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## SERVICE PROVIDERS PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF SEXUALLY EXPLOITED WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

Ruth Harrison

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SERVICE PROVIDERS PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF  
SEXUALLY EXPLOITED WOMEN AND CHILDREN  
IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Ruth Harrison  
September 2018

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore and expose the needs of sexually exploited women and children. The participants were recruited from a few non-profit agencies in the Inland Empire area. This study found one of the most underlying challenge facing the participants when working with sexually exploited victims was the unavailability of resources, particularly, shortage of transitional housing for them. Another finding that featured prominently in the study was related to a need for continuous training and education for the service providers in order to stay current with trends. The study also identified the rapport building challenges faced by service providers and the risk of re-traumatization for these victims and proper types of treatment for these individuals.

This study recommends that the policymakers work with other key stakeholders to provide resources to these service providers in addition to providing a favorable environment. The collaboration should also include the law enforcement agencies and the judicial officers to protect the victims from further suffering. Furthermore, the study suggests that attention should be placed on the development of awareness campaigns and stronger voices of support and advocacy for these victims.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formation

There has been an increase in the sexual exploitation of women and children here in the United States over the last 10 years, and the US State Department estimated between 700,000 and 2,000,000 women and children that are trafficked each year (Shauer & Wheaton, 2006). The average age of a child entering prostitution is 12 years of age (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). In the United States there has been estimates of over 100,000 or more victims lured into the sex trade industry (Shauer & Wheaton, 2006). The exact number of victims is still unclear to this date and that is due to several factors and one being the inability to identify a person that is being trafficked and therefore resulting in the lack of evidence (Shauer & Wheaton, 2006).

When a person is arrested for an unrelated charge there is no way for law enforcement to determine what the reasoning behind the charge is (Tan, 2016). If a minor is arrested for drug trafficking there are not specifically tailored questions being done to help identify these victims. The lack of investigation and appropriate assessment are not being utilized in these types of cases (Tan, 2016). Moreover, when the victims do not disclose their situation for fear of retaliation causes barriers for all those involved in identifying these victims (Shauer & Wheaton, 2006). Lastly, Shauer and Wheaton (2016) report it has



been recognized that victims are lied to, mislead and abused emotionally and physically, they lack the ability to trust which includes government systems.

Some of the research suggests that the entire sexual exploitation is a form of organized crime that involve powerful people (Shauer & Wheaton, 2006).

What we do know about sexual exploitation is that it can affect anyone and has unfortunately affected many families and communities. There is data that supports that the poor and uneducated women are more at risk for victimization. Regardless of what country of origin women are almost always on the receiving end of not equaling up their male counterparts (Bolin & Roswurm, 2014; Fedina, Perdue, & Williamson, 2016; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006). Countries that are dealing with challenges from political and economic instability, lack of employment opportunities and gender inequality, we see that woman are undervalued and the most impacted. (Fedina, et al., 2016). In many countries women have less of a chance to earn a living, they also have limited influential power and are the least desired in the workforce as well as their communities. Thus, they are easy targets for sexual exploitation and being trafficked. (Bolin & Roswurm, 2014; Fedina, et al., 2016; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006).

As we further explore sexual exploitation and underage children and we look at their specific risks factors we find that runaways, homeless and those that have suffered abuse and abandoned by families (Ostrowschi, et al., 2011). The consequences of sexually abused women and children are that they are more likely to live with trauma. Consequently, it will impact their development, health

and ability to acclimate into the societal norms. Sexually exploited women are likely to suffer serious psychological distress, PTSD, or some form of anxiety and depression (Ostrovski, et al.). Any forms of sexual exploitation violate an individual's human rights and is a social injustice. The social services field has devoted some recent attention to trafficking, especially of women (Lombardo, 2013; Mendoza, 2014). Social workers who are working with sexually exploited women and children will need to know how to best help meet their needs. It is not clear based on government or non-profit organization agency information of any protocols or policies that guides social workers on how to best serve this population (Bromfield, 2016; Kotrla, 2010). Once social workers understand the political context of trafficking as a vehicle to move an adversary agenda. Additionally, removing the biases and the moral compass and understanding forced opposed to consensual sex work (Bromfield, 2016). Furthermore, understanding the violence and exploitation of these victims and the feminist sexism undertone. These details can hinder social workers from identifying best practices for work with sexually exploited victims at the micro, mezzo and macro levels (Bromfield, 2016).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the needs of sexually exploited women and children in the Inland Empire and explore ways to assist them. The California Department of Justice report inferred that victims of human trafficking

