprehensive services to victims.

Section 2: Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature

Introduction

The conceptual framework of interagency collaboration is foundational in aligning how failing to establish effective partnerships with emergency shelters that house victims of human trafficking is a missed opportunity. The lack of an integrative approach, such as interagency collaboration, can hinder victims' progress, creating significant barriers to their recovery and reclaiming their lives. Strong partnerships are central to tackling the multifaceted challenges of human trafficking and ensuring a path to recovery. I explored and documented the multifaceted nature of human trafficking, acknowledging that it extends beyond the act itself to encompass challenges in victim identification, support, rehabilitation, and legal prosecution.

Grounded in the conceptual framework of interagency collaboration, this study emphasized the limitations of current single-agency strategies for fighting human trafficking. It therefore laid the groundwork for a more in-depth look at interagency collaboration. Promoting and adopting this approach can have a powerful impact, aiding in the comprehensive recovery of survivors and helping them regain control of their lives.

The objective was to identify the complexities, barriers, and benefits of integrating an interagency collaboration model into human trafficking partnerships and to establish a strategic plan for future organizational alliances. Establishing partnerships can create pipelines for transitional services that extend beyond the capacity of any single program, ensuring continuous and comprehensive support for survivors. Building

alliances with external entities is vital for maintaining progress for the victims, eliminating the significant gap in their ability to provide long-term support services.

Through interagency collaboration, the goal is to establish partnerships that can help support and rehabilitate victims of human trafficking. Grossman et.al (2012) noted that collaboration between independent organizations offers a practical approach to tackling related issues and improving the quality of public services. This is essential for promoting sustainable development within public services. Jones (2023) proclaimed that interagency collaboration is not just beneficial but urgent when it comes to preventing and controlling human trafficking. This problem requires immediate attention and action. Entities must enter mutually beneficial and well-defined relationships to achieve common goals. This necessitates collaboration between the criminal justice system, human and social services, victim service providers, and allied professionals to achieve meaningful short— and long-term solutions to the crime. Interagency collaboration is beneficial when multiple agencies come together to achieve a common goal.

Hounmenou and Toepp (2023) emphasized the need for law enforcement agencies to form innovative partnerships with specialized organizations beyond law enforcement to combat human trafficking. Partnerships that involve collaborating with outside organizations and individuals are crucial for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to effectively investigate trafficking cases, identify and recover trafficking victims, and support the prosecution of traffickers. The urgency of developing innovative partnerships is apparent, as they are necessary to improve the capacity to investigate human trafficking cases and recover and protect victims.

Literature Search Strategy

I used peer-reviewed literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and complex nature of human trafficking, examined the challenges related to emergency shelter issues for victims, and explored interagency collaboration as a solution. The existing literature was essential because it offered a wealth of information and insights that helped in understanding these complex issues. The literature search utilized the Walden University Library to identify relevant academic, peer-reviewed articles, and government research focusing on human trafficking, victim services, and interagency collaboration. The literature highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach to addressing human trafficking, offered comprehensive support dynamics, and ways to secure justice for victims. Without alliances, there are potential limitations in investigating human trafficking cases, aiding victims' recovery, and ensuring their protection.

The literature review focused on research published within the last five years, including key works published prior to 2019. Critical databases, including the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Emerald Insight, ProQuest, and Sage Journals, were accessed. This research examined core concepts, including human trafficking, emergency shelters, and interagency collaboration, to highlight the important link between these areas. The approach aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of human trafficking, the role of emergency shelters, and the significance of interagency partnerships in creating effective transitional services for survivors. Clear terms are essential for a focused, explicit understanding of the complex issue of human trafficking. This knowledge will

guide the development of transitional services that improve the quality of life for survivors.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of interagency collaboration was critical within the context of this study. This framework was pivotal in addressing any complex social issues, such as human trafficking or sexual exploitation, which no single agency can tackle alone. Interagency collaboration will work well in mitigating the complex issue of human trafficking because of the potential it offers to prevent and control human trafficking. After all, shared goals necessitate collaboration between the criminal justice system, human and social services, victim service providers, and allied professionals to achieve meaningful short- and long-term solutions to crime.

Povenmire-Kirk et al. (2015) defined interagency collaboration as a cooperative process wherein agencies' combined efforts yield outcomes surpassing what each could achieve independently, aiming to amplify the effectiveness of services provided and enhance outcomes for service recipients. Interagency collaboration is pivotal in identifying emergency shelters that house victims of sex trafficking and establish strategies to partner with other organizations because no single agency can tackle this complex social issue alone. Partnerships illustrate networking, shared goals, and shared commitments, recognizing the effectiveness of joint efforts in achieving ultimate goals.

Bryson et al. (2006) asserted that collaboration occurs at an intermediate level in how organizations address public problems. On one end of the spectrum, organizations barely interact when facing issues that exceed their capabilities. Conversely,

organizations fully merge into a new entity, combining authority and resources to tackle problems. The research highlighted how collaboration can achieve ultimate objectives more effectively by emphasizing the importance of networking, shared goals, and mutual commitments. Collaborations are essential for sustaining and establishing better connections with other organizations to provide continuous services that often exceed the organization's capabilities. By enabling sustained care, collaboration will facilitate the holistic recovery of survivors as they will be equipped to reclaim control over their lives.

Kim et al. (2018) stated that collaboration among anti-domestic violence organizations, attorneys, victim assistance providers, health services providers, and local law enforcement is likely the optimal model for this vulnerable population. By combining services, organizations can achieve goals and objectives beyond the capacity of any single entity. This is a notable demonstration of the efficacy of interagency collaboration, encompassing the intention of the components of partnerships at the macro, meso, and micro levels, illustrating how interagency collaboration is beneficial when multiple agencies come together to achieve a common goal.

Interagency collaboration is beneficial in anti-human trafficking efforts as it assimilates groups and increases learning and understanding about the issue among professionals working to address the crime, information sharing about human trafficking, perspectives concerning its causes and best solutions, and experiences responding to human trafficking situations. Practical assessments among subgroups provide the propensity for a deeper awareness and appreciation of the complexity of human

trafficking, leading to the development and implementation of more comprehensive and integrated approaches to victim services.

Furthermore, interagency collaboration among agencies allows interactive engagement in anti-human trafficking efforts as a rationale to pool their financial and human resources to share substantial monetary and labor costs associated with responding to such a complex social issue. This provides agencies with limited budgets and personnel access to more significant resources to support their anti-human trafficking activities. Lastly, anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration enables agencies to establish a joint mission, set long-term goals to achieve, and identify measurable objectives that represent these goals. A joint mission, goals, and objectives can help establish a formalized infrastructure. Developing a strategic framework helps mitigate the challenges of integrating anti-human trafficking activities. It enhances the coordination of agencies' anti-human trafficking efforts, making them more efficient and productive (Jones, 2023).

Jones (2023) emphasized the crucial importance of interagency collaboration in establishing a robust framework and infrastructure for agencies that serve survivors of human trafficking. This teamwork is especially effective in tackling the unique challenges survivors face. By enabling smooth coordination among agencies, there is a real opportunity to increase efficiency and productivity in supporting individuals, ensuring that no opportunity to address the complex needs of this vulnerable group is missed.

Literature Review for the Study

This section provides a comprehensive overview of critical concepts and their alignment with a complex social issue, where relationships between multifaceted entities come together to work in tandem for the common good of vulnerable populations. The literature review provided relevant information, offering a historical perspective on other works related to human trafficking and the benefits and barriers of forming alliances with organizations.

Definition of Human Trafficking

The United Nations' definition of human trafficking is...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for exploitation (UN, 2017,p.7). Human trafficking is a complex global issue characterized by geographical uncertainty, diverse victim populations, and fragmented exploitation networks. Victims are often lured across borders with false promises of employment or better opportunities, only to be exploited for commercial sexual purposes. This exploitation violates the human rights of vulnerable individuals, particularly those from marginalized socioeconomic circumstances.

Sex tourism, a result of human trafficking, involves the sexual exploitation of both international and domestic tourists. The mobility of victims and the difficulty in distinguishing between consensual and nonconsensual sexual encounters make

identification and prevention a challenge. Traffickers often deceive victims about the nature of their work, exploiting their vulnerability and limiting their ability to escape. The U.S. Department of Justice (2023) highlighted a significant surge in cases from 2011 to 2021. Referrals to U.S. attorneys climbed by 49%, prosecutions more than doubled, and convictions increased by over 70%. This escalation underscores the pervasive and complex nature of human trafficking as a profound social crisis.

Cockbain et al. (2022) discussed the complexities of human trafficking through a geographical perspective. This research demonstrated how geographical perspectives and analyses can enable a more nuanced understanding of trafficking, challenge assumptions and orthodoxies, inform responses, and increase scrutiny and accountability. Their research on trafficking and anti-trafficking involves diverse conceptual and empirical contributions. Additionally, their work highlighted a clear and long-standing need for the improved routine collection of geospatial data and the more effective use of existing sources. Given the complexities of trafficking and the limited foundational research relevant to the topic, this study employed a case-study approach. In their study, they focused on an issue and data set that could produce a fuller geographical picture: namely, labor trafficking, the different ‘types’ of trafficking such as sex, domestic servitude, or other labor, and risks obscuring significant differences and better – geographical research on trafficking by extending the focus specifically to quantitative geospatial/spatiotemporal analysis, in particular GIS mapping. The significance of their approach illustrates that trafficking is challenging to straighten out, meaning trafficking is as much about exploitation as a movement, because targets could move freely and readily

enter the regular labor market. The collection and processing of their spatial data allowed the mapping of the geographies of trafficking.

Although the geospatial analyses generated exciting results, the process also revealed considerable barriers that needed to be overcome to ensure rigorous and reliable results. Five methodological challenges for geospatial analysis were identified: data integrity, geographical uncertainty, managing multiple geographies, diversity and disaggregation, and unclear journeys. This research concludes that human trafficking is the most significant issue where there is uncertainty and inaccuracy. This overarching challenge complicates geospatial analysis because it is a complex process rather than a one-off event represented by a single spatial reference. The complex nature of human trafficking research is impaired by the fragmented nature of its victims, which necessitates a comprehensive analysis of various trafficking-related geographies. Existing geographical research often faces challenges due to gaps in reporting.

Human trafficking is about mind manipulation and brainwashing of the victim, which places them in unfortunate circumstances. Human trafficking evidentiary occurrences can be seen in international, federal, and state demographics in the form of labor trafficking and sex trafficking. One of the most pervasive criminal activities globally and in the United States, human trafficking is a social problem that continues to flourish. It is a multi-billion-dollar industry that is on the same level as drug trafficking in terms of its profitability as an illicit activity (U.S. Department of Justice 2016).

Eargle and Doucet (2021) wrote that research on human trafficking within the United States has been limited in scope, with studies concerned primarily with

identifying and assisting victims. Their study was guided by social disorganization, routine activities, and push-pull migration theories and examined the influence of structural measures on the rate of human trafficking cases in the United States.

Ecological Theory speculates that human trafficking arises from the interplay between individuals within a societal context. Community and societal factors can create conditions that foster exploitative relationships, facilitating the connection between traffickers and victims. Another theory discussed in the research was the social disorganization theory, which suggests that weakening social institutions in communities limits their influence and constraint on residents' behavior, resulting in community instability and undermining community efficacy, which leads to further deterioration of the community.

Sampson and Groves's (1989) explanation of social disorganization theory is based on the following structural conditions that reduce the community's ability to regulate members' behavior: low socioeconomic status, ethnic and racial diversity, population turnover, urbanization, and family disruption. Human traffickers can exploit these factors. They feed off these factors, taking advantage of victims' economic inequality, making it their opportunity to capitalize on those who may not be able to afford a good quality of life, leading to social disorganization, which plays a role in human trafficking.

Eargle and Doucet (2021) explored the relationship between social disorganization and human trafficking. Their analysis indicates that areas with higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and high school dropouts may also have higher rates of

human trafficking, and areas with more significant ethnic heterogeneity may experience higher levels of human trafficking. Single-parent households could be linked to increased human trafficking rates. Their research concluded that social detriments could create conditions conducive to human trafficking. Traffickers often prey on marginalized populations by offering false promises of a better life. Victims may be more vulnerable in neighborhoods with social barriers, limited community relations, low levels of investment, and where informal social control is absent.

The data source of Eargle and Doucet's (2021) research came from human trafficking from the National Human Trafficking Hotline Statistics, several U.S. Census Bureau surveys, including the American Community Survey's 1-year estimates, the Annual Survey of Public Investigating Human Trafficking, the County Business Patterns, and the U.S. Decennial Census. Data sources included the Migration Policy Institute, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's point-in-time counts produced for 2018. The dependent variable in the analyses is the human trafficking rate, measured as the number of cases for every 100,000 people in the state, along with the independent variables of low socioeconomic status, including poverty, unemployment, and educational attainment, to test the social disorganization theory. Their research findings conclude that, based on the literature, each independent variable was predicted to positively and significantly impact human trafficking rates. Victims who face these disadvantages of poverty, unemployment, high school dropout, and female-headed households were positively and marginally related to human trafficking rates in their final

model, supporting the hypotheses of their study and illustrating a link between low socioeconomic status and human trafficking.

