

Sex Trafficking: Examining Links to Prostitution and the Routine Activity Theory

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Abstract: Sex trafficking is often a concern in international communities. However, sex trafficking victims do not always cross international borders; these victims can be trafficked within their own countries. The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of law enforcement agents experienced in investigations of prostitution and sex trafficking incidents. Qualitative data were collected by interviewing law enforcement agents along the east coast region of the United States. An analysis of the interview data uncovered a series of themes which include desire for money, drug activity, lack of awareness, and varying tolerance levels. The research results were applied to the framework of routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979). It was found that the three elements (motivated offenders, suitable targets, and absence of a capable guardian) of the theory were well applied to describe sex trafficking activity. Important future research implications as well as policy implications were discussed.

Keywords: Sex trafficking, prostitution, routine activities theory, law enforcement.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 defines the act of sex trafficking as “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (p. 1470). The notion of sex trafficking may conjure images of international crime syndicates and smuggling people across international borders. While this is sometimes the case, there is a risk for people within the United States to become victims of sex trafficking as well. According to a 2011 report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 83% of reported sex trafficking victims cases were United States citizens (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011). While prostitution is an illegal activity, it is an activity that may lead to further victimization. Some researchers suggest that acts of prostitution may place one at risk of becoming a victim of sex trafficking in the United States, especially for domestic minors (Hodge 2008; Kotrla 2010; Rand 2009; Williamson and Prior 2009).

The purpose of the present study is threefold. First, the study examines the perceptions of law enforcement agents experienced in prostitution and sex trafficking incidents in order to explore if prostitution and sex trafficking are linked. Second, the present study explores if there are specific factors or conditions that might allow the crime of sex trafficking to occur at a local level. Third, based on the factors and conditions mentioned above, the study examines how the elements of routine activity theory (Cohen and Felson 1979) can be applied to prostitution and sex trafficking

incidents. Routine activity theory can shed light on local level factors that lead to victimization so it can be an insightful tool to explore if prostitution can lead to sex trafficking victimization (Boetig 2006). The research in this paper is exploratory and qualitative in nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sex Trafficking & Victims

Sex trafficking is often considered a global or international problem (Aronowitz, Theuermann, and Tyurykanova 2010; Laczko and Gozdzia 2005; Yuko 2009). Since 2000, there has been an increase in political support for research and funding sources for research projects resulting in a growing amount of studies related to human trafficking (Laczko and Gozdzia 2005; Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005). However, many studies focus on macro-level factors of trafficking, such as international law discrepancies, migration, and other international problems (Broderick 2005; Loftus 2011; Yuko 2009). There is considerably less literature detailing trafficking incidents occurring within the United States.

The estimated rates of human trafficking and sex trafficking vary between sources. The TVPA (2000) estimates the United States has 50,000 minors and women brought into the country every year. On the other hand, another report estimates 18,000 to 20,000 women and children are trafficking into the country (U.S. Department of State 2003). However, sex trafficking victims do not always cross international borders; these victims can be trafficked within their own countries (Trafficking in Persons Report 2006). In other words, these previously mentioned estimates

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rates do not include United States citizens who are trafficked and also do not include males who are trafficked, therefore the rates should be considered underestimated (Hopper 2004). Reporting of human trafficking and sex trafficking is also low which may be due to deficiencies of awareness among communities, healthcare, social services, and law enforcement groups as well as the victims themselves due to the traumatic nature of their victimization (Hopper 2004; Stotts and Ramey 2009).

According to data provided by Banks and Kyckelhahn (2011), roughly 80% of the reported human trafficking cases in the United States were distinguished as sex trafficking incidents. United States citizens accounted for "four-fifths of victims in confirmed sex trafficking incidents" in the United States (p. 1) and undocumented aliens were the next largest group of victims. Victims within the United States are predominately female and under the age of eighteen (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011). According to Rand (2009), sex trafficking does not only impact minority women and children in cities areas but rather it can happen in any geographic area, blind to income, race, and age.

Various reports suggested that minors are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking victimization (Kotrla 2010; Hodge 2008; Rand 2009; Reid 2010; Trafficking in Persons Report 2006). Stotts and Ramey (2009) suggested that teens from troubled families are especially vulnerable and can be enticed by the money making potential in sex work. According to Estes and Weiner (2001), many of the exploited children were living in poverty; however, poverty was not directly causing the exploitation but rather providing a context for the exploitation to occur. Both of the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Reports from 2005 and 2006 state that minors can be sold into sex trafficking or forced into prostitution by their family. Interviewing two hundred and forty-nine minors from New York City, Curtis and his associates (2008) found that their interview participants were mostly African-American or mixed race and primarily female (Curtis *et al.* 2008). They also found that the minors were confronted with violence daily, mostly from their customers but also from pimps and other prostituted minors. Focusing on exploited minors from a southern United States city, Reid (2010) found there are difficulties identifying these minors because the minors are unlikely to report the victimization. Reid also found that lack of services for the victims and difficulties in charging and prosecuting a trafficker contributed to exploitation of minors.

Sex Traffickers & Recruitment of Victims

A sex trafficker is someone who is involved with recruiting, harboring, transporting, or provisioning someone for commercial sex (TVPA 2000). Between 2008 and 2010, the suspects in the sex-trafficking incidents were predominately male while females accounted for nineteen percent of the suspects (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011). The researchers reported the suspects were most frequently identified as Black or African American, accounting for sixty two percent of the suspects (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011). Money is frequently cited as a primary motivation for getting involved in trafficking (Hodge 2008; Kortla 2010; Rand 2009; Samarasinghe 2009; Steele 2010; Trafficking in Persons Report 2006; Williamson and Prior 2009; Zhang 2011). According to the United States Department of State (2004), trafficking in persons is estimated to produce roughly 9.5 billion U.S. dollars a year (p. 14). In northern Mexico, Zhang (2011) found that of the pimps and sex traffickers surveyed, the average yearly income per person was \$93,000 U.S. dollars.

Sex traffickers use various methods to lure people into trafficking situations. According to Estes and Weiner (2001), traffickers have been known to use minors already under their control to recruit other minors. The authors say that the recruiters are awarded with drugs or money for bringing new kids to the traffickers and the newly acquired minor is promised shelter, food, and money in exchange for pornography, stripping, or other commercial sex activity. Similar tactics have been used by pimps and traffickers to recruit adults into the sex industry. Adult, female prostitutes who act as recruiters are known as "wife-in-laws," who assist a pimp in recruiting, training, and controlling new women (Williamson and Baker 2009:32). Traffickers will also approach individuals who are already working in prostitution and promise them more money or better conditions if they work for them (Hodge,2008).