Lastly, human trafficking is a significant medical and public health issue. Consequently, there is limited data on the healthcare needs and access of this population. Human trafficking has components of violence and violations of human rights. Victims are victimized by the activities of the traffickers, increased risks among survivors for mental health and trauma-related injury, physical health problems, and substance abuse issues. The traumatic experiences endured by victims of human trafficking can have severe and lasting physical and psychological consequences, including acute stress reactions, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, adjustment disorders, dissociation, and suicidal ideation. These conditions necessitate trauma-focused interventions tailored to their specific needs.

Cunha et al. (2023) wrote that human trafficking is a severe human rights violation, illegal, and a criminalized condition that has significant adverse effects on trafficked individuals' well-being. The traumatic experience of trafficking victims is evidence of the effectiveness of interventions to increase mental health recovery. Collaboration among agencies will enhance the quality and validity of programs designed to support the healing of these victims.

Ravi et al.'s (2017) research encapsulated the literature from other studies on how health conditions associated with sex trafficking have long-lasting effects, which include forced pregnancies and abortions, substance abuse, sexual violence, suicide attempts, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections that have affected victims' lives. There

is limited data on the healthcare needs and access of victims in the United States, due in part to challenges in identifying trafficking survivors. Nevertheless, their study investigated the health experiences of domestically sex-trafficked women who are incarcerated on Rikers Island concerning healthcare access, reproductive health, and infectious diseases while trafficked.

The study setting was the Rose M. Singer Center at Rikers Island Prison Complex in New York City, which houses incarcerated women and is dedicated to counseling and therapeutic programming. The study was conducted from July to September 2015. The interviews were conducted in private office spaces on the unit. All interviews were audio recorded. This interview was conducted with women aged 18 and older who were comfortable completing interviews in English. Participants were informed of the study by announcements made during health education programs run weekly by one of the investigators, who worked as a volunteer with Correctional Health Services, or therapeutic programming coordinators who were aware of the study and informed the study team if they encountered potential participants who were interested in learning more about the study.

Primary focus areas in the interview guide included healthcare access, reproductive health, and infectious diseases. The interview recordings were transcribed by an independent transcription agency and reviewed for accuracy. Transcripts were then examined to determine whether participants ultimately shared narratives that fit the legal definition of sex trafficking. This was a qualitative study; the data set was divided, and all interviews were (re)coded by the two authors of this study. Seven of 26 transcripts were

coded by these authors for quality assurance. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was achieved. The study revealed that individuals who had experienced human trafficking sought healthcare primarily for urgent medical needs, including sexually transmitted infections and HIV testing, unintended pregnancies, violence-related injuries (such as rape, trauma, and suicide attempts), and chronic disease management. Because victims did not have Medicaid due to their situation, these individuals often paid for healthcare and prescriptions out of pocket. The primary sources of healthcare for this population were emergency departments (EDs), jails, women's health clinics (like Planned Parenthood), and free health department clinics.

As the study elucidated, trafficking victims' reproductive health suffered during their ordeal, as their experiences were not conducive to optimal healthcare. Human trafficking victims describe how their menses impacted their trafficking experiences. Some women did not see buyers during this time; others described stuffing, whereby absorbent objects such as baby wipes or makeup sponges were inserted into the vagina so that the traffickers' expected income quotas could continue to be met. Others described offering oral or anal sex instead of engaging in intercrural sex. Moreover, unintended pregnancies among trafficking victims often resulted in increased physical violence from their traffickers, who viewed such pregnancies as a potential financial burden. Access to prenatal care varied significantly, with some survivors able to connect with healthcare providers while others did not. Lastly, infectious disease was a concern for participants. They cited HIV infection as their greatest health-related fear while being trafficked. Two participants feared disclosing their HIV-positive status to traffickers or buyers. They

reflected on worries they had about potentially exposed buyers to the virus if condoms broke or were not used.

The study highlighted the urgent public health crisis of human trafficking, particularly its devastating impact on healthcare access, reproductive health, and infectious disease prevention. Trafficked women in this study were particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and violence due to their lack of control over their bodies and circumstances. They were denied essential healthcare services and faced significant barriers to seeking help.

Effectively addressing these challenges and prioritizing victims' social determinants of health must start with a proactive follow-up plan that utilizes the victims' preferred methods of testing and receiving test results, assesses treatments, and evaluates the feasibility of treatment recommendations within their life circumstances. This method can significantly improve care delivery for trafficked individuals. It is optimal to bridge a gap in service delivery for victims of human trafficking, as this study shows the missed opportunities that are displayed in the healthcare system around this topic.

Cunha et al. (2023) found that the prolonged trauma experienced by human trafficking victims significantly increases their risk of severe mental health conditions. Given the high prevalence of trauma among this population, trauma-focused interventions are essential. However, the current analysis indicates a lack of evidence supporting the effectiveness of psychological interventions for human trafficking victims. This highlights the urgent need for further research to inform the development of effective interventions for this vulnerable population.

Nonetheless, any form of psychotherapy can help reduce feelings of shame and empower victims of human trafficking, restoring the essential trust lost due to the abuses perpetrated by their traffickers. As Shah et al. (2023) noted, citing the New South Wales guidelines (2020), a holistic approach to supporting survivors must address their mental health needs, as well as their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. This comprehensive approach utilizes design and creative practices to amplify the voices of individuals who use these services. Fundamentally, it acknowledges the interconnectedness of the physiological, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual aspects of the self. Many times, victims of human trafficking feel judged by health care and service providers, which adds to their trauma and leads to mistrust and a lack of willingness to reveal personal information about their lifestyle. However, tailored therapy to their specific needs is built on a framework of trauma-informed care. Such care will be focused on the individual and is delivered in a manner that acknowledges how past traumas impact current health behaviors and healthcare decisions.

As Reeves (2015) observed, a defining characteristic of the trafficked individual's experience is a profound lack of autonomy over their body because of the traumatic experiences. When providing services to trafficking survivors, it is essential to address the power imbalance inherent in the service-provider-survivor relationship to prevent retraumatization. Moreover, effective care must be grounded in the understanding that unhealed traumatic experiences can manifest as physiological reactions triggered by seemingly unrelated stimuli.

Given the trauma experienced by human trafficking victims, it is essential to provide comprehensive care that addresses their mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. A holistic approach requires collaboration among various entities to offer tailored support. Exploring the experiences of mental health professionals as they work with holistic practices provides valuable insights into the importance of this collaborative approach in providing comprehensive care to survivors of human trafficking.

Characteristics of Emergency Shelters

Emergency shelters are temporary living facilities established to provide short-term housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. Studies have shown that girls are the most vulnerable population who utilize these facilities. According to Castaños-Cervantes et al. (2018), girls are more likely to experience homelessness, even when living with their families. These girls are at risk of being abandoned or expelled from their homes due to unstable situations such as abuse, neglect, poverty, familial dysfunction, unfavorable social environments, growing up in challenging family environments, communities plagued by social problems, and economically disadvantaged areas with limited opportunities. Because of their circumstances, many of these girls exhibit low self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation skills, making it difficult for them to adapt to and cope with environmental stressors.

Castaños-Cervantes et al.'s (2018) research aimed to identify psychosocial differences among sheltered, unsheltered, or emergency-sheltered homeless girls and those at risk of homelessness. The study revealed that homeless girls experienced a high prevalence of mental health issues, with 82.23% exhibiting anxiety symptoms, 64.45%

exhibiting depression symptoms, and 11.12% lacking basic assertiveness skills. Additionally, 13.34% lacked emotion regulation skills, and 82.22% employed dysfunctional emotional regulation strategies. These findings feature the significant impact of traumatic experiences on a vulnerable population and underline the urgent need for trauma-centered interventions. Shelters offer temporary safety and support for victims of traumatic experiences such as violence or exploitation. They provide a short-term refuge, allowing vulnerable individuals to escape dangerous situations. Shelters are not intended for long-term stays, but they serve as a vital safety net for vulnerable populations.

Muftić and Fansher (2019) wrote that the capacity of emergency shelters in Bosnia-Herzegovina has an average of 21 beds available, with an average minimum stay of 3 weeks and an average maximum stay of roughly 7 months. Most shelters offer allowances for extensions of stay for survivors, with qualitative responses underscoring that clients could stay “as long as needed” or “as long as necessary.” The dilemma that shelters face is expected because these safe places are always full. This capacity shortage can lead to alternative lodging options, including setting up additional beds within the shelter, contacting the next closest shelter in the area, a crisis center, or renting apartments through an agency. A small number of shelters place the responsibility for finding alternative lodging for survivors at the Center for Social Work, demonstrating the impact of organizations approaching this dilemma through partnerships and alliances with like-minded entities.

Danis et al. (2019) wrote that emergency shelters for human trafficking survivors can be challenging. There are critical bed shortages for designated shelter spaces for these survivors, which provide several systemic and technological barriers to securing appropriate and safe housing. Additionally, the process can be time-consuming and frustrating for agencies with residential facilities at full capacity. To locate a proper emergency shelter, advocates and other agency staff must contact multiple agencies until a bed is identified and secured. The information of the survivors will be kept to establish service eligibility until a placement match can be secured. These authors have looked at other research that has identified a pressing need for additional emergency housing for human trafficking survivors, making it impossible to determine the exact number of beds needed for survivors per night. The number of available beds per night nationwide falls significantly short, where only 529 beds are exclusively designated for human trafficking survivors, and the other 1,115 beds are available at organizations that support other population groups in need, thus limiting the actual number of beds available to human trafficking survivors. Shelter specific to human trafficking survivors is scarce to nonexistent despite a high level of need. This research underscores the urgent need for advocates to identify and support emergency shelters that are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of human trafficking survivors.

According to Danis et al. (2019), agencies from the New Jersey area that already provide residential shelter services were recruited to participate in the project. Many of these agencies primarily focused on serving domestic and sexual violence survivors; they were the most likely organizations to expand their services to house and assist human

trafficking survivors. The data from this study were relevant to the period from May 7, 2015, to August 9, 2016, during which 78 requests for emergency shelter were sent out through the Safe Shelter Collaborative. Of the 78, 40 were domestic violence survivors, 34 were sex trafficking survivors, and three were labor trafficking survivors. Most requests came from the New Jersey region (70%, $n = 55$), followed by North Texas (17%, $n = 13$), and the San Francisco Bay Area (13%, $n = 10$).

The demographic information from the study revealed that survivors needing emergency shelter were most often women (91%), 25 years of age or older (54%), who were escaping domestic violence (51%). This description applies to the individuals assisted in the San Francisco Bay Area and North Texas. The New Jersey survivors were different; survivors in New Jersey were female (93%) but younger, as 53% were between the ages of 18-24, and 60% of New Jersey requests were for survivors of sex trafficking. The implications revealed a problem with housing victims of human trafficking and the agency's ability to help survivors of human trafficking. It identified the transformation of finding emergency beds into a more efficient and time-saving process. Secondly, it addressed the issue of supporting the collaboration of agencies to find shelter. Thirdly, most often cited, it relates to the expansion of skills and knowledge about human trafficking.

Danis et al.'s (2019) research highlighted the pivotal role of emergency shelters in the collaborative network. By utilizing a technological tool to link survivors with safe housing, these shelters can significantly enhance the reach and efficacy of residential shelter services for human trafficking victims. This is crucial for broadening the scope of

agencies providing services to survivors and ensuring access to services that exceed the capabilities of emergency shelters.

Locating emergency shelters for human trafficking survivors can be challenging. Advocates often spend considerable time contacting multiple agencies to find suitable placements for their clients. Additionally, there is a critical shortage of designated shelter beds for these survivors. This process can be time-consuming and frustrating for both agencies, as residential facilities are at capacity and nonresidential organizations advocate for emergency shelters. The number of available beds per night nationwide falls far short of the need. While many of these agencies primarily focus on serving domestic and sexual violence survivors, there is growing hope that organizations will expand their services to house and assist human trafficking survivors as well. This approach can be facilitated through interagency collaboration.

Interagency Collaboration

Highlighting the key benefits of interagency collaboration is crucial in fighting human trafficking. When organizations work together, their combined efforts become vital for providing comprehensive support and healing for survivors. These partnerships are essential in closing important service gaps that hinder prevention, intervention, and victim protection, ultimately limiting survivors' ability to become self-sufficient. Keep in mind, there are some perceptual barriers to interagency collaboration.

According to the United States Department of Justice, interagency collaboration enables individuals working to combat human trafficking to identify a joint mission, set goals, and establish a formalized infrastructure and strategic framework to respond

effectively to victims' needs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). This collaborative approach ensures that efforts are coordinated, resources are efficiently utilized, and comprehensive support services are provided to trafficking survivors. Strong partnerships can be foundational to victims' reintegration into society.

Erakovich and Anderson (2013) proclaimed that organizational management has undergone significant changes, as public and private sector managers collaborate in cross-sector networks to address problems that individual organizations cannot resolve quickly. The authors have asserted that as organizational leaders facilitate and negotiate with public, private, and nonprofit organizations and individuals, they can form cross-sector networks that solve problems. Past administrative cultures were oriented towards procedures rather than towards clients, or self-serving results rather than citizen- or customer-serving behavior. For the most part, collaboration fosters an approach to leveraging partnerships, thereby enhancing the capacity of organizations. This shift requires management to adjust their rationality and reasoning as it maintains and improves organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Ampah and Kandilige (2023) argued that multiagency collaboration is essential to combat the complexities of geographical uncertainties, diverse victim populations, and exploitation networks. This collaboration can range from simple knowledge sharing to full integration across organizational boundaries, resources, capacity, responsibility, and geographical space. A collaborative approach aims to develop a contingency that can highlight conditions under which collaboration will be more effective than tackling situations as a single agency.

Benefits of Interagency Collaboration

Effective interagency collaboration offers several advantages. As Patel et al. (2011) highlighted, benefits can vary based on the specific organizations involved but generally include increased meaningful referrals, enhanced service delivery through shared expertise, reduced costs through the sharing of best practices, improved decision-making through shared insights and knowledge, fostering innovation through idea-sharing, and an improved ability to pursue collective goals. Advantages are vital assets for partners tackling complex issues such as human trafficking.

Jones and Lutze (2016) noted that interagency collaboration is an effective means for professionals combating human trafficking to share their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. This mutual learning serves to foster a deeper understanding of the issue, gain perspectives on victims' ordeals, explore unique ideas that can be implemented for victims' reclamation, and employ a strategic roadmap for a comprehensive organizational context that leads to a collaborative partnership. In this context, interagency collaboration is a crucial framework for combating human trafficking and all its complexities.

Furthermore, Le et al. (2018) found that collaboration between antitrafficking agencies yields significantly better results than when a single organization works in isolation. Effective collaboration is crucial for building robust support systems for human trafficking victims. Partnerships enhance outcomes and provide essential resources for sustainable recovery. Fostering strong and productive collaborations is a shared goal for all involved.

Previous studies have painted the diverse needs of human trafficking victims and survivors, including housing, food, medical care, mental health services, advocacy, legal assistance, transportation, outreach, education, employment, and childcare. Agencies that are dedicated to serving trafficking victims have made significant efforts, but they often struggle to meet the full range of needs within their existing capacities. A more effective approach is interagency collaboration, as it can achieve goals and objectives that exceed the capacity of any individual organization. Collaboration among organizations is beneficial for integrating service provision, building organizational capacity, and addressing collective problems (Sieppert, 2011).

Barriers to Interagency Collaboration

Jones (2023) wrote that to address human trafficking effectively, a comprehensive, collaborative approach between agencies is imperative for providing human trafficking victims with needed services and the prosecution of offenders for their crimes. The study explored the perceptual benefits and barriers to collaboration. It sought to fill the research gap by acknowledging the benefits of interagency collaborative practice in anti-human trafficking efforts, thereby leading to more successful collaborative outcomes. This study examined two key theories: professionals' perceptions of the benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration, and their perceptions of the underlying benefits and obstacles to such collaboration through the lens of human trafficking and organizational theory.

Jones's (2023) study recognized that practical anti-human trafficking efforts necessitate an interagency collaborative approach to address the crime effectively.

However, the study identified several barriers to this collaboration, including uncertainty about the collaboration process. Collaborative uncertainty arises from unclear purposes, processes, and outcomes of joint efforts, hindering the development of positive relationships.

The study also identified agency incongruence—fundamental differences between agencies—as a key obstacle to collaboration. This is often evident in the differing approaches to complex issues, such as human trafficking, where core goals may not align with those of another organization, thereby preventing necessary agreement for successful partnerships. This can lead to a hostile collaborative climate and even power struggles between agencies.

Lastly, the study identified an unfavorable collaborative environment as a significant barrier to progress. This type of environment is characterized by a hostile climate and a lack of trust stemming from organizational dynamics or past negative experiences, which actively hinders support for interagency collaboration. Such conditions can block the crucial decision-making needed for effective partnerships.

Despite these identified barriers, there remains a lack of empirical research on effective interagency collaboration in anti-human trafficking efforts. Understanding this topic can inform interagency collaborative practices, potentially leading to more successful outcomes. This study contributes to current human trafficking research by identifying the underlying benefits of anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. Research suggests that the expected benefits and barriers to interagency cooperation

typically remain stable. However, this research also indicates that extreme events can significantly alter traditional interagency collaborative approaches.

Bryson et al. (2006) asserted that collaboration exists on a continuum in addressing public challenges. While some organizations may operate privately, others fully integrate to form new partnerships. Collaboration's effectiveness is crucial to identifying and addressing service gaps. Despite its potential benefits, collaboration has challenges that hinder comprehensive efforts to find solutions to complex issues.

Summary

Human trafficking is a critical criminological and sociological concern, involving the exploitation of vulnerable populations through mechanisms of force, fraud, or coercion. Realistic evidence of human trafficking is documented across international, federal, and state contexts, primarily in the forms of labor and sex trafficking. Recognized as one of the most pervasive and illicitly profitable forms of transnational crime, human trafficking persists as an entrenched social problem, despite legislative, policy, and enforcement efforts aimed at its eradication. Human trafficking is a social problem that continues to flourish.

The implementation of the interagency collaboration model has the potential to tackle this multifaceted problem effectively. When agencies cooperate, they foster a deeper understanding of the issue's complexities among professionals, allowing them to exchange valuable insights and develop more effective strategies. This collaboration also enables them to pool financial and human resources, which significantly reduces costs and maximizes their collective impact, particularly benefiting organizations with limited

budgets. Ultimately, a unified mission empowers agencies to work towards measurable objectives, providing higher-quality services to survivors and significantly enhancing their quality of life. These collective benefits underscore the importance of interagency collaboration for effective implementation.

Despite these clear advantages, interagency collaboration is not without its issues. Challenges like collaboration uncertainty, incongruence between agencies, and unfavorable organizational environments can impede progress. Overcoming these obstacles is vital to ensuring victims receive the comprehensive support they desperately need. Organizations are increasingly recognizing that failing to establish such partnerships represents a critical missed opportunity in the ongoing fight against human trafficking. Section 3 provides details on the generic qualitative inquiry approach employed in this study. I discussed the data collection methods and analysis strategies I used to uncover valuable insights.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

According to the literature, failing to develop strong partnerships among organizations that regularly interact with victims of human trafficking can potentially represent a significant gap in their collective responsibility. Developing alliances with other entities can be a crucial component for long-term supportive systems that are vital for survivors' healing and successful reintegration. Establishing an alliance has the potential to meaningfully impact victims' recovery and establish autonomy in their lives.

For the most part, collaboration can accelerate victims' progress, eliminating roadblocks to their efforts to regain control over their lives. This generic qualitative inquiry approach aims to demonstrate the challenges faced by a single agency in addressing complex social issues and highlights the effectiveness of interagency partnerships. Interagency collaboration, as a strategic model, can become a foundation for alliances that help lead the path to victims' recovery. This existing research underscores how collaboration can more effectively achieve ultimate objectives by highlighting the importance of networking, shared goals, and mutual commitments. Bryson et al. (2006) wrote that collaboration is increasingly necessary and desirable for addressing many of society's most complex public challenges.

Practice-Focused Research Question and Research Design

This professional administrative study explored the potential benefits and challenges of interagency collaboration in addressing complex social issues, such as human trafficking. By examining the factors that influence the formation of partnerships

and the conditions that foster successful collaboration, this research can potentially provide practical guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and other organizations in the study seeking to enhance interagency cooperation. The RQ: How can the education system, law enforcement, public health agencies, and community-based organizations effectively assess both the barriers and benefits of interagency collaboration as a strategic approach to create a more seamless and comprehensive support network for survivors of human trafficking?

The conceptual framework of interagency collaboration is essential. The potential effectiveness of implementing a strategy focused on interagency collaboration is practical and crucial in addressing complex social issues such as human trafficking. No single agency can manage this alone. Strategic collaboration can bridge key service gaps and enhance the capacity to provide long-term support to survivors, ensuring ongoing empowerment and an improved quality of life. I chose a generic qualitative approach for my research design to explore the central question relevant to this professional administrative study. This approach offers a broad perspective of different organizations and identifies existing service gaps for victims of human trafficking.

McLeod (2001) suggested that generic qualitative inquiry is a more straightforward approach to qualitative research, particularly suitable for student dissertations. While a generic qualitative inquiry offers flexibility and does not demand expertise in a specific qualitative method, it is not without its complexities. Kennedy (2016) characterized the generic qualitative inquiry as a research approach that centers on participants' subjective interpretations of their experiences, focusing on external factors.

Generic qualitative inquiry is often considered a more accessible method for novice researchers, offering a straightforward approach to qualitative research.

Patton (1990) described generic qualitative inquiry as an approach that focuses on understanding and describing people's experiences and perspectives. This approach aims to delve into phenomena, processes, or worldviews without a predetermined theoretical framework or rigid methodological guidelines. Bellamy et al. (2015) argued that the research question should guide the selection of generic qualitative inquiry research methods. This approach allows researchers to draw upon various methodologies, tailoring their research design to their epistemological stance and disciplinary context. However, researchers must thoroughly understand the methodologies they employ and be able to justify their choices. Additionally, researchers must carefully consider ethical implications, resource requirements, time constraints, and potential logistical challenges throughout the study.

Percy et al. (2015) expanded their concept of generic qualitative inquiry, focusing on the subjective content of participants' thoughts and experiences. This approach is particularly suitable when researchers are more interested in the actual external content of participants' questions, opinions, life experiences, and reflections rather than their cognitive processes' internal organization and structure. Percy et al. (2015) explained that generic qualitative inquiry delves into people's subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences of the external world, such as those related to interagency collaboration. Given this study's focus on interagency collaboration, participants will be

asked semistructured, open-ended interview questions to describe their perspectives on interagency collaboration.

A generic qualitative inquiry approach provided a suitable framework, focusing on specific organizations and emphasizing data collection through interviews. By examining patterns, relationships, and causal explanations, the aim was to improve the effectiveness of interagency collaboration as a strategy for fighting human trafficking and supporting survivors. To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, I addressed key aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which are essential components of qualitative research.

Practice-focused interview questions contributed to my analysis of how interagency collaboration enhances an organization's ability to deliver comprehensive support and critical services to victims of human trafficking. The interview questions explored

- the current role of interagency collaboration in the organization's approach to supporting victims,
- challenges encountered when collaborating with other agencies,
- the impact of collaboration on agencies' ability to support victims,
- successful interagency partnerships that have enhanced the organization's delivery service,
- how interagency collaboration can be strengthened to ensure victims receive holistic support across different sectors,

- necessary resources or tools for improving collaborative efforts in addressing human trafficking,
- the role of leadership in fostering effective collaboration between human trafficking organizations and other service providers, and
- key outcomes organizations hope to achieve through enhanced interagency collaboration regarding victim support and recovery.

Roles of the Researcher and Client Organizations

Human trafficking is a prevalent and complex issue that intersects with both criminal justice and public health concerns. As a form of modern-day slavery, human trafficking undercuts the fabric of human rights and remains harmful to societal norms. The historical legacy of slavery in the United States, including the experiences of those enslaved through human trafficking, represents a grave violation of human rights. These ordeals significantly hindered survivors' ability to reclaim their autonomy. Leach (2022) asserted that depriving an individual of their autonomy and freedom by forcing them into involuntary slavery is arguably the most destructive human rights violation one can commit. Human trafficking and “modern slavery” have been used interchangeably to refer to various forms of human exploitation (Leach, 2022, p. 234). Slavery has been a global problem since the beginning of time. However, human trafficking garnered attention and concern in the 1990s (Leach,2022).

My interest in this topic originated from my previous work in public health in Texas, where the issue of human trafficking began to have a significant impact on Texas communities. I sought to address the specific health needs of survivors by collaborating

with a local human trafficking agency to provide education and testing for sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Unfortunately, this initiative was unable to proceed due to a change in my professional role within the Department of State Health Services.

To investigate interagency collaboration on human trafficking and supportive services for victims, I leveraged existing professional networks to initiate conversations with professionals across relevant organizations despite having no prior internal connections. Individuals within the education system, law enforcement, public health, and supportive services organizations were approached to share their perspectives on current collaborative successes and areas for improvement. The information gathered will bring nuance to what is working well and help improve areas that are not working in collaboration efforts.

Initial contact was established through preexisting professional connections. Interested individuals subsequently received recruitment flyers via email (see Appendix A). Another email message with an official invitation to participate in the study through virtual meetings was distributed (see Appendix B). Consistent email communication was maintained with 17 potential participants. The threshold was to have a minimum of 10 individuals willing to support this professional administrative study and collaborate on this critical issue.

I maintained no preexisting personal relationships with participants within these organizations, a factor that could potentially present limitations, challenges, or barriers to this research. My study involved interactions with mid- and senior-level staff. I acknowledged the potential limitations, challenges, and biases associated with pursuing

this research. Establishing these boundaries was essential because rapport and confidentiality were vital for effective participation. I prioritized my research to ensure that ethical considerations were addressed and to prevent unauthorized access to sensitive data, including case files and client records. This approach was necessary to address legal and ethical challenges, including obtaining informed consent and implementing strong data protection measures.

By focusing on a specific research question and using a qualitative approach, I gathered subjective insights into human trafficking and interagency collaboration through a set of semistructured questions. This method enabled a thorough analysis of individual viewpoints without risking confidentiality. Participants' privacy was of the highest importance to their involvement.

The concerns about potential biases mainly focus on those related to criminalization. Used as a tool to fight human trafficking and sexual exploitation, criminalization can retraumatize victims. It is crucial to acknowledge its limits. Forcing victims to take part in the legal process as witnesses can be very stressful and overwhelming. Reexposing them to their traffickers often triggers the trauma they experienced during trafficking. Fear of retaliation from traffickers or their associates can also be a significant obstacle to cooperation.