Some researchers (e.g., Kotrla 2010; Estes and Weiner 2001) noted that traffickers will sometimes choose to appeal to their potential victim's emotions by offering affection and becoming a boyfriend or girlfriend. Sometimes traffickers will promise future careers to minors in music or modeling to gain access to them (Rand 2009). Hodge (2008) stated other times traffickers will directly approach families they have selected who are in poverty and offer to more or less purchase a child. The 2006 Trafficking in Persons

Report stated the traffickers will promise an education and career for the child in exchange for payments, yet the payments rarely if ever arrive.

New methods of recruiting are now made possible by the use of technology. The internet is a crucial tool for traffickers to recruit new victims (Hodge 2009; Hughes 2000; Kortla 2010). According to Hughes (2000), there are website that allows visitors to pay for live sex shows which include rape and torture. Kortla (2010) wrote that children can be bought and sold online for sexual purposes. Some methods do not use such indirect approaches to secure victims. Kidnapping is another method employed by traffickers (Hodge 2009; Kortla 2010; Estes and Weiner 2001).

After the victim is recruited, they are subject to physical, mental, and sexual abuse to establish dominance and control. Rape is commonly used; Friedman (2005) writes that female minors are often gang raped into submission. The extent of the manipulation can even result in the victim bonding with their traffickers (Reid 2010). The Trafficking in Persons Report of 2006 states that traffickers will force their victims to use drugs and deprive them of food to maintain control, which can lead to death. Rand (2009) stated that victims can be tattooed or branded and are given false identities; the victim is subject to physical attack if they do not comply with the rules or attempt to escape. Moving the victims to other parts of the country or out of the country are tactics commonly used (Hofstede 1999; Williamson and Prior 2009); Estes and Weiner (2001) stated that minors from the United States are sometimes trafficked to other countries including Japan and various places in the European Union. The recruitment and movement of victims suggests that trafficking can happen in various locations.

There is little information in the literature about the physical locations of sex trafficking victimization. Hodge (2008) suggested much of the activity is concealed from the eye of the public. However, sex traffickers often take their victims to areas with high demand, which can include areas with high populations, tourism, and military personnel (Williamson and Prior 2009). Some reports state that trafficking victims were brought to truck stops, hotels, street ways, and common residences to perform sex acts (Williamson and Prior 2009). Other researchers suggested sex trafficking victims can be found in areas of prostitution, adult clubs, and massage parlor (Stotts and Ramey 2009).

The Routine Activity Theory

In the late 1970s, Cohen and Felson (1979) proposed a new approach to examine crime trends and cycles called the routine activity approach. The researchers formulated this approach to gain a better understanding of why crime rates were increasing after World War II. Cohen and Felson (1979) observed that predatory crime rates were rising between 1947 and 1974 even though income, employment, and education were also rising, defying many of the period's popular theories of crime causation (Cohen and Felson 1979). The researchers explain that predatory crimes involve direct or proximal contact with a victim resulting in the victim becoming violated, injured, or having something stolen from them (Cohen and Felson 1979).

The routine activity theory has been used to examine predatory crimes ranging from sexual offenses (Mustaine and Tewksbury 2002; Tewksbury, Mustaine, and Stengel 2008) to modern day piracy (Sheetz 2013). The theory is also used for crime control practices by law enforcement (Boetig 2006). Examining the higher incidences of sexual assaults among females than males on college campuses, Mustaine and Tewksbury (2002) suggested that not all women are at the same risk of victimization but rather that some activities of a chosen lifestyle may increase one's risk of victimization. Mustaine and Tewksbury (2002) concluded that their results imply that exposure to motivated offenders in places that lack capable guardianship has a greater impact on victimization than certain lifestyle activities.

Concepts and Assumptions

The routine activity approach, now better known as the routine activity theory, chose to explore criminal events from two interesting viewpoints. First, the theory explores crime primarily from the perspective of the victim rather than the choices and influences of the offender, which differed from many criminological theories of the time (Sheetz 2013). The second viewpoint refers to human ecology to the extent that criminal acts are "...events which occur at specific locations in space and time, involving specific persons and/or objects" (Cohen and Felson 1979:589). Thus the theory seeks to explain how victims and offenders rendezvous in time and space for a criminal opportunity to come about.

The theory focuses heavily on a person's activities and suggests that the composition of daily activities or changes in these activities can impact criminal

opportunity (Cohen and Felson 1979). The authors explained that routine activities are normally prominent and recurring which can be located either at home, away from home, or at work. The activities often include employment, sexual outlet, housing, and social interaction but may include other activities if they are a part of normal life for the individual (Cohen and Felson 1979). The researchers suggested that activities outside of an individual's home, which involve others who are not family members, may lead to a greater chance of victimization. They also considered crime itself to be a routine activity that is mutually dependent on other routine activities. The theory compliments the rational choice model in its assumptions in regard to the behavior of offenders. The rational choice model suggests that people make choices about their behavior, criminal or otherwise, by deciding if the behavior is worth the potential risk, reward, and effort (Beauregard and Leclerc 2007; Gul 2009). Furthermore, offenders choose to commit crime as a means to reach a desired outcome, such as achieving sexual gratification, generating money, or to dominate others (Beauregard and Leclerc 2007). Ultimately, the routine activity theory states that there are three elements that need to exist for a predatory crime to take place. These elements are a motivated offender, a suitable target, and an absence of a capable guardian (Cohen and Felson 1979).

Elements

The first element of the theory which must be present for a predatory crime to take place is a motivated offender. Cohen and Felson (1979) did not elaborate deeply into what actually motivated an offender in the original presentation of the theory (Waldner and Berg 2008). Instead, the authors considered the presence of offenders in society to be common and abundant. The researcher emphasized that they "...take criminal inclination as a given..." and stressed that the activities which bring an offender and victim together demand more attention (Cohen and Felson, 1979:589). They go on to state that the motivated offender possesses criminal inclination or will, as well as the capability to carry out the crime (Boetig 2006; Cohen and Felson 1979). However, the researchers did apply more focus on offenders when it came to selecting a target for victimization.

A suitable target is the second vital element of the theory. Routine activities can supply the means to commit a predatory crime and also supply suitable targets to victimize (Cohen and Felson 1979). Suitable

targets of crime can be either people or objects that are positioned in time and space which risk being violated or stolen by a motivated offender (Felson and Clarke 1998). There are four factors which are considered when determining target suitability. Most importantly, a suitable target is one that the offender values (Felson and Clarke 1998). Value is not limited to monetary worth but can be any perceived value; therefore, value is not constant between offenders but rather it varies from person to person (Sheetz 2013). Value may also be modified by the other three factors named inertia, visibility, and access.