Additionally, this approach has resulted in stigmatizing and punishing victims. In many legal systems, victims of trafficking have been arrested or prosecuted for crimes they committed while under duress, such as drug offenses or prostitution. This only adds to their trauma. It also makes it harder for them to access social services, find stable

housing, or secure employment. These adverse effects, especially for victims, create a cycle of victimization and criminalization that can be difficult to break.

Lennon (2020) described human trafficking as a pervasive crisis within the United States, highlighting the inadequacy of current laws and policies in addressing the evolving nature of this complex issue and the sex work industry. The United States has primarily focused on reducing trafficking through stricter penalties for offenders, as evidenced by clear legal definitions and mandatory minimum sentences. This approach has led to the prosecution of individual traffickers, but it is insufficient to combat this multifaceted and elusive problem.

Erikson and Larsson (2022) discussed how many countries are adopting the Swedish model. It criminalizes buying sex, and several nations have implemented this approach to tackle both prostitution and trafficking. However, its effectiveness and impact on victims remain a topic of ongoing debate, which can lead to negative legal consequences for victims. To reduce these harmful legal outcomes for victims, laws should focus on protecting them rather than punishing them for their forced servitude.

A shift away from criminalization is essential for effective human trafficking prevention and response. Existing research has suggested that new strategies should be identified that emphasize the importance of policymakers, legal systems, and practitioners working together to protect victims. This includes having more comprehensive strategies, offering survivors viable alternatives, and supporting their reintegration into society.

My research was drawn from organizations from diverse public sectors, including the education system, law enforcement, public health, and community-based organizations. They all offered insight and perspectives on what can be beneficial for specialized long-term assistance for those who have escaped human trafficking or sexual exploitation. These organizations recognize the unique needs of each survivor and the importance of delivering personalized support programs that encompass trauma-informed counseling, comprehensive life skills training, and individualized care plans.

Organizations have acknowledged that the absence of comprehensive collaboration creates a significant obstacle to survivors of human trafficking reclaiming their lives. Without cohesive support networks, the journey toward healing and long-term recovery is often delayed and filled with obstacles. These entities recognize that critical gaps in their capacity to deliver sustained and multifaceted assistance to survivors hinder their efforts. Therefore, they recognize that actively building strategic partnerships is not just advantageous but essential. This ensures the ongoing delivery of vital services beyond short-term efforts. Ultimately, effective partnerships can help survivors rebuild their futures with dignity and independence.

Methodology

I used a generic qualitative approach to examine the commitment of organizational leaders in implementing an interagency collaboration approach to combat human trafficking and provide long-term support services for victims. I aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context, challenges, and opportunities of interagency

collaboration by conducting in-depth, semistructured interviews with key stakeholders involved in collaborative efforts.

The interview information could highlight the need for stronger partnerships and outline specific strategies for improving collaboration among education, law enforcement, public health, and community organizations. Additionally, it can enhance sustainability and effectively fight human trafficking. Finally, their responses may reveal primary motivations for interagency collaboration in fighting human trafficking and supporting victims.

The information obtained highlights how historical factors and current trends have shaped the development of interagency efforts to combat human trafficking and provide long-term support for victims within the organization. This generic qualitative approach offers some context about significant challenges that hinder effective interagency collaboration in tackling human trafficking and victim support. These challenges can be addressed and reduced through improved communication, resource sharing, and coordination.

Potential benefits and opportunities can be gained through stronger interagency collaboration. The responses from participants revealed their true beliefs and opinions about effective interagency collaboration, the extent to which such collaboration has contributed to the successful identification, rescue, and support of human trafficking victims, how it has impacted the overall effectiveness of victim support services, and specific strategies that have been successful in fostering collaboration and achieving positive results.

The interviews followed a flexible protocol that included open-ended questions and follow-up probes to explore emerging themes and insights. The collected data was analyzed using deductive and thematic methods. This process involved identifying, coding, and categorizing key themes and patterns within the interview transcripts. The analysis aimed to understand the factors that facilitate or hinder effective interagency collaboration and to identify best practices and recommendations for improvement. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current interagency efforts in combating human trafficking and supporting victims. By emphasizing the importance of partnerships and pinpointing specific strategies for enhancement, the goal is to contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable approaches to addressing this complex issue. The results could potentially inform policy and practice changes across organizations.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment and Sample Size

I commenced data collection after I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB; approval no. 04-01-25-1184585). This approval encompassed all study materials, including the client organization agreement letter, informed consent forms, email invitation script, and semistructured interview questions. This review process served as a critical prerequisite, ensuring full ethical compliance and formally authorizing the initiation of data collection.

Initially, the research design focused on examining a client organization's efforts to establish alliances with transitional agencies, such as emergency shelters, in Texas and

Louisiana. However, after more than a year of collaboration, substantial recruitment challenges emerged just as data collection was set to begin. The executive director became unresponsive, missed scheduled meetings, and delayed correspondence.

Ultimately, the executive director expressed concerns about staff participation, citing a lack of experience in interagency collaboration and unfamiliarity with the organization's referral processes, which revealed a misunderstanding of the research scope.

Simultaneously, my recruitment efforts targeting emergency shelters in North Texas and Louisiana were unsuccessful. Despite extensive outreach to more than 30 shelters via email, telephone, and in-person visits, no organizations agreed to participate. Responses ranged from outright refusals to reluctance in scheduling follow-up meetings or a complete cessation of communication.

Given the significant recruitment barriers with both the client organization and emergency shelters, and after an exploratory assessment, this initial line of inquiry was discontinued following a discussion of these challenges with my committee chair. He quickly consulted with Walden staff, who, after speaking with the Program Director and Walden University staff, offered crucial guidance on the next steps. A Request for Change in Procedure was submitted to the IRB and approved, enabling the immediate implementation of a revised study plan while maintaining the original approval number and expiration date.

Following this pivot, the study's focus shifted to conducting interviews with representatives from public sector organizations, including those in education, law enforcement, public health, and community-based organizations. My background in

public health enabled me to leverage established relationships in these sectors, facilitating easier access to contact information and effective communication for recruitment purposes. My new approach was to gather a broader range of perspectives from different entities on interagency collaboration as a best-practice strategy for building alliances to fight human trafficking and improve services for victims. Recruitment for the revised study began in late April, pending IRB approval for the procedural change.

Following the procedural change and revised recruitment strategy, I focused on exploring the perspectives, barriers, and experiences of stakeholders from diverse public sectors and community-based organizations. The aim was to identify best practices, strategies, and opportunities for strengthening interagency collaboration to improve services for victims of human trafficking. Building on the connections established through my professional network, I engaged participants whose roles positioned them to provide informed insight into collaborative efforts. I also examined the challenges and motivations that influence the development and sustainability of such efforts, as well as the factors that facilitate adequate support for survivors. Data was collected through interviews with mid- and senior-level stakeholders, enabling a nuanced understanding of organizational practices, interagency dynamics, and opportunities for improvement.

The interviews offered valuable insights into organizational practices and strategies. I invited participants to join this voluntary research study. I coordinated recruitment efforts by using flyers to promote organizational participation (see Appendix A). My recruitment efforts resulted in 11 participants signing up willingly, with interviews scheduled at their convenience. The participant sample included two

individuals from the education system, one from law enforcement, four from public health, and four from community-based organizations. An official invitation to participate via virtual meetings was distributed for scheduling interviews (see Appendix B). Participants received a consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks.

All participants were allowed the opportunity to ask questions before and after signing the consent form. To protect confidentiality, participants' names were de-identified and replaced with their participant numbers in all study materials. The participants responded to 10 semistructured, open-ended questions, which helped identify themes and insights (see Appendix C).

Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 min and were conducted via the Zoom virtual conferencing platform for participants' convenience. Follow-up probes were useful during these interviews because they allowed for a deeper understanding and meaningful insight into their perspective on the topics of human trafficking and interagency collaboration. All interviews were audio recorded on Zoom and then transcribed. Recordings were uploaded to the MAXQDA server after transcription and analyzed for coding and emerging themes from the interviews; they were then deleted from the conferencing platform.

Data Collection Procedure

I used open-ended questions to gather detailed, personalized responses that inform strategies to combat human trafficking, shape public policy, and improve service delivery. All potential participants were contacted via email to schedule interviews. This

process was both tedious and time-consuming. Although I reached out to 17 individuals, response times varied. Some participants responded quickly, and their interviews were scheduled based on their availability. Others delayed responding, prompting me to send follow-up emails after 2 days.

Although some participants did not respond to my email communications, ongoing contact with others allowed the successful scheduling of additional interviews. The interviews were on hold until I received the IRB's approval for the submitted change of procedure request. Ultimately, 11 participants scheduled interviews. Each was given a voluntary informed consent form that explained the purpose, outlined participation expectations, and clarified the potential benefits and ethical considerations of the research.

To gain a comprehensive assessment of the interagency collaboration process in providing long-term services to survivors of sexual exploitation, a generic qualitative approach was used for data analysis to address human trafficking and inform best practices for future policies and strengthen support for victims. The insight could inform the formation of collaborative partnerships, identify barriers to effective collaboration, and inform strategies for overcoming challenges. The outcomes and impact will guide the consequences of interagency collaboration on the provision of supportive services and the long-term well-being of survivors.

By examining key areas, I wanted to identify best practices and provide evidence-based recommendations to enhance interagency collaboration and improve the effectiveness of services for human trafficking survivors. Specifically, the inquiry

included factors influencing the formation of collaborative partnerships, barriers to effective collaboration, strategies for overcoming challenges, and recommendations for strengthening interagency cooperation. The information highlights the positive impact of interagency collaboration as a practical approach for offering meaningful support to survivors of human trafficking, along with the services necessary for the reclamation of their lives.

By employing a generic qualitative approach, this research design facilitated the exploration of how collaboration offers valuable insights into best practices, policy recommendations, and strategies for enhancing support for survivors. Ultimately, the objective is to inform evidence-based approaches that address the complex needs of this vulnerable population and promote effective collaboration among service providers. Furthermore, through interviews with collaborating organizations, I elucidated the benefits of interagency collaboration as an intervention in providing long-term services to women affected by human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Strategy for Data Analysis

The interviews with key stakeholders in these organizations were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach utilizing MAXQDA. This qualitative analysis software used the interviewees' transcripts to identify key themes related to interagency collaboration and barriers to effective collaboration. The MAXQDA analysis allows for systematic identification, coding, and categorization of key themes and patterns within the interview transcripts. The coding process involved assigning codes to relevant text segments that reflected the participants' experiences, perspectives, and understandings. The coding

process involved grouping data into categories and identifying themes that emerged from the analysis. A comprehensive analysis of the research questions examined the frequency, intensity, and relationships between themes, providing a real-time perspective of the participants' experiences and contributing to a deeper understanding of interagency collaboration.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The credibility of the thematic tool used to collect data about interagency collaboration is a critical factor in the trustworthiness of the research. Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence a researcher has in their sources and data collection methods. My study will establish credibility or internal validity by utilizing multiple data sources, including interviews, peer reviews, and statistics from governmental and law enforcement agencies. Prolonged engagement with participants will deepen their understanding and broaden their perspectives. Member checks were conducted to validate findings with participants, ensuring accuracy and relevance.

Erdmann and Potthoff (2023) proposed five criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research: trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Member checking is a valuable technique for enhancing the credibility of research findings. This process involves sharing the researchers' interpretations and findings with the participants, allowing them to verify the accuracy and completeness of the information and provide additional insights or corrections.

The participants in this study received their transcripts via email and had 1 week to review them. A 7-day review period was offered to verify the accuracy and completeness of the participants' responses and to provide any necessary clarifications. Once this timeframe had elapsed, all transcripts were considered an accurate and complete reflection of their experiences with interagency collaboration as an approach for combating human trafficking and enhancing supportive care services for victims.

For external validity, the findings can serve as a foundation for future studies, offering enough evidence for transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability to the extent to which findings can be applied to other situations. While this research has demonstrated credibility and transferability, it is essential to acknowledge that the ultimate decision regarding the findings rests with the organizations that can utilize them to combat human trafficking.

Ethical Procedures

Addressing ethical issues was an integral part of the research process and was relevant in discussions concerning research methodology. Burkholder et al. (2020) noted that the Nuremberg Code's influence on ethics codes and regulations as a tool for research is necessary, as it outlines conditions to protect research participants through voluntary informed consent, avoidance of harm, risk assessment, the right to withdraw, and the researcher's responsibility to terminate. I required approval from Walden University's IRB before beginning participant recruitment and data collection, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in research to minimize harm or risk to participants.

Ethical procedures are essential not only to prevent deception or the dissemination of misleading information but also to ensure the research's purpose is justified and that participants' rights and welfare are protected. Maintaining confidentiality was a central component. All data will be stored securely on an encrypted storage device and accessed only by authorized personnel. In alignment with Walden University's IRB guidelines and ethics standards, data will be retained for 5 years before being securely destroyed. Electronic files will be encrypted and permanently deleted to prevent unauthorized recovery. At the same time, all paper-based notes will be destroyed via cross-cut shredding to ensure they cannot be reconstructed.

Summary

I employed a generic qualitative approach, using semistructured interviews with key stakeholders, to explore the context, challenges, and beneficial opportunities of interagency collaboration in human trafficking. The detailed questions asked of participants provided valuable insights into the importance of interagency cooperation. Secondary data from peer-reviewed literature, as well as government and law enforcement sources, were analyzed to support the findings. To analyze the data, I used MAXQDA software. I identified relevant text segments that reflected the participants' experiences, perspectives, and understandings of the topic. The thematic analysis assessed frequency, intensity, and connections among key themes related to interagency collaboration.

The study's credibility was strengthened using a reliable thematic tool and adherence to ethical practices, which emphasized the well-being of the vulnerable

population involved. The findings from this research could help deepen the understanding of interagency collaboration. As a practical approach, interagency collaboration is achievable in the fight against human trafficking and enhances victim services and prevention strategies.

All interviews with key stakeholders were conducted to gather qualitative data, complemented by an analysis of secondary data from peer-reviewed literature, government reports, and law enforcement records. The interview data was analyzed using MAXQDA to extract valuable insights. Section 4 presents the key findings of this analysis and provides actionable recommendations to empower organizations to effectively leverage interagency collaboration.

Section 4: Results and Recommendations

Introduction

Partnerships are essential for effectively combating human trafficking and ensuring that survivors receive comprehensive and high-quality support services. Establishing connections is crucial, as it facilitates a holistic approach that addresses the diverse needs of survivors and empowers them to reclaim their autonomy. This study aims to gain insight into interagency collaboration as a best-practice strategy for building alliances to address human trafficking and elevating victims' services for the sustainability of a quality life.

Organizations have identified a significant gap in services for victims of human trafficking. The lack of specialized resources and support systems needed for long-term recovery and rehabilitation can hinder their healing and independence, ultimately affecting their quality of life. This includes addressing trauma, offering mental health care, and supporting reintegration into society. Organizations recognize that collaboration is crucial in bridging these gaps. Instead of weakening an organization's effectiveness, partnerships can help remove obstacles to service delivery, significantly enhancing the quality of care for survivors.

Building collaborative partnerships may become essential for overcoming challenges. As strong relationships are forged, organizational leaders can leverage collective expertise and resources to provide comprehensive and practical support to victims of sex trafficking. Having the capacity to build through collaboration is evolutionary and creates new value within each organization.

Organizational leaders can enhance existing services through active collaboration. This can include offering specialized services, sharing expertise and resources, and building a collaborative network among public sector entities, service providers, and other stakeholders. Collaboration can serve as a solution to help ensure a seamless and effective continuum of care for survivors. As a best practice, interagency collaboration has the potential to enhance the capacity of organizations serving victims of human trafficking to deliver comprehensive services more efficiently and establish effective alliances. The findings of my study have illustrated the current state of interagency collaboration, provided recommendations for improving interagency collaboration practices, and established a framework for developing and implementing collaboration action plans. Section 4 outlines the process for data collection, data analysis, findings, deliverables, recommendations, evidence of trustworthiness, study strengths, limitations, and a summary.

Data Collection

Data collection commenced following approval from the IRB under Approval No. 04-01-25-1184585. This approval covered all study materials, including the client organization agreement letter, informed consent forms, email invitation script, and semistructured interview questions. However, after more than a year of collaboration with a client agency, substantial recruitment challenges emerged just as data collection was set to begin. The executive director became unresponsive, missed scheduled meetings, and delayed correspondence, which hindered progress. Efforts to recruit emergency shelters in North Texas and Louisiana met similar difficulties. Despite

outreach to more than 30 shelters via email, telephone, and in-person visits, no organization agreed to participate. Responses included outright refusals, reluctance to schedule follow-up meetings, or a complete cessation of communication.

Due to these barriers, I consulted my committee chair, who advised me to revise the study after discussing it with the program director and Walden University staff. A pivotal shift in recruitment strategy marked a turning point in my research progression. I improved recruitment by changing my approach from cold outreach to leveraging my professional network. This proved crucial in overcoming my initial recruitment challenges, allowing me to successfully recruit interviewees. After submitting the request for change in procedure to the IRB, I was permitted to immediately implement the new plan using the original approval number and expiration date.

I reached out to 17 people through my professional network and successfully scheduled interviews with 11 of them. Although the process was time-consuming, as I had to send follow-up emails after 2 days to those who did not respond initially, using established professional relationships ultimately helped me meet the participant's goal and progress with the study. The participants in the educational system included two individuals, one from law enforcement, four from public health, and four from community-based organizations.

Each participant was provided with a voluntary informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, participation expectations, and ethical considerations. Open-ended interviews were conducted to elicit in-depth perspectives on interagency collaboration as a best-practice strategy for fostering alliances to combat human trafficking and improve

services for victims. Each participant shared their perspective during a 30–45-min interview conducted via Zoom.

I designed the interview questions to identify emerging themes and insights, with follow-up probes used as necessary to deepen the discussion. All interviews were audio recorded through the Zoom platform and then transcribed. Participants had 1 week to review their interview transcripts and provide feedback on their accuracy and completeness. No transcripts were returned by participants for correction or clarification; all transcripts were considered accurate and comprehensive representations of the participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

The study's context was detailed through interviews with participants from the education, law enforcement, public health, and supportive services sectors. The interviews aimed to gather their perspectives on the value and complexities of interagency collaboration to provide comprehensive support to human trafficking survivors. The primary focus was on how collaboration contributes to the long-term well-being and quality of life for survivors beyond their trafficking experience. MAXQDA was used to code and analyze these transcribed interviews for thematic analysis. The analysis identified six key themes that highlight important areas for improving the effectiveness of interagency collaboration as a strategic approach to support survivors' successful reintegration into society and enhance their overall quality of life. These themes reflect both systemic strengths and areas needing growth. The identified interview themes were (a) victim identification challenges, (b) holistic well-being, (c) interagency

collaboration, (d) systemic constraints, (e) hierarchical buy-in and organizational culture, and (f) survivor empowerment and interagency responsibility. These themes offered a comprehensive framework for advancing coordinated, survivor-centered support networks.

Victim Identification Challenges

The initial theme that emerged from the data analysis was the identification and recognition of human trafficking victims. This theme encompasses the various methods and approaches organizations use to identify potential human trafficking victims and the immediate support systems they provide. Identifying victims of human trafficking presents significant challenges, often making it difficult to recognize and confirm cases. Participant 11, a clinic director, shared a compelling example of addressing this emerging issue within their organization.

In 2019, the director observed a concerning increase in human trafficking victims seeking services at their clinic. Recognizing this trend, the director took proactive steps to address it. They initiated staff training to equip their team with knowledge and skills to recognize signs of victimization. This training proved crucial, raising the organization's awareness of the problem and highlighting the urgent need for action.

Following the training, as more patients presenting with indicators of trafficking were identified, the director moved to develop and implement policies and protocols for handling these complex cases. This demonstrates a vital organizational commitment to addressing human trafficking and ensuring appropriate support for survivors.

Participant 12 stated, “The organization identifies potential victims of human trafficking through observing behavioral changes in the individuals they serve, such as changes in demeanor or withdrawal. The staff are trained to recognize warning signs of human trafficking and conduct regular check-ins with the individuals they serve. The organization collaborates with law enforcement, who provide training to help the organization's staff recognize signs of human trafficking.”

Participant 14 stated, “Their organization relies on trauma-informed intake assessments, community referrals, and frontline staff observations to identify potential victims of human trafficking”. Participant 15 detailed, “The organization receives tips and referrals from other agencies about potential human trafficking victims.” The organization also conducts undercover operations, posing as customers, to identify and divert potential victims to support services.”

Participant 16 stated, “Counselors receive training to identify and support individuals who may be victims of human trafficking, including learning how to build trust and look for specific signs. However, counselors may not frequently encounter cases of active human trafficking, as it is more commonly seen in the school setting, where teachers have more direct contact with students. In the private counseling realm, cases of human trafficking are more likely to come up in the context of past experiences, rather than ongoing situations. The key is creating a safe, trusting environment for individuals to feel comfortable disclosing their experiences.”

Participant 17 believed that educating teachers on identifying children who may be victims of human trafficking is a plan of action that needs to be implemented.

Additionally, we provide counseling support to potential victims, although we are not currently partnered with antitrafficking organizations. Lastly, plans are in place to collaborate with antitrafficking organizations to provide more comprehensive support.

Participant 18 elucidated this viewpoint, “Individuals who may be victims of human trafficking often self-identify, if they identify at all, in the context of private practice. There are limited practices to actively identify victims of human trafficking, especially in the nonprofit sector, where individuals typically self-identify and share their experiences. The organization does not have other agencies or individuals bringing potential victims to them; the focus is on supporting those who self-identify as having experienced human trafficking.”

Participant 19 quantified, “The organization has taken steps to educate its employees and the public on identifying potential victims of human trafficking. They have trained their 12,000 employees on recognizing red flags, such as individuals who appear afraid, are not allowed to speak for themselves, or are in inappropriate or suspicious situations. They have also trained law enforcement officers who work on grants with the department, enabling them to identify potential trafficking cases while enforcing other laws. The training is based on the Truckers Against Trafficking program, which guides in recognizing and reporting suspected human trafficking.

Victims of human trafficking can come from diverse backgrounds and may not fit a specific profile, so it is important to focus on identifying behavioral and situational red flags rather than relying on stereotypes. Both sex trafficking and labor trafficking are concerns, and victims can be of any age, gender, or ethnicity.”

Participant 20 stated, “The organization supports individuals who may be victims of human trafficking. One client has shared her experience of being a victim of human trafficking. Another client exhibits signs of being groomed for human trafficking, such as being well-put-together when with a certain group but looking run-down otherwise. Indicators of potential human trafficking victims include being overly sexually active, exhibiting inappropriate behavior in public, and being reluctant to disclose their situation. The organization tries to sensitively probe and prompt clients to share more about their experiences, as some may be open while others may deny it initially.”

Participants 10 and 13 are affiliated with organizations that work directly with victims of human trafficking, providing a range of essential support services. Identifying and recognizing victims was not a primary challenge for these participants, as they had direct engagement with this population. Instead, their focus was on addressing the broader needs of survivors, particularly in education and economic empowerment. Their organizations prioritize helping survivors obtain their GEDs to overcome gaps in formal education, which is seen as a foundational step toward self-sufficiency. Additionally, they provide financial literacy education, including budgeting and savings skills, and facilitate access to employment opportunities through strategic partnerships with the Texas Workforce Commission. To further support survivors’ recovery and reintegration, the organizations offer counseling, comprehensive case management, job referrals, career readiness assessments, and workforce development initiatives, ensuring holistic support tailored to long-term stability and well-being.

Holistic Well-Being

The second theme from the analysis was the holistic well-being of human trafficking victims. This theme focuses on their primary needs, essential services, and resources that human trafficking survivors express as crucial for their recovery, independence, and improved quality of life. Participants consistently emphasized a shared understanding of these needs from these interviews, underscoring the importance of accessible and comprehensive support systems that address survivors' immediate and long-term challenges. Participant 10 responded, "... that victims of human trafficking often express a need for supportive services related to transportation and housing. Case management and clinical services, such as therapy, are also important to address their needs. Parental support and therapy are also beneficial for some victims. Lack of transportation and stable housing are among the primary concerns voiced by human trafficking victims."

Participant 11 answered, "primary supportive services needed by human trafficking survivors to achieve a better quality of life or greater independence include safety, access to social services and resources such as housing, transportation, and premedical care, legal support, career training and educational opportunities, and mental health and behavioral health services." Providing a comprehensive range of support services that address the survivors' safety, social determinants of health, and overall well-being is crucial in helping them rebuild their lives and achieve greater independence. Participant 12 said, "... mental health counseling helps survivors regain a sense of autonomy and rebuild relationships. Assistance with housing, as many survivors have

been living in unstable situations. Job training and coaching, particularly for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, can help them secure employment. Comprehensive support services to address the complex trauma experienced by survivors of human trafficking.” Participant 13 spoke “about secure and stable housing as the primary need expressed by human trafficking survivors to achieve a better quality of life and greater independence. Many survivors come from domestic violence or pimping situations, lacking employment skills and financial resources to obtain their apartments, and felonies on their record also prevent them from finding suitable housing. Without a safe place to live, it is difficult for survivors to focus on their therapy, case management, and economic empowerment.”

Participant 14 mentioned “safe transitional housing, job training, legal services, trauma-informed counseling, access to basic health care, assistance obtaining identification documents (e.g., ID, driver's license), childcare support, and educational opportunities.” Participant 15 said,

helping victims overcome dependencies (e.g., drugs, alcohol) that traffickers use to maintain control. Assist with obtaining identification documents that traffickers often withhold. Provide vocational training and job placement support to help victims achieve financial independence. Secure long-term, stable housing rather than just short-term options, as recovery takes time, especially for those trafficked from a young age. Build partnerships to expand access to long-term housing solutions, as short-term options are limited.

Participant 16 stated,

Patience and open communication from support providers help survivors feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Access to specialized resources and services for human trafficking survivors, such as shelters, financial assistance, and skills training. Addressing survivors' trauma and helping them rebuild self-esteem, adapt to the real world, and develop healthy relationships. Customizing support according to the survivor's age and specific situations, such as parental neglect or a need for belonging, is essential to create an effective treatment plan for their recovery and development.

Participant 17 believed that basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, access to healthcare, and medical support, were essential. Counseling and other support services. Assistance with financial independence and stability. Safe housing away from traffickers. Participant 18 stated, "... counseling and therapy services, such as talk therapy, grief therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, and trauma-informed approaches, are essential for helping trafficking victims recover and heal. Housing and employment assistance are vital for supporting victims in gaining independence and improving their quality of life. Substance abuse treatment is also a key need for many trafficking victims, along with mental health services. Providing these services in an unbiased and supportive environment is crucial for empowering individuals and helping them make informed decisions."