Inertia applies to both inanimate and animate objects alike. For inanimate objects, inertia typically refers to the weight or size of the item (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and Clarke 1998; Sheetz 2013). However, it may also pertain to whether or not an object is secured or attached to something, making it difficult to move. Therefore, objects that are light and small or even portable or self-propelled would have favorable inertia (Felson and Clarke 1998; Sheetz 2013). For animate objects, such as people, inertia is also determined by whether or not the victim can "...resist attackers with or without weapons" (Cohen and Felson 1979:591).

Visibility is another factor in determining target suitability. Visibility entails the level of exposure of a target (Felson and Clarke 1998). Sheetz (2013) explained that if a target is easily obtained or it is in plain sight it has a high level of visibility. While this may be straightforward for inanimate objects, the same concept applies to persons as well; Cohen and Felson (1979) wrote that a victim's daily activities will alter their personal visibility.

Access is the final factor used to determine target suitability. Simply put, access means how attainable a person or object is to tamper with. This factor is modified by a number of conditions. It can be restricted by the specific conditions of the location of the target, such as locks or security features (Sheetz 2013). Cohen and Felson (1979) explained that access is also modified if specific locations or certain activities place weapons or other instruments at the target's disposal. The researchers expand further and state that some activities could make a target more accessible because they are engaged in a task that limits their ability to resist attacks. Finally, Felson and Clarke (1998) explained that access can also be determined by the location of a target in a structure or the patterns the target follows on the street. All of these elements are

considered by the offender when determining the suitability of a target. If an offender does not find the target suitable, a predatory crime will not happen.

The third element of the theory required for predatory victimization is an absence of a capable guardian. When Cohen and Felson (1979) presented the theory, they proclaimed that non-law enforcement guardianship could be "...one of the most neglected elements in sociological research on crime..." (p. 590). A capable guardian is defined as any person, in close vicinity, that can prevent a predatory crime from happening (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and Clarke 1998; Sheetz 2013; Tyler and Beal 2010). This guardian, or group of guardians, does not need to be aware that they are preventing criminal activities (Boetig 2006; Felson and Clarke 1998). Also, the guardian can be either factually present or only believed to be present in the eyes of the offender (Sheetz 2013).

Furthermore, the present definition of capable guardian has expanded beyond an individual in close vicinity. Cohen and Felson (1979) allowed for the flexibility in the definitions of capable guardianship in their original proposal when they stated (a) the concepts of guardianship can apply to the self-protection of an individual; (b) guardians can oversee both a victim and the offender; (c) advancements in technology can be used to protect a person or defeat a target. Therefore, capable guardianship can include a variety of objects. Boetig (2006) expanded on the element of technology by including alarm and surveillance systems in his definition. In addition, Spano, Freilich, and Bolland (2008) elaborated specifically on self-protection by including the carrying of firearms in their definition and research. Tewksbury and his associates (2008) believed that a variety of studies have expanded the idea of guardianship yet it was still rather undeveloped at the time of their research. This may be due to the difficulty of measuring guardianship because a predatory criminal event would not happen if a capable guardian was present (Cohen and Felson 1979; Sheetz 2013). Felson and Clarke (1998) explained that the absence of capable guardianship is a very influential element of the theory because it can lead to the risk of victimization.

METHODS

This qualitative research explores the idea that prostitution may be linked to sex trafficking and explores what certain conditions may exist to allow

these crimes to occur at a local level. Data for this study were acquired by interviewing law enforcement personnel because these respondents may provide expert knowledge of the possible connections between prostitution and sex trafficking. The data collection period of the study spanned from March 19, 2013 to June 19, 2013. Data were collected at participating law enforcement agency's offices. These various agencies were located in, or had field offices in, the east coast region of the United States.

Sample

The study aimed for a purposive sample of current law enforcement officers, agents, investigators, and instructors. A total of thirteen agencies were contacted who provide services at either a municipal, county, state, or federal level. From the thirteen agencies contacted, two agencies agreed to participate resulting in five qualified participants. The respondent's average number of years of experience as a law enforcement agent was twenty two years. The inclusion criteria for perspective participants is comprised of men and women currently employed as local, state, or federal law enforcement agents in the previously mentioned region. Furthermore, qualified individuals performed patrol duties, investigate sex or vice crimes, or provided instructional duties related to these vice crimes. Individuals who did not perform those duties, those who did not consent to participate, or those who were no longer employed as law enforcement agents in the area were not included in the interviews.

Design and Procedures

The interview protocols were composed of standardized open-ended questions (Turner 2010). A total of seventeen questions were asked during the interviews. The interview included questions such as: Why do you think people enter into prostitution? Why do you think prostitution or sex trafficking occurs in certain locations or areas? Do you think the same motivations influence individuals to become traffickers? Do you think certain groups within a community may be tolerant towards prostitution or sex trafficking? If so, what groups?

All of the participants were interviewed with the same set of questions which followed the same wording and order. These questions allowed for respondents to relay detailed information and express their views. The researcher was allowed to ask follow up prompts so participants could elaborate on certain

responses or topics as needed. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the law enforcement agency's offices. Interview responses were handwritten by the researcher on notebook paper and later transcribed into a computerized text document.

The following procedures were followed in the course of the study to collect data. First, various law enforcement agencies were contacted along the east coast region of the United States. The researcher collected e-mail addresses and telephone numbers found from the individual agency's websites. These e-mail addresses and telephone numbers belonged to commanding officers in patrol and investigation units, public points of contact, program directors, or local field offices. Contact was primarily initiated through e-mail. Subsequent e-mails and phone calls were used to further discuss the study and to set up meetings. Once permission was obtained from ranking officers or administrators, appointments were set to interview people who met the inclusion criteria and consent forms were signed before the interview. The transcribed data were examined by using thematic content analysis. The researcher coded and categorized the responses to examine the data for any emerging patterns or themes (Alhojailan 2012). An analysis of the interview data uncovered a series of themes which include a desire for money, drug activity, lack of awareness, and varying tolerance levels. Each theme is interconnected between prostitution and sex trafficking activity as well as pimps, traffickers, and occasionally the locations where the activity takes place.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Theme One: Desire for Money

The first prevalent theme is the desire for money. The topic of money was notably present in each of the interview responses, a total of thirty six times in the five responses. According to the response data, the need or longing for money affected victims of trafficking, prostitutes, pimps and traffickers, and also had some connection with the locations where sex trafficking and prostitution can take place. Figure 1 presents the interview responses related to the desire for money.