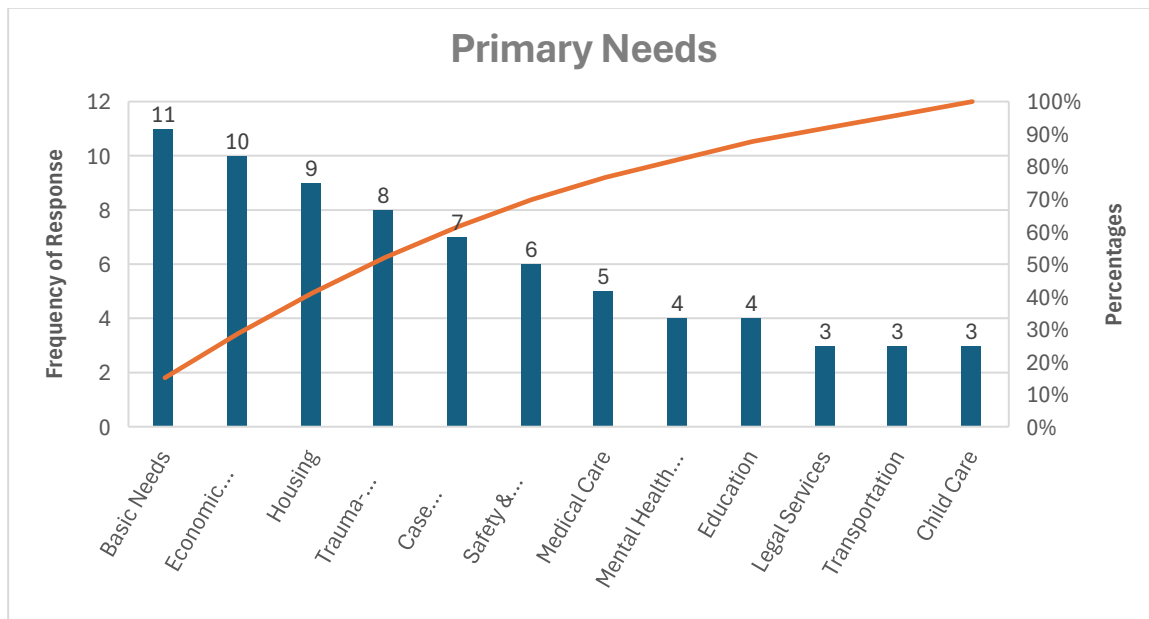
Participant 19 specified that the provision of safe and secure housing for trafficking survivors is necessary. Access to comprehensive health care, including dental care and treatment for any physical injuries or health issues. Emotional and psychological

support through counseling and other therapeutic services. Job skills training and employment assistance to help survivors achieve financial independence and a better quality of life. Specialized support for survivors with children, such as childcare and parenting resources. Addressing the underlying vulnerabilities that make survivors susceptible to trafficking, such as a lack of experience, youth, and other life challenges. Ongoing support and guidance to help survivors navigate the challenges of reintegrating into society and prevent them from returning to their traffickers.

Participant 20 stated that “addressing addiction through treatment, providing mental health support, managing medication, and educating survivors on the importance of ongoing care are essential for supporting trauma survivors and offering hope, emphasizing that healing takes time and effort. Educating survivors on self-protection measures like using safety devices and taking self-defense classes, prioritizing stabilization of addiction and mental health issues before addressing other needs.” Figure 1 illustrates the participants’ viewpoints on the primary needs for victims of human trafficking, as well as the frequency with which the needs were mentioned.

Figure 1

Participants' Perceptions of Human Trafficking Victims' Primary Needs



Interagency Collaboration

This theme explored how organizations set parameters for collaboration with other sectors (education, law enforcement, public health, social services) to support survivors, including their established relationships and types of mechanisms. Participants 11 and 15 have established formal mechanisms for collaboration with other organizations to support survivors of human trafficking.

Participant 11 explained that the organization had formal mechanisms, such as memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and policies, to collaborate with other sectors in supporting trafficking victims. Included in their agreement is annual training on recognizing human trafficking, which is required to maintain funding. The organization

had a connection with the local jail, where they would visit and provide support, though not specifically for human trafficking cases. Their relationship with law enforcement was limited, as they had tried to have a police officer on-site but faced resistance from patients, particularly during a time of heightened tensions around policing. While they could call the police if needed, the organization's ability to collaborate with law enforcement was constrained.

Participant 15 described the organization's formal mechanism for collaboration. “The organization collaborates with various sectors, including public health, education, and social service organizations, through a monthly formal coalition. This collaborative and victim-centered approach has led to the organization identifying and arresting traffickers, as well as victims providing additional information about other traffickers. The organization maintains ongoing contact with some victims to offer continued support and build relationships, which can lead to further information and assistance in the future. During operations to rescue trafficking victims, the organization provides a range of support services, such as food, medical care, counseling, housing, and transportation. The organization has shifted its approach because of the influence of its partnerships, from arresting victims to prioritizing their care and support, building trust, and then gathering information about the traffickers. This collaborative and victim-centered approach has led to the organization identifying and arresting traffickers, as well as victims providing additional information about other traffickers.”

Participant 19 explained, “... collaboration as having a formal mechanism, an app called iWatch, to report suspected trafficking cases directly to the Department of Public

Safety. The organization collaborates with various sectors, including law enforcement, social service organizations, and a local coalition that supports victims of trafficking. The coalition serves as a central hub, providing various services to victims, including counseling, job skills training, and connecting them with law enforcement and victim advocates. The organization's primary role is to connect victims with victim advocates, who provide one-on-one support and ensure the victims' well-being.”

Other participants spoke of using informal mechanisms and their professional relationships with other organizations to collaborate on efforts to support victims of human trafficking. Participant 12 discussed how the organization collaborates informally with local law enforcement, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies that provide victim assistance and resources, including the attorney general's office and disability rights organizations. The organization reports cases of trafficking or at-risk individuals to the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure they are documented, and then also reports to the police department. While the organization does not have any formal memoranda of agreement or understanding, it has long-standing relationships with various agencies and organizations that are familiar with its work and provide referrals.

Participant 20 stated, “The organization collaborates with various sectors, including law enforcement, public health, education, and social services, to support its clients. This collaboration involves setting up therapy sessions, managing medication, and facilitating communication with case managers and other agencies, such as the Department of Human Services and Section 8 housing. The organization also provides

guidance on housing options, such as the benefits of living on higher floors to enhance safety. While some formal mechanisms like MOU are in place, much of the collaboration happens through word-of-mouth, educational sessions, and identifying the clients' specific needs.”

Participants 16 and 17 expressed that their organizations do not currently have formal mechanisms or agreements in place to collaborate with other organizations to support trafficking survivors. If they encountered a trafficking survivor, the organization would need to do research and make efforts to find and connect with relevant resources and services, as there is no clear or open system for accessing support. Identifying and assisting trafficking survivors is challenging, as they often come to the organization's attention through indirect means like hospitals or public assistance programs, rather than directly seeking help. The counselor has contacted another organization to provide counseling services, potentially, but this collaboration has not been formalized. The primary mechanisms for collaboration are through the school's social work program, which connects students with local support organizations. A counselor also works closely with Child Protective Services (CPS) when dealing with cases involving children. Their organizations are open to finding ways to collaborate and consult with other groups to provide help for trafficking survivors if the need arises. However, they do not currently have established procedures in place.

Systematic Constraints

This theme highlighted the significant and multifaceted obstacles that hinder effective interagency collaboration in supporting survivors of human trafficking. Among

the most pressing barriers are staff turnover and difficulties in establishing client trust, which disrupt the continuity and coordination of care. Frequent turnover within agencies weakens established partnerships and erodes institutional knowledge, forcing providers to continually rebuild collaborative relationships. Concurrently, building trust with survivors remains a complex challenge, particularly when individuals are coping with trauma, internalized shame, fear, and low self-worth. These emotional and psychological barriers impact service engagement and strain collaborative efforts.

Likewise, limited resources are a persistent issue that contributes to service gaps and prolonged waitlists, leaving many survivors without timely access to critical care. While confidentiality is essential for protecting survivors, it often complicates information sharing between agencies, impeding seamless coordination. Jurisdictional challenges, including territoriality and differing legal mandates, further obstruct cooperation and create uncertainty around roles and responsibilities. The absence of standardized protocols and inconsistent follow-up procedures increases the risk of survivors falling through the cracks or experiencing retraumatization through fragmented services.

These systemic challenges represent a central concern for collaborative initiatives, as they can meaningfully impact survivors' long-term engagement and outcomes. Systematic constraints demonstrate how organizational barriers make it challenging to work with other agencies. These barriers can be addressed through sustainable staffing, trauma-informed care, clear interagency protocols, and resource increases. All are

essential for creating a more effective and compassionate support system for this vulnerable population.

Participant 20 elaborated in detail on the barriers and challenges to collaboration, stating, "...that jurisdictional issues, resource constraints, and confidentiality concerns are key obstacles when working with other agencies. Accessing legal representation and court processes can be challenging for clients, as they often lack information or access until just before court hearings. Funding and income-related issues, such as clients being on limited government assistance or having no income, make it challenging to secure affordable housing and meet basic needs. The lack of coordination and communication between agencies, as well as clients' rights to privacy, can hinder collaboration and service provision, especially for vulnerable clients like victims of trafficking or domestic abuse. Lastly, finding appropriate, safe, and accessible shelter and housing options, particularly for clients with children, is an ongoing struggle that is currently being witnessed in their organization."

Hierarchical Buy-in and Organizational Culture

This theme examined the profound influence of leadership and an organization's internal culture on the effectiveness of interagency collaboration in supporting human trafficking survivors. Leadership investment is crucial in modeling collaborative behavior, and actively championing interagency training and coordination is paramount. This fosters a robust culture of partnership within and across organizations. Essentially, leadership establishes the foundational tone for all cross-sector collaboration. The need for buy-in and support from leadership at all organizational levels, along with the impact

of organizational culture, significantly affects the effectiveness of cross-sector collaboration.

These interviews underscored that leaders should genuinely value partnership, which is instrumental in promoting inclusive and client-centered service delivery models that are best for the victims. Such a leadership approach is not passive; they actively engage in coalitions, conferences, and formal MOUs with partner agencies. This proactive approach is essential for fostering robust external relationships and expanding the scope of collaborative efforts.

Importantly, leadership support can potentially prove pivotal in scaling antitrafficking initiatives beyond the confines of a single agency. Supportive leadership can propel an agency-wide approach to expanding into broader community outreach and education, where multiple agencies can see success. One participant specifically credited supportive leadership for empowering counselors to prioritize the nuanced needs of their clients.

Furthermore, another interview participant highlighted how supportive leadership exemplifies commitment to noncoercive engagement and provided extensive staff training in trauma-informed approaches. This commitment is deeply ingrained in the organizational fabric, with leadership actively promoting trauma-informed and disability justice principles. They consistently foster interagency collaboration and engage in comprehensive cross-agency planning, cultivating a truly value-driven leadership culture.

Participant 15 discussed,

Survivor-led training was important for the organization because it addressed some leadership's initial resistance to collaborating with organizations championing human trafficking victims' causes. These powerful narratives were instrumental in reshaping the agency's perspectives and solidifying institutional support for collaborative practices that are both trauma-informed and highly effective.

Survivor Empowerment and Interagency Responsibility

This theme explored the collective vision across diverse sectors for how interagency collaboration can profoundly impact the lives of human trafficking survivors, ultimately leading to a sustainable quality of life. The all-encompassing goals for survivors are clear: to achieve fewer repeat trafficking experiences, improved mental health, and economic self-sufficiency. At the heart of these efforts lies survivor empowerment, which fosters agency and resilience in those who have experienced trafficking. Accompanying this is an interagency responsibility, recognizing the shared role of all agencies in supporting victims' comprehensive recovery.

Collaborative efforts are designed to

- Reduce revictimization: This is a primary aim, ensuring survivors can successfully exit and remain free from trafficking.
- Improve mental health outcomes: Providing access to comprehensive mental health services is crucial for healing and recovery.

- Increase self-sufficiency: This encompasses job stability, access to safe environments, improved self-confidence, and sustained access to essential support services.

To achieve these outcomes, interagency partnerships are essential. Key initiatives include

- tailored referrals: Creating streamlined, robust, and customized referral processes specifically designed for human trafficking victims.
- sustainable networks of care: Building and expanding resilient networks that empower survivors' long-term recovery and provide consistent, quality support. This includes providing in-house support, such as food pantries, to address immediate basic needs.
- expanded coalitions and better-funded partners: Fostering broader and more robust partnerships to offer extensive and lasting support systems.

Prioritization of survivor well-being and empowerment extends to the long-term well-being and recovery of survivors. This involves

- consistency and job stability: Helping survivors achieve stable employment and secure living environments.
- building self-confidence: Empowering survivors to regain their self-worth and navigate away from dangerous situations.
- long-term recovery focus: It is important to provide compassionate and nonjudgmental support, recognizing that recovery is an ongoing journey without a timeline and that relapse can be a part of it.

- increasing recovery rates: Aiming to significantly increase the percentage of victims who successfully recover and remain free from the trafficking lifestyle, moving beyond the current estimated 5%–8%. The goal is to expand the support network and provide ongoing assistance to more victims.

Effective interagency collaboration requires

- staff training: Providing ongoing education and training for agency staff and partners to recognize the signs of human trafficking and respond appropriately.
- active coalition involvement: Maintaining active involvement in coalitions and networks to stay updated on best practices and protocols.
- minimizing retraumatization: Ensuring victims do not have to repeatedly share their traumatic stories by having trained professionals who understand their experiences.
- holistic approach: Emphasizes the importance of awareness and educational apparatus that addresses human trafficking comprehensively.
- access to resources: Ensuring survivors have access to all necessary resources, including free therapy, to support their recovery, safety, and long-term well-being.
- empowerment tools: Providing survivors with the tools, skills, and professional support they need to adapt, overcome trauma, and build their desired quality of life.

- accountability: Holding those responsible for perpetrating human trafficking accountable through the justice system.

Participant 20's profound assessment said, “ Survivors need more support and resources to aid their recovery, safety, and long-term well-being, such as: easier access to services and assistance (e.g., reducing bureaucratic hurdles, increasing availability of shelters and housing), comprehensive trauma-informed care, including counseling and treatment for mental health and substance abuse issues, and help developing job skills, employment readiness, and independent living abilities. Many survivors have experienced prolonged trauma and exploitation, leading to normalized, unhealthy behaviors that require patience and specialized support to overcome. Survivors often lack job history, education, and basic life skills, necessitating tailored training and preparation to reintegrate into the workforce and community.”

These organizations recognized the importance of continuous improvement, including conducting needs assessments, evaluating the effectiveness of their services, and identifying ways to support survivors better. While collaboration with partners is seen as highly beneficial for survivors' long-term well-being, organizations also recognize the crucial need to balance providing support with respecting survivors' individual preferences and autonomy. Without professional assistance, survivors may struggle to move past their trauma. The overarching aim is to achieve successful long-term recovery and well-being for survivors, enabling them to establish the life they desire, free from trafficking.

Findings

I conducted a thorough analysis of four key thematic areas, providing detailed assessments and corresponding recommendations. The first theme I explored was the complexity involved in identifying and recognizing victims of human trafficking. This theme highlighted the inherent challenges and nuances that professionals and organizations face in accurately detecting victims, due to issues like fear, coercion, and limited awareness among both victims and service providers.

Although often “in plain sight,” many victims remain hidden and highly vulnerable. A key finding is that victims come from diverse backgrounds and rarely fit a single stereotype. This highlights the importance of focusing on behavioral and situational warning signs rather than relying on harmful stereotypes, which can hinder accurate identification.

A significant challenge arises from the profound impact on a victim's self-identity. Victims seldom self-identify due to unescapable fear or shame, particularly within private practice settings where the opportunity for intervention might be less formal. Organizations, therefore, must proactively identify potential victims. This often involves observing subtle behavioral changes in the individuals they serve, such as shifts in demeanor or withdrawal.

Effective victim identification within organizations relies on a multifaceted approach, including specialized assessments designed to elicit information sensitively and recognize potential indicators of trafficking. Strong community partnerships can also lead to crucial referrals of potential victims. Ultimately, frontline staff members who

frequently interact with individuals are often best positioned to identify potential red flags.

To overcome these current limitations in actively identifying victims, organizations must prioritize having specialized staff training that equips staff with comprehensive teaching to aid in recognizing the nuanced warning signs of human trafficking. This goes beyond basic awareness and delves into specific indicators and intervention strategies. Consistent and discreet check-ins with individuals served should be implemented to facilitate continuous observation and foster the development of trust, thereby encouraging open and honest disclosures. Follow up by developing robust policies and protocols that establish clear guidelines for staff to assist and support potential victims, ensuring a consistent and appropriate response.

Most importantly, create a discreet method for seeking help. Recognizing the fear and shame that victims face, organizations should have innovative and discreet ways for individuals to seek assistance. Examples include placing information cards in private clinic areas or offering confidential online resources. Ultimately, effective identification hinges on a practical, empathetic, and well-trained approach that prioritizes the safety and well-being of individuals who may be silently enduring the ordeals of human trafficking.

Lee et al. (2021) studied the LIFT training curriculum by describing and comparing attendees' knowledge and attitudes towards human trafficking from baseline to immediately posttraining. Their secondary objective was to determine whether changes in knowledge and attitudes are sustained for 6 to 8 months following training by comparing immediate and long-term posttraining scores. They hypothesized that

participants' knowledge and attitudes towards identifying and managing victim-survivors of human trafficking would improve immediately posttraining and be maintained at long-term follow-up. As a result of their study, among health professionals, the continuing medical education-accredited LIFT training leads to a short-term improvement in knowledge of human trafficking and a sustained improvement in awareness and attitudes about it.

Specialized staff training is essential for effectively identifying and supporting victims of human trafficking. Such training equips personnel with the skills to recognize the often subtle and complex warning signs associated with trafficking. However, for this training to be truly practical, it must be ongoing and regularly updated, ensuring that staff continue to deepen their knowledge, challenge misconceptions, and refine their attitudes toward trafficking and its victims. Strengthening identification strategies and support mechanisms is crucial for early intervention and providing adequate care for survivors. A subsequent in-depth analysis focused on how that interagency collaboration faces numerous significant obstacles that can compromise the effectiveness of services. Resource limitations, particularly in funding and access to affordable housing, are common, often resulting in critical service gaps and lengthy waitlists. This directly affects agencies' ability to provide timely and comprehensive support.

Furthermore, while essential, protections like confidentiality concerns can impede the necessary sharing of information between agencies. Jurisdictional issues, including interagency turfism and complex legal frameworks, can further obstruct coordinated efforts. The absence of standardized protocols and inconsistent follow-up mechanisms

means individuals can tragically fall through the cracks or experience retraumatization. For exceptionally vulnerable populations, specific challenges often arise that may prevent their long-term engagement, making sustained support a key concern.

Adding to these challenges, Jones (2023) highlighted that interagency collaboration often faces uncertainty about its purpose, process, and outcomes. The research highlighted that the lack of intentional efforts to build and sustain positive working relationships among collaborative members, combined with brief collaborative exchanges, can significantly hinder collaborative efforts. Different conceptual attitudes among collaborating agencies can cause members to approach the same social issues in fundamentally different ways. Moreover, variations in agencies' core missions, goals, and objectives can obstruct the necessary agreement to move forward effectively with the collaborative process. Despite these challenges, Jones underscored the substantial benefits of interagency collaboration, particularly in anti-human trafficking efforts. Jones found that such collaboration provides a crucial capacity, enabling agencies to achieve their desired collective outcomes, including improved human trafficking detection, more efficient case processing, and enhanced victim service provision.

A pivotal aspect of my findings was the influence of leadership and organizational culture on collaboration efforts. This can either promote or obstruct an organization's ability to achieve positive outcomes through collaboration. Supportive leadership is paramount. Leaders who prioritize and invest in training and interagency engagement directly contribute to a collaborative environment. This includes modeling collaborative behavior and advocating for interagency training and

coordination. Conversely, organizations with siloed cultures often lack shared values, which creates significant obstacles to effective partnership.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that effective organizational leadership actively participates in coalitions, conferences, and MOUs with partner agencies. These active approaches helped to cultivate external relationships and expand collaborative opportunities. This reflects a value-driven leadership approach that fostered a collaborative environment, emphasizing interagency cooperation and strategic cross-agency planning.

The last finding revealed that every interviewee hoped for better outcomes for human trafficking victims. The research consistently suggests that the main goal is to reintegrate victims into society by focusing on their well-being and empowerment. This includes providing stable employment and safe living conditions, as well as helping survivors regain their self-worth and escape dangerous situations.

Long-term recovery is achievable through compassionate, nonjudgmental, and supportive care continuums. It is essential to acknowledge that recovery is an ongoing journey with no fixed timeline and that relapses can be a natural part of this process. Palpable results define the vision for hope in long-term recovery from trafficking. To truly support survivors, we must focus on breaking the cycle of repeated victimization. This approach will dramatically reduce repeat trafficking experiences, foster profound improvements in mental health outcomes, and build foundational economic self-sufficiency, creating a vital shield against revictimization.

Mumey et al. (2021) highlighted the urgent need for long-term recovery efforts to address the unmet social needs of human trafficking survivors, such as access to health care and housing support. These issues directly impact the psychological health and well-being of survivors. The study shows that survivors often view their reintegration experiences as ongoing forms of dehumanization and marginalization. Mumey et al. concluded with several key recommendations. First, the authors emphasize the essential nature of adopting trauma-informed care, which acknowledges and is sensitive to survivors' histories of violence and mistrust. They also highlight that a nonjudgmental and empathetic approach is critical to reducing the stigma and shame many survivors experience.

Finally, Mumey et al. (2021) advocated for a comprehensive model of care that encompasses individual, organizational, and systemic levels, treating healing as a process rather than a one-time event. Building on their findings, the authors emphasized that recovery for human trafficking survivors requires a deeper understanding of their spoken needs. This includes a particular emphasis on supporting and improving their mental health outcomes, recognizing their current coping mechanisms, and addressing the systemic barriers that hinder their path to empowerment and sustainability.

Deliverables and Recommendations

I examined the crucial role of interagency collaboration among organizations in the education system, law enforcement, public health, and community-based organizations that potentially encounter human trafficking victims. By gathering perspectives from these key stakeholders, my research offered valuable insights into the

current state of collaborative efforts and their impact on providing comprehensive support to survivors. It highlighted how effective interagency collaboration empowers organizations to deliver comprehensive services more efficiently. By working together, agencies can streamline processes, offer survivors a wider range of support, and establish alliances to strengthen the network of assistance available to victims.

I have highlighted the current state of interagency collaboration through interviews with various public sectors and community-based organizations. The goal was to develop a broader community approach, create a framework for action plans, and offer recommendations to improve interagency collaboration practices. These recommendations will help guide the development and implementation of strategies that influence partnership building and create conditions for successful collaboration.

Additionally, providing practical guidance for policymakers to inform decisions that promote and facilitate interagency cooperation; for practitioners, to improve their collaborative efforts in the field of human trafficking acknowledgment; and for organizations, to strengthen their interagency cooperation as a strategic tool to overcome barriers and create a more seamless and comprehensive support network for human trafficking survivors.

The power of partnerships in the fight against human trafficking is vital to more effective prevention, intervention, and victim recovery. The inherent complexities in identifying victims underscore the need for a unified approach to this task. That approach has led to my recommendation of standardized training, which is a significant development. By developing a standardized training curriculum, my research addressed

the challenges in identifying and recognizing human trafficking. The curriculum should focus on several key areas:

- understanding scope and prevalence: Equip individuals with a comprehensive understanding of human trafficking's scale and impact.
- recognizing warning signs: Train professionals to identify the subtle and obvious indicators that may suggest human trafficking victimization.
- identifying and assessing victims: A focus on preparing individuals across various sectors to effectively identify and assess trafficked persons who present within their settings.

This standardized training may empower frontline professionals to better recognize and respond to human trafficking, ultimately leading to more successful interventions and support for survivors. It will be updated as needed to reflect the evolving landscape of human trafficking awareness and prevalence.

As Le et al. (2021) highlighted, previous studies indicate that a significant majority of trafficked individuals (68% to 88%) interact with a health care professional during their exploitation. This presented a unique and critical opportunity for identification, intervention, and assistance. However, many physicians missed the signs of trafficking, primarily due to a lack of explicit training. Therefore, implementing a standardized curriculum is an impactful and necessary approach for organizations. Since identifying human trafficking victims is difficult, this curriculum can help provide prompt intervention and support.

Another area of concern focused on the need for attention to systematic constraints. Obstacles are encountered when trying to collaborate with other agencies to support human trafficking victims. Most of these constraints are organizational, such as issues with confidentiality, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), mandated reporting, release of information, trust), resource limitations (funding cuts, lack of funds, waitlists, lack of affordable housing, limited access to resources), inconsistent follow-through resulting in survivors falling through the cracks, retraumatization, staff turnover in partner agencies, and difficulty in keeping survivors engaged. Additionally, jurisdictional setbacks, such as cross-border cases, disparities between resource-rich and smaller counties, territoriality among providers, and complexities within the legal system, hinder efforts to support victims.

Recommendations for Addressing Systematic Constraints

First, to address issues related to confidentiality concerns such as HIPAA, mandated reporting, release of information, and trust, develop and implement standardized and legally compliant information-sharing agreements. Agency leaders should (a) collaboratively draft and sign comprehensive MOU or interagency agreements that specify parameters for information sharing, including types of information, consent requirements, and secure transmission methods, ensuring full compliance with HIPAA and other relevant privacy laws; (b) establish a joint committee or working group with legal counsel and frontline staff from all involved agencies to review and update these agreements regularly; and (c) provide ongoing guidance on complex confidentiality situations.

Next, resource limitations, including funding cuts, lack of funds, waitlists, affordable housing, and limited access to resources, should be addressed. This can be done by resource modification, which involves establishing a shared resource-mapping initiative to identify underutilized resources across partner agencies and develop formal resource-sharing agreements, as well as, creating and maintaining a comprehensive and regularly updated online database or directory of all available victim services, housing options, legal aid, and specialized care providers, including their eligibility criteria, waitlist status, and direct contact information.