Much of the responses explain that individuals often enter into prostitution to generate income. However, the respondents said the prostitution activity was not always purely profit, but sometimes took the place of regular employment or was used out of desperation to pay bills or support drug habits. These concepts were

similar to the reasons found in the literature review. The respondents reported that prostitutes were able to acquire "quick cash" in smaller quantities from working streets and alleyways but were able to collect one to four thousand dollars a night by working through high class hotels. The responses related to sex trafficking were somewhat similar to prostitution. The pathway into sex trafficking, as compared to prostitution, often resulted from a need to make money and a need for employment. However, there was a greater sense of desperation and less notions of profit or making a second income. Some of the responses suggest that the victims were expecting to make money but did not necessarily know that they would be forced into sex work. Sex trafficking related responses were also connected to money in that some victims were worth more money than others when they are trafficked or exploited, such as children or women with blonde hair. These transactions may lead to high profit for traffickers. Every interview response cited money as a reason a pimp or trafficker gets involved with prostitution and sex trafficking. A desire for money may be present even at the locations where these trafficking and prostitution activities happen; one respondent said that hotels and motels "...may be receiving a cut of the money" for allowing activity to occur on their property.

Theme Two: Drug Activity

The second theme is drug activity. The topic of drugs was frequently mentioned in the interview responses, twelve times in four of the five responses, and can be viewed in Figure 2.

The interview responses related drugs more frequently to prostitution than to sex trafficking victims or to pimps and traffickers. The responses suggested both prostitutes and sex trafficking victims may have drug dependency issues which may contribute to victimization or criminal activity, saying that prostitutes can be "pushed into it to support drugs" and that sex trafficking victims sometimes have "drug dependence." The respondents mentioned that at locations of both prostitution and sex trafficking there may be activity that is similar to drug trafficking, such as "a lot of traffic in the area that only stays for a short time," "high vehicle traffic in the area...", "a lot of traffic at a house," or "lots of short term traffic." One response also said that sex traffickers employ tactics similar to drug traffickers by using lookouts to spot police. Another response relayed that large scale drug dealers may become involved in sex trafficking as another way to make money.

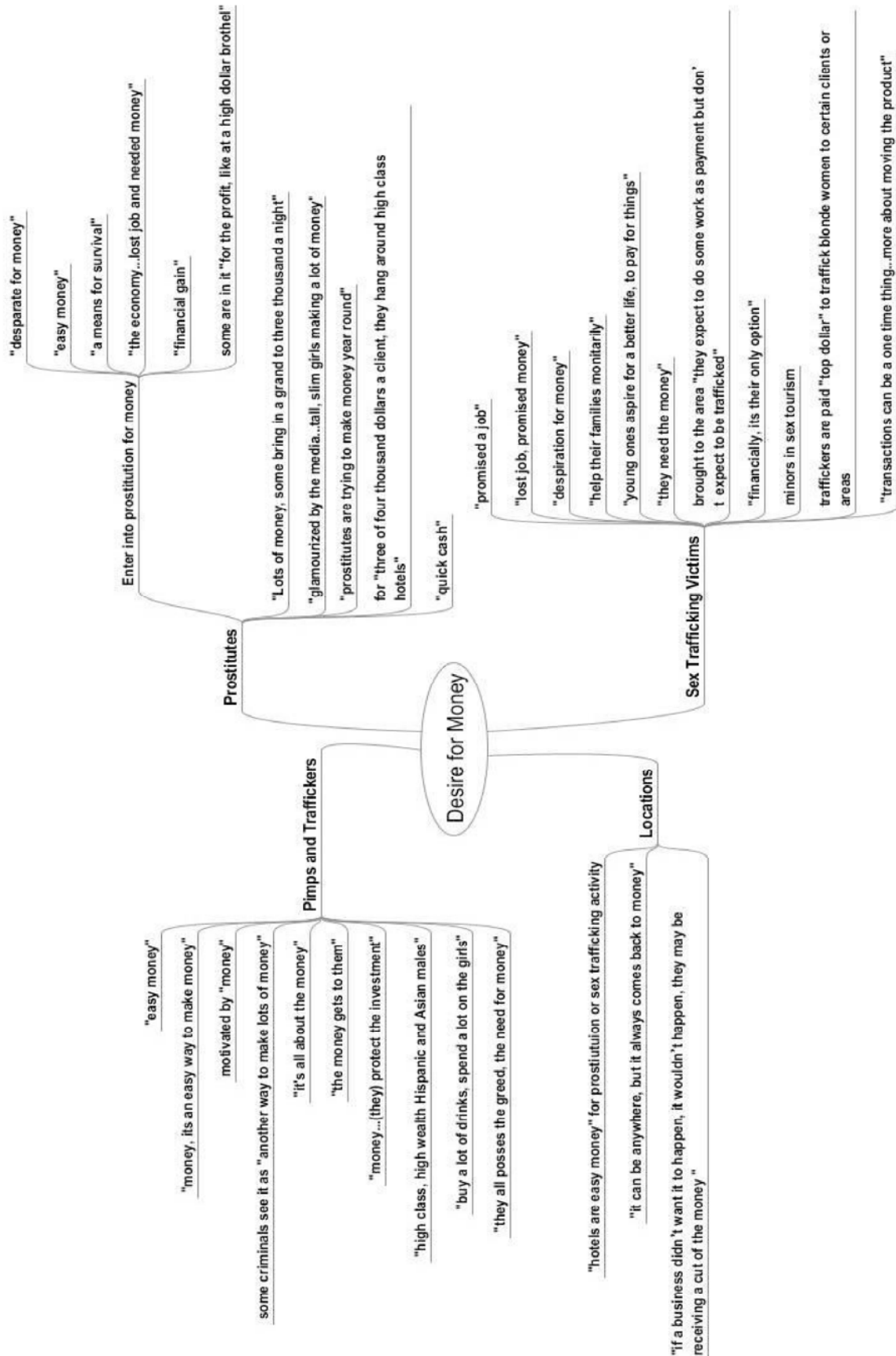


Figure 1: Theme One: Desire for Money.