Furthermore, improving inconsistent follow-through is a hinderance, survivors falling through the cracks, and retraumatization will require innovative victim-centered protocols, such as developing a system for identifying victims at high risk of disengaging from services or falling through the cracks, triggering immediate, coordinated outreach and reengagement efforts from partner agencies, and requiring all staff across collaborating agencies who interact with human trafficking victims to complete advanced trauma-informed care training, with a specific focus on understanding and mitigating the risks of retraumatization during interactions and service delivery.

The fourth recommendation centered on agency turnover. This issue can be addressed by developing a strong interagency agenda, where partnering organizations organize regular, informal "meet-and-greet" or networking events—such as quarterly luncheons and joint workshops on non-case-specific topics—for frontline staff, supervisors, and leadership to foster personal relationships and informal communication channels. The last systemic constraint requiring attention is overcoming jurisdictional

setbacks, such as cross-border cases, disparities between resource-rich and less affluent counties, territoriality, and complexities in the legal system. I recommend that organizations collaborate to establish multijurisdictional coalitions and agreements. This involves establishing formal, standing multijurisdictional task forces comprising representatives from law enforcement, victim services, legal aid, and other relevant entities across county, state, and potentially international borders to address cross-border human trafficking cases. Participants 15 and 19 noted that these practices are currently in place in their organizations. Targeted strategies and a comprehensive collaborative work plan can effectively address systemic constraints. Efforts in these areas will improve efforts to combat human trafficking and make initiatives significantly more effective, which is crucial for enhanced prevention, intervention, and long-term recovery for survivors.

Another concern focused on the role of leadership and organizational culture in implementing interagency collaboration as a strategic tool for supporting human trafficking victims. Hierarchical buy-in and organizational ethos are vital components that can influence the effectiveness of interagency collaboration in supporting prevention, intervention, and long-term recovery for survivors. There are no absolute recommendations for this finding. However, my research illustrated that for interagency collaboration's effectiveness, leadership must support this strategy, invest in training that equips the organization with an understanding, and advocate for cooperative engagements. Leadership endorsement is a crucial first step in enabling the training, education, and outreach necessary for successful cross-sector collaboration. Leadership

sets the tone and drive for collaboration. An organizational culture that recognizes the importance of collaboration will also encourage it. Collaboration can potentially lead to transformational changes for clients.

Fountain (2013) wrote that effective managers and teams are paramount to cross-agency collaborative initiatives. To make them effective, organizational processes must focus on strategy, operations, systems, and management. Effective organizational processes require an organizational skill set that emphasizes rigor and clarity in setting goals, designing systems, establishing milestones, attracting resources, and framing an organization that spans agency boundaries. Effective cross-agency collaboration must be both relational and strategically organized, working within the institutional constraints of each agency.

The last key concern highlighted the hoped-for better outcomes for human trafficking victims. Long-term recovery is achievable through compassionate, nonjudgmental, and supportive care continuums, which leads to my controversial recommendation of legislation for the decriminalization of victims of human trafficking. Past experiences and circumstances have led to victims' criminalization as they have been arrested or jailed due to their sexual exploitation, leading to their reluctance to deal with the police or law enforcement.

Systemic failures should be eye-opening because they reveal broader societal and institutional shortcomings, which in turn highlight policy failures. They demonstrate a lack of empathy for victims' needs, highlighting my core desire for a compassionate and supportive approach to justice. Criminalization of sex work presents as a measure to

protect individuals, but it often has the opposite effect, significantly increasing victims' exposure to violence and exploitation.

It fosters a "climate of impunity" that encourages various actors—including law enforcement, health care professionals, and nonstate groups—to abuse sex workers. Although it appears to focus on the well-being of sex workers, the actual enforcement of criminalization often leads to increased policing. This pushes individuals into more isolated areas and conditions, thereby increasing their physical vulnerability and raising their risk of harm. Albright and D'Adamo (2017) concluded that removing punitive laws through decriminalization can encourage the reporting of exploitation and abuse by creating safer conditions for sex workers. This approach not only reduces their marginalization and vulnerability but also helps to destigmatize sex work, challenging the political, social, and cultural forces that contribute to their exclusion.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

MAXQDA was the thematic instrument used for data analysis along with the collection of multiple data sources, such as interviews, peer reviews, and governmental and law enforcement statistics, which contributed to collecting data about interagency collaboration, as it lends to the credibility and internal validity of this generic qualitative study, a critical factor in the trustworthiness of the research. Prolonged interviews and probing follow-ups with participants allowed for a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences regarding interagency collaboration and the complexities surrounding human trafficking and comprehensive supportive services for helping them reclaim their dignity and long-term recovery. Member checks were conducted to validate

findings with participants, ensuring accuracy and a comprehensive assessment of the relevance of their experiences. A 7-day review period was provided to verify the accuracy and completeness of the participants' responses and to provide any necessary clarifications. Once this timeframe had elapsed, no participant returned their transcript, deeming the information an accurate and complete reflection of their experiences with interagency collaboration as an approach to combating human trafficking and enhancing supportive care services for victims.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A key strength of my generic qualitative study was the diversity of my interview participants, who represent a range of sectors, including education, law enforcement, public health, and supportive services. Their wide array of perspectives provided meaningful insight into the complexities of human trafficking and underscored the importance of comprehensive, coordinated support for survivors. The findings provided valuable guidance for future research aimed at strengthening interagency collaboration as a framework for addressing the complex challenges faced by vulnerable populations. Ultimately, the study contributed to identifying effective strategies for prevention, intervention, and long-term recovery, ensuring survivors receive dignified, stigma-free support that empowers them to reclaim their quality of life.

One limitation of my study was the lack of perspectives from emergency shelter administrators. Future research should aim to include their viewpoints, as emergency shelters often serve as places where individuals fleeing trafficking situations can find refuge. Interviewing shelter administrators can play a crucial role in the continuum of

care. Since many of the most vulnerable populations depend on these services, understanding how interagency collaboration affects emergency shelter operations is vital for improving support systems for trafficking survivors.

Summary

My thematic analysis of the generic qualitative study presents interviews with professionals supporting human trafficking survivors, highlighting six key themes that define the current landscape of this vital work. The findings emphasized the commitment of individuals and organizations while also pointing out significant systemic challenges that hinder optimal support for survivors. The analysis showed that, although various identification and support mechanisms are in place, their consistency and reach can be improved.

Survivors of human trafficking often face a wide range of urgent and long-term needs, with safe housing, mental health care, and economic empowerment emerging as particularly critical. While interagency collaboration is widely acknowledged as vital to meeting these needs, it frequently depends on informal networks. Although these connections can be beneficial, they often lack the consistency and structure of formalized partnerships. Establishing clear protocols and standardized procedures is essential to building a more effective, coordinated, and compassionate support system for this vulnerable population.

Significant barriers to effective collaboration persist, including resource limitations, confidentiality concerns, and jurisdictional complexities. Leadership and organizational culture are paramount in either facilitating or hindering collaborative

efforts. Encouragingly, participants offered numerous strategies for improvement, emphasizing the need for stronger formal partnerships, enhanced training, improved communication channels, public awareness, and a holistic, client-centered approach to achieve seamless care.

Moving forward, addressing these identified challenges and implementing the suggested strategies will be crucial for strengthening the multisectoral response to human trafficking. This will require a concentrated effort from policymakers, funders, and service providers to invest in resources, foster a culture of collaboration, standardize protocols where appropriate, and prioritize the complex needs of survivors. By doing so, we can move closer to a system that not only rescues individuals from trafficking but also empowers them to rebuild their lives with dignity and achieve lasting independence.

Section 5 outlined my dissemination plan tailored for organizations serving victims of human trafficking and other vulnerable populations. It acknowledges that addressing the multilayered challenges of trafficking and other complex issues requires more than a one-size-fits-all solution. The strategy must be adaptable, open to ongoing improvement, and include diverse viewpoints. The plan promotes interagency collaboration as an innovative pathway to achieving meaningful outcomes and advancing systemic change, with the potential to support the integration of socially responsive approaches within public administration and address complex social issues more effectively.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan and Conclusion

Dissemination Plan

I plan to disseminate a white paper briefing to the public sectors identified in my study. This white paper advocates for interagency collaboration as a vital and innovative pathway to achieving meaningful outcomes and driving systemic change. By promoting this integration of a socially responsive approach, we can employ it more effectively to address complex social issues. The briefing will equip decision-makers with concrete components, insightful analysis, and clear recommendations to tackle their challenges through interagency collaboration.

Furthermore, this white paper can be shared with other organizations facing similar urgent concerns and seeking precise, actionable solutions for improving their service deliverables. As a viable solution to problem-solving, interagency collaboration can go a long way in being a suitable framework for tackling complex issues. Agencies can benefit from collaboration, as it improves efficiency, facilitates better outcomes, enhances their reputation, and provides access to new resources and opportunities.

Conclusions

Interagency collaboration is regarded as a vital strategy for addressing society's most complex and persistent challenges. Uniting two or more organizations facilitates the development of meaningful partnerships and aligns efforts toward shared goals. The existing literature consistently has underscored the value of such collaboration, particularly in promoting safety and protecting individuals from harm.

While the benefits, such as shared resources, pooled expertise, and coordinated responses, are well-documented, several limitations persist. Research highlights significant barriers to effective collaboration, including collaborative uncertainty, characterized by ambiguity in agency roles, misalignment of responsibilities, and organizational incongruence, as well as unfavorable collaborative environments. These critical issues are likely to hinder the effectiveness of interagency collaboration, as they are frequently cited in case reviews and official inspections, compromising the success and sustainability of interagency efforts.

The study's findings highlighted the effectiveness of interagency collaboration as a pragmatic approach to combating human trafficking. The development of strategic alliances facilitates and distributes responsibility among multiple agencies. This enables a concerted effort to mitigate obstacles, such as challenges in victim identification. Addressing systematic constraints requires establishing formal mechanisms, such as MOUs, and fostering an organizational culture that encourages a receptive environment for interagency integration to enhance its effectiveness. This collaborative framework also provides a way to reevaluate and amend legislation that may unintentionally criminalize victims. The interview questions effectively highlighted these themes from the participants' perspectives and lived experiences.

Summary

To disseminate the study findings, I plan to create a white paper brief for public sector officials to utilize as a means of combating human trafficking. The briefing will serve as a template to equip decision-makers with concrete components, insightful

analysis, and clear recommendations to address their challenges through interagency collaboration. Agencies can benefit from collaboration, as it improves efficiency, facilitates better outcomes, enhances their reputation, and provides access to new resources and opportunities.

Interagency collaboration is a dynamic strategy for addressing society's most complex and persistent challenges. A generic qualitative approach captured individual perspectives, identified barriers and benefits, and comprehensively highlighted the collaborative experiences of individuals working in organizations that seek to assist victims of human trafficking. Hopefully, the study provided insight into best practices and documents opportunities for interagency collaboration as a creative and pragmatic approach to building alliances that better serve victims of human trafficking and other vulnerable populations, leading to societal reforms that are impactful and meaningful.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

You are invited to share your views for a study titled: Interagency Collaboration:

A Framework to Ensure Sustainable Services for Human Trafficking Survivors

- One 30–45-minute interview via Zoom that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Interviews will take place during May and June 2025.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Participants who can help shape evidence-based policies, resource allocation, and interagency practices to combat human trafficking effectively.
- Must hold a mid-to-high-level administrative role (e.g., program manager, director, case manager supervisor).

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact the researcher via email at robert.baxter@waldenu.edu.

Appendix B: Participant Invitation

You are invited to share your views for a study titled: Interagency Collaboration:

A Framework to Ensure Sustainable Services for Human Trafficking Survivors

- One 30–45-minute Zoom interview that will be audio recorded (no video recording)
- You would receive a **\$20 Visa gift card** as a thank-you
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Interviews will take place during May and June 2025.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Hold a mid-to-high-level administrative role (e.g., Executive Director, Program Manager, or Case Manager Supervisor).
- Are involved in shaping evidence-based policies, resource allocation, and interagency practices to combat human trafficking effectively

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact the researcher via email at robert.baxter@waldenu.edu

Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Questions

The following questions are applicable to members of public health, law enforcement, education, and social service organizations who meet the eligibility criteria for the current study:

1. From the perspective of your role, how does your organization currently identify and support individuals who may be victims of human trafficking?
2. What are some primary supportive service needs expressed by human trafficking survivors that would help them achieve a better quality of life and greater independence?
3. How does your organization collaborate with other sectors to support trafficking survivors? Can you describe any formal or informal mechanisms in place?
4. What challenges or barriers has your organization encountered when working with agencies from other sectors (e.g., confidentiality, jurisdictional issues, resource limitations)?
5. What gaps do you see in cross-sector collaboration for supporting human trafficking survivors, and how do these gaps affect service delivery or survivor outcomes?
6. How do communication practices, such as information sharing or referral processes, impact your organization's ability to meet the immediate and long-term needs of trafficking survivors?

7. What role do leadership and organizational culture play in facilitating or hindering collaboration across public health, law enforcement, education, and social service sectors?
8. What strategies or practices could improve interagency collaboration's effectiveness to support trafficking survivors more holistically?
9. How does your organization work to ensure that survivors receive seamless and comprehensive care when multiple agencies are involved?
10. What outcomes would your organization like to achieve through more effective interagency collaboration, particularly regarding survivor recovery, safety, and long-term well-being?