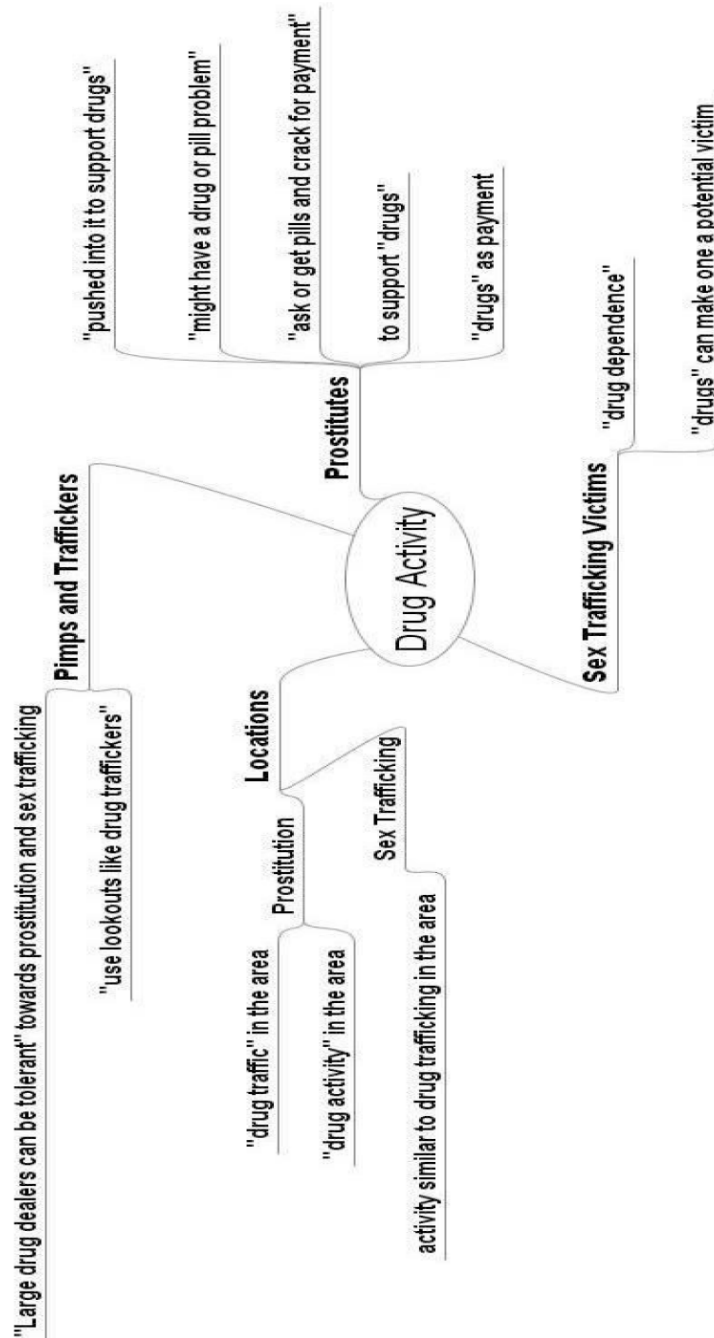


Figure 2: Theme Two: Drug Activity.

Theme Three: Lack of Awareness

A lack of awareness about prostitution and sex trafficking was another theme among the interview responses as shown in Figure 3.

The idea that there is a lack of awareness about the issues of sex trafficking and prostitution was common in the interview responses being mentioned nineteen times across the five respondents. The responses suggest that the majority of the awareness issue lies within the local community due to infrequent or

inaccurate reporting to law enforcement. Many of the respondents replied that there needs to be more community awareness and more reporting to police about suspicious activities. Also, the responses suggest that there is a problem with the perception of sex trafficking and prostitution in the local community. One participant responded, "Small towns are prime targets for sex trafficking, people think it can't happen in my town." Other respondents said "The public perception is that there are [ladies] standing on the street corner, that isn't the case in reality" and "The

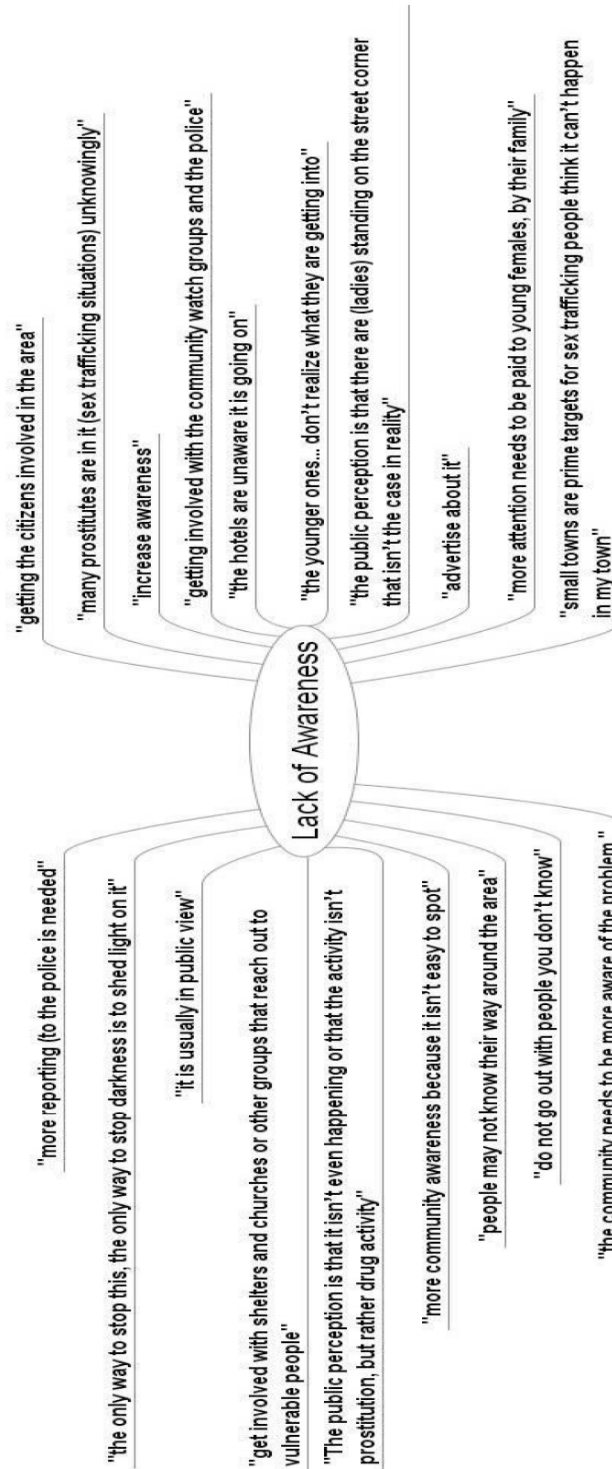


Figure 3: Theme Three: Lack of Awareness.

public perception is that it isn't even happening or that the activity isn't prostitution, but rather drug activity."

Theme Four: Variance in Tolerance Levels

The last theme is a variance in tolerance levels between sex trafficking and prostitution activities. Figure 4 shows the responses related to the theme.

The responses show a slight discrepancy in the tolerance towards prostitution versus sex trafficking. The data seems to show more tolerant attitudes towards prostitution than towards sex trafficking. About sex trafficking, respondents said "Sex trafficking, no one wants it to happen," "No one is tolerant to sex trafficking, except maybe very deviant and emotionally

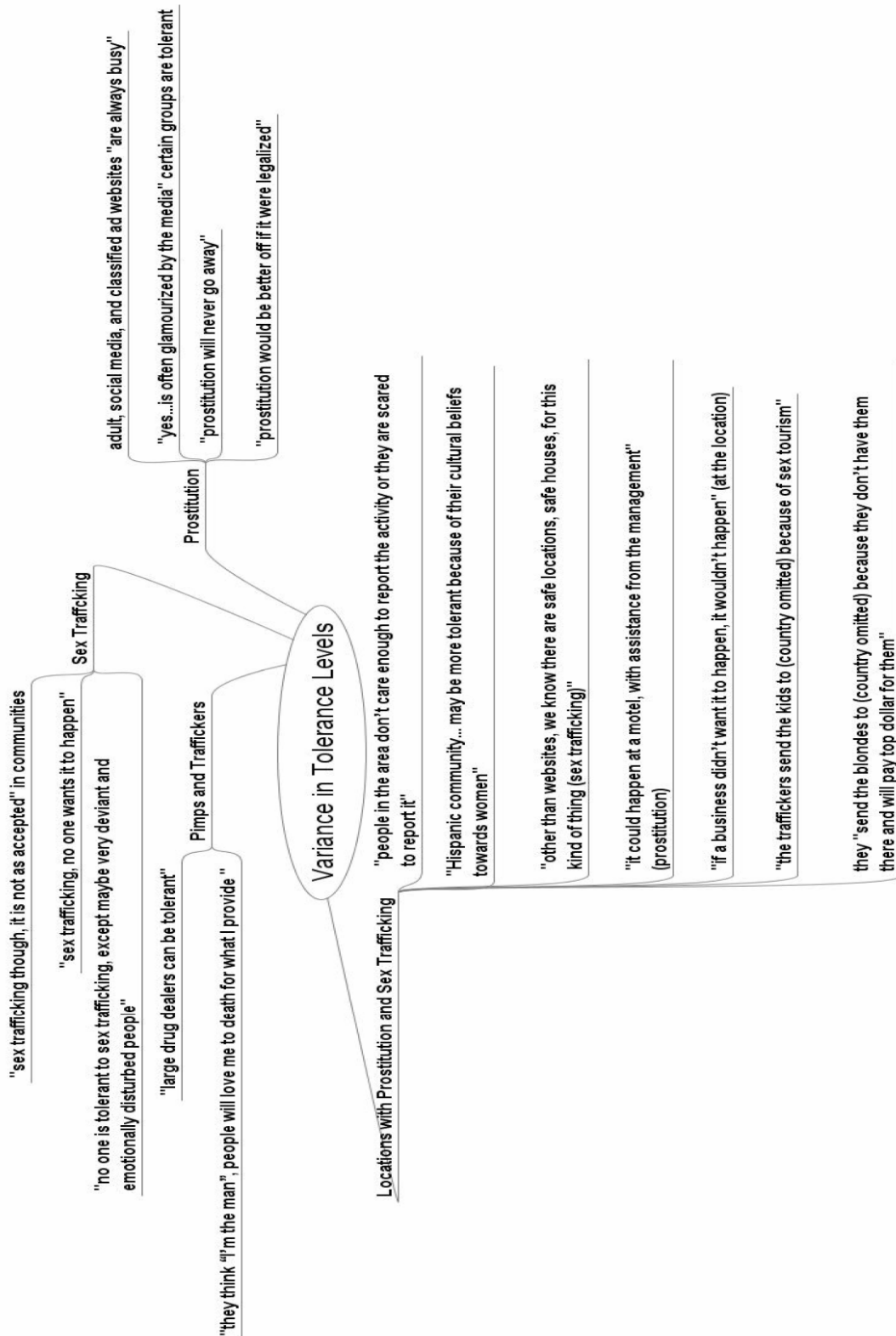


Figure 4: Theme Four: Variance in Tolerance Levels.

disturbed people,” and “Sex trafficking though, it is not as accepted.” On the other hand, responses about prostitution conveyed more tolerance; respondents said that websites with prostitution ads “are always busy,”

prostitution is “glamorized by the media,” “Prostitution will never go away,” and “prostitution would be better off if it were legalized.” However, the responses show that some locations or communities are tolerant to both

sex trafficking and prostitution. Participants mentioned some locations may be tolerant to these activities stating that "it could happen at a motel, with assistance from the management," "If a business didn't want it to happen, it wouldn't happen," and "...we know there are safe locations, safe houses for this kind of thing [sex trafficking]." Other interviewees responded about certain communities saying "People in the area don't care enough to report the activity..." and "Hispanic community...may be more tolerant because of their cultural beliefs towards women." One respondent said that traffickers will sell blondes or children to certain countries because they don't have blondes in the country and "will pay top dollar for them."

Connections to the Routine Activity Theory

Aside from the direct responses of the interviews, the routine activity theory may assist in exploring if engaging in prostitution can lead to sex trafficking victimization. Cohen and Felson (1979) explain that routine activities are normally prominent and recurring which can be located either at home, away from home, or at work. The material from the literature review and the interview responses seem to point to prostitution being a routine activity in a few ways. First, routine activities can include employment; the interview responses and literature convey that individuals are frequently involved in prostitution for the need of money (Hodge 2008; Shdaimah and Wiechelt 2012; Vanwesenbeeck 2013). Respondents said "I know one woman who lost her job suddenly and needed money," "They might initially enter prostitution because they are desperate for money. They enter it voluntarily to get easy money," and "A small number of them get into it for the profit, like at a high dollar brothel." These responses may suggest prostitution is a secondary income or the only means of employment for some individuals. Next, routine activities can include activities for sexual outlet or housing (Cohen and Felson 1979). Vanwesenbeeck (2013) said that some individuals enter into prostitution for excitement and sexual gratification. However, this concept was not expressed within the interview responses. The literature mentions that prostitutes will perform sex acts for shelter (Estes and Weiner 2001; Shdaimah and Wiechelt 2012). Again, this idea is not directly expressed in the interview responses. In addition, a routine activity takes place at home, work, or away from home. The interview responses mention prostitution happening in homes and away from homes, respondents said "A call in involves the prostitute staying at a secure location, like an apartment or motel..." "It turns out he was running

the business [prostitution] out of his house," and "At the street level, it is done in cars in alley ways. Or it can be done in a motel room." Finally, prostitution seems to be part of everyday life for some individuals who are desperate for money. Participants responded that prostitution is "year round" and "steady." The material in the interview responses and literature can allow one to assume prostitution as a routine activity through the lens of the theory.

With prostitution established as a routine activity, the next step is to determine how this activity can place one at risk for sex trafficking victimization. For the victimization to occur the three main elements of the theory, a motivated offender, a suitable target, and an absence of a capable guardian, should be present (Cohen and Felson 1979). According to the theory, the activity should place the victim in such a way that they intersect with an offender in such a manner that permits crime. First, a motivated offender needs to be identified. Cohen and Felson (1979) wrote that offenders were common and abundant in society and that motivated offenders would possess the ability and the inclination to commit the crime. Many of the interview responses and reports from the literature suggest traffickers have a desire for money, which may contribute to motivation and inclination. Respondents said "they all possess the greed, the need for money" and "it's all about money." The literature frequently explained that money was that primary reason someone gets involved as a trafficker (Hodge 2008; Kortla 2010; Rand 2009; Samarasinghe 2009; Steele 2010; Trafficking in Persons Report 2006; Williamson and Prior 2009; Zhang 2011). The interview responses also suggested other motivators such as "power and control" and one respondent said "They have a thing for being violent against women." The notion of ability is more abstract in this situation. The way pimps and traffickers recruit victims is either through psychological manipulation or physical means, by appealing to weaknesses and desire or blatant kidnapping (Hodge 2009; Kortla 2010; Estes and Weiner 2001). This would suggest traffickers have the physical power and fortitude to qualify for the ability requirement of the theory's motivated offender. In addition, pimps can easily become traffickers by prostituting a child or by how they treat adult prostitutes. According to the literature, sex trafficking victims are often found, recruited, and exploited in areas of existing prostitution (Estes and Weiner 2001; Hodge 2008). This would suggest traffickers and pimps that become traffickers have connections or experience in the commercial sex industry which would contribute to the ability and

inclination aspects of a motivated offender. The interview responses offer some support to this notion where respondents have said that trafficking is tolerated by drug dealers, that sex traffickers use similar tactics as drug dealers, and pimps and traffickers can be working in cooperation of hotel or motel operations. For these reasons, a trafficker may qualify as a motivated offender.

The next element of the theory is the presence of a suitable target. There are a variety of possibilities of what may be considered a suitable target. In the situation of a potential victim of sex trafficking, a suitable target would be a person that a trafficker considers to have favorable value, inertia, visibility, and access. Value in this situation would most often refer to monetary worth, however the concept can be any perceived value; therefore, value can vary from offender to offender (Sheetz 2013). Other perceived value, in terms of sex trafficking, could be a demand for victims with specific characteristics. As previously mentioned, money making is frequently cited in the literature and the interview responses. Some responses suggest some victims are more valuable in certain markets, respondents said "In this area, it is likely that sex trafficking victims are highly attractive females, whereas overseas it is more about age" and "(the traffickers) want to get a specific body type, like young kids or attractive young blondes. They take them and send the blondes to (country omitted) because they don't have them there and will pay top dollar for them." Therefore, potential sex trafficking victims may have qualities that a trafficker considers valuable such as age and physical characteristics other than just payment from sex work or from selling the person to another.

Inertia is another factor an offender considers when selecting a suitable target. Inertia typically means size, weight, and portability and when inertia refers to animate objects it also refers to the person's ability to resist their attackers (Cohen and Felson 1979). Hence, an individual who is unarmed and easily overpowered would have favorable inertia. In terms of sex trafficking, some individuals like minors may have more favorable inertia than others. There is little in the literature that relates directly to inertia; however one may consider an individual with mental illness or drug dependencies to have favorable inertia as they are targeted by traffickers (Estes and Weiner 2001). Two participants cited drug use as a risk factor for becoming victimized in sex trafficking, but no other support for inertia was uncovered.

The next factor of target suitability is visibility. Sheetz (2013) explained that if a target is easily obtained or it is in plain sight it has a high level of visibility. Some prostitutes and minors have favorable visibility. Both the interview participants and the literature cite social networking and other websites as locations where intelligence gathering, recruitment, solicitation, and exploitation occur (Hughes 2000; Kortla 2010). Other aspects of favorable visibility include where potential victims perform their routine activities (Cohen and Felson 1979). Some interview responses cite "street walking" and other prostitution activities happening on the street level "in alleyways", saying that prostitution is "usually in public view."

Access is the final factor in determining target suitability. Access means how attainable a person is to tamper with. This factor is modified by the specific conditions of the location of the target, such as locks or security features, and weapons or other instruments at the target's disposal, as well as activities a potential target is engaged which would limit their ability to resist attack (Cohen and Felson 1979; Sheetz 2013). Again, drug use may make the target more vulnerable because some drugs and the symptoms of drug use may limit one's ability to resist attack. Also, a prostitute engaging in an "out call" could be considered engaging in activity that limits their ability to resist attack. A respondent defines out call as "the prostitute leaves their area and goes to the (offender's) home or hotel room" to perform the sex acts. The prostitute would most likely be in an unfamiliar location and could be overpowered and victimized. Some recruiting areas can give traffickers favorable access to potential victims. Traffickers have been known to recruit at transit stations, shopping areas, and homeless shelters (Estes and Weiner 2001). These areas can lack locks and security features and can be open to the public, providing favorable access. If a prostitute has favorable value, inertia, visibility, and access they could be considered a suitable target by a sex trafficker.

The last key element that mitigates victimization in the theory is the absence of a capable guardian. A capable guardian is defined as any person, in close vicinity, that can prevent a predatory crime from happening (Cohen and Felson 1979). This guardian, or group of guardians, does not need to be aware that they are preventing criminal activities (Boetig 2006; Felson and Clarke 1998). Also, the guardian can be either factually present or only believed to be present in the eyes of the offender (Sheetz 2013). In addition, capable guardianship can include the self-protection

and advancements in technology which can be used to protect a person or defeat a target (Cohen and Felson 1979). There were a few interview responses that pertain to capable guardianship.

Some respondents spoke about pimps, saying "The pimp has constant contact with the girl, but provides security that protects the investment" and "He won't let her out of his sight. Always together even in public. If she could get away from him she would expose the whole operation." In this situation, the pimps themselves could be acting as capable guardians by being in close proximity to the potential victim. This may suggest that renegades, prostitutes that work independently from pimps (Williamson and Baker 2009), may be at more risk than those who work with pimps. On the other hand, pimps can turn to into traffickers themselves so this may be an inaccurate assumption. According to the interview responses, the police may act as capable guardians; respondents said that "They [the traffickers] will move out of the area fast if they catch wind that someone is on to them or the police are near" and that some traffickers use lookouts "to alert those involved if law enforcement are coming." In addition to increased police patrols, one respondent suggested using technology at a location to reduce victimization by saying "add more security...increase lighting, light it up."

In the realm of prostitution and sex trafficking technology could both mitigate and improve capable guardianship. The internet has been used to recruit sex trafficking victims, solicit prostitution, and exploit victims (Hughes 2000; Kortla 2010). There is often a sense of facelessness or anonymity while using internet which could benefit sex traffickers as they attempt to obtain private information or recruit individuals by using false advertisements. On the other hand, the internet can increase capable guardianship for potential victims by maintaining a physical separation from the offender and providing the methods to research the advertisement or business the traffickers hide behind. The interview responses suggest prostitutes use internet sites advertise their services; by utilizing technology the prostitutes could also investigate or otherwise vet their potential clients. It appears that prostitution activities can contribute to the lack of capable guardianship in some instances.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

There were a number of responses to the interview questions that are worthy of further discussion.

Question thirteen asks "do you think a prostitute could be considered a suitable target for sex trafficking victimization in regards to the routine activities theory," all of the respondents answered in the affirmative but one response is particularly notable, "Yes. Many prostitutes are in it [sex trafficking situations] unknowingly. A voluntary prostitute is definitely a vulnerable target." While this response shows support for the routine activity theory it also speaks to the narrow line between prostitution and sex trafficking. One participant said "It is hard to find a line between prostitution and sex trafficking." Prostitutes may be sex trafficking situations without knowing it. The responses to the question "do you think people can be forced into prostitution" further illustrate this idea. The responses were predominantly affirmative, including "Yes, I've known it to happen." This may be particularly true for minors in prostitution. They are often subjected to psychological manipulation and might not know the extent of their situation. Pimps may also unknowingly be traffickers due to the methods they employ to control their prostitutes. These situations contribute to the difficulty of estimating the accurate number of sex trafficking incidents in the United States and other countries.

Interview responses also suggest that sex trafficking incidents can occur in low income areas but they are not limited to those areas. The following responses suggest the activity can happen outside of low income areas;

- It can be anywhere.
- Sex traffickers might set it up in an environment to present the females to the clientele (in a more wealthy area).
- Sex trafficking can be done in high class places
- ...high end dance clubs. These wealthy guys "schmooze" the girls, buy them drinks and spend a lot on [the girls] and then they bring them to their boat [where they are kidnapped or captured].
- Small towns are prime targets for sex trafficking.

Other responses said that sex trafficking can happen with the cooperation of hotel and motel businesses as well as in low income areas. The combinations of responses suggest the activity is not limited to certain locations. The solicitors may come from various locations as well. Participants said that

solicitors could be from the local community, visitors from nearby towns, or tourists. One respondent said "...some come out of the military base (from a nearby city)"

Limitations

All qualitative exploratory research is subject to limitations that this research project itself is not immune to. Sampling, design methodology, and researcher bias are areas of concern with this type of research. While the use of purposive sampling aided in targeting individuals who are versed in the investigation of sex trafficking and prostitution, there comes with it a set of limitations. First, due to the small sample size and limited geographical sampling area, the responses do not represent the opinions or experiences of all law enforcement agents in United States, making it difficult to generalize these findings to other areas of the country. Therefore the responses should not be projected to relate to every law enforcement agent. Next, this research does not examine all of the possible instances of sex trafficking and prostitution due to the complex and hidden nature of the incidents. Consequently, responses that detail sex trafficking and prostitution situations should not be generalized to explain every reason a person might become involved in prostitution or sex trafficking. Finally, purposive sampling can suffer from researcher bias in determining which individuals are qualified to participate. This project made an effort to limit bias by using broad inclusion criteria as detailed in the methods section.

The sample size may have been stunted for several reasons. First, potential participants may be hesitant to engage in the interviews for concerns about exposing their or their agency's undercover identities and operations or risking harm to the victims they are trying to help. Next, there was no reward offered and little motivation for law enforcement agents to participate in this study. Conducting a raffle or providing monetary compensation for participate could perhaps have increased the interest towards the study. Also, the sample was limited geographically to the eastern United States due to a narrow data collection window and in-existent funding to support further travel for face-to-face interviews. Future researchers should make attempts to increase the sample size in an effort to increase the validity of their study and to allow for more accurate generalizations.

Finally, thematic content analysis is subject to researcher interpretation and bias. The research

selects what general topic or issue is to be connected to the response data, so there can be a possibility for the researcher to project opinion or search for support of a hypothesis without merit. Attempts were made to limit this bias by both counting word and topic frequency and using open-ended questions during the interview process.

CONCLUSIONS

This project explored the links of prostitution and sex trafficking by interviewing law enforcement agents experienced in investigations of these incidents. The participants were asked questions related to prostitution, sex trafficking, and the routine activity theory. In general, the responses uncovered a drive for money, drug abuse, and questionable tolerance levels impact prostitution and sex trafficking in addition to a lack of awareness about sex trafficking. Furthermore, the interview response show connections between prostitution and sex trafficking and that sex trafficking incidents are not limited to low income areas, clients, or victims.

In conclusion, despite some limitations, this study adds important findings to existing literature in criminology in terms of future research implications and important policy implications. When interview responses and literature review material were compared to the theoretical framework of routine activity theory, the theory appears to be a suitable framework to explain if prostitution puts one at a greater risk for sex trafficking victimization. However, the theory should be scientifically tested to support the idea in the near future. Researchers will need to accurately identify and test for capable guardianship in the situation. Researchers should consider including pimps and the internet as factors contributing to capable guardianship. Researchers should also consider the effects of drug abuse and target suitability.

This study found that there is a considerable lack of awareness about sex trafficking in local communities. As both the literature and the interview responses suggest, prostitutes sometimes are not even aware they are involved in sex trafficking incidents. Pimps may become sex traffickers without their knowing. Some sex trafficking incidents appear to be related to drug traffic or prostitution activity and may go unreported or under-investigated by law enforcement. Perhaps more education and training should be made available to law enforcement, victim service providers, and medical professionals. Also, local communities

should be informed about suspicious activities to be cognizant of and to report those activities.

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