are most of the time unwilling to report or attempt to escape (Mendoza, 2014). With these reporting challenges which are due to victims being in fear of retaliation from both exploiters whom are sometimes family members (Tan, 2016). There is also the issue involving fear of reporting to law enforcement, which could result in criminal charges. These issues have caused challenges in the available data that can assist in capturing the extent of the issue (Tan, 2016). From the mid 2010 to 2012, the nine-regional human trafficking task forces in California discovered 1,277 victims, started 2,552 investigations and arrested 1,798 individuals, according to a report by the California Department of Justice (Winburn, 2013).

In San Bernardino County, the Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation (CASE) organization has reported to have provided services and resources to close to 75 young victims (Lombardo, 2013; Mendoza, 2014; Winburn, 2013). San Bernardino County District Attorney Michael Ramos shared that there has been a belief that this type of offensive crime only happens on the other side of the world and unfortunately, it is happening right here in our own country (Mendoza, 2014). Per Assemblyman Tim Donnelly the statistics on human trafficking in the High Dessert are believed to be incomplete. In the last year, there were two confirmed cases and not for lack of activity, but because of a lack of victim identification (Lombardo, 2013). Given that social work agencies and social workers themselves may not be trained or equipped to helping this population it is important to understand about how to best serve these

individuals. The rationale behind the method is that it will provide insight from the providers in how they work with sexually exploited women and children at the individual level, what systematic issues need to be addressed, and what policies currently exist that are a strength.

### Significance of the Project for Social Work

As we continue to see recent literature revealing there is an increase in sexual exploitation here in the United States. In 2016 alone there has been more than 3,000 cases of trafficking much of which involved sex trafficking per the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (Tan, 2016). The reason why this study is needed is because we need to have a clearer understanding of the current climate on our field's preparedness and competency in knowing how to treat and service sexually exploited women and children. The results of this study will contribute to many facets of social work field. At the practice level, service providers can provide appropriate trainings that will complement their expertise in working with these victims and provide them with other identification tools and intervention methods that can aid in healing the wound. The expression healing the wound is an outcome in which many victims experience and is declared to be essential to the recovery as well as reintegration of women who experienced sexual exploitation, from the first contact with survivors to identifying services that meet their needs (Hom & Woods, 2013). At the policy level, the findings from this study will inform what policies and protocols need to

be reevaluated or implemented so that agencies are better prepared to help this community in need. Based on the purpose of this study, the phase of the generalist intervention process that will be addressed is the assessing phase. Due to the lack of limited data on sexually exploited women and children and their unique needs, this study will investigate the observations and experiences from directly linked service providers. The research questions this study will answer are: What needs do sexually exploited women and children need according to service providers in the Inland Empire and how can they best be helped?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter examines the trends and consequences of sexually exploited women and children. As well as explore the level or preparedness for service providers. Examine what law makers are proposing for the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation here in the United States. Moreover, investigate what the thriving sexual exploitation infrastructure looks like in modern times. We will explore the trauma faced by these victims and explore potential treatment options. Lastly, attempt to assess the needs of these individuals as well as resource options or lack thereof.

#### Sexually Exploited Women

##### Trends

According to the Bureau of Justice statistics while many of those being exploited and trafficked are undocumented immigrants 82% of sex victims between 2008-2010 were identified as U.S. citizens (Tan, 2016). Bromfield (2016) suggests there is no uniform data collection system that tracks the number of sexually exploited victims in the United States. Furthermore, censoring the ability to assess or track the number of victims. Moreover, there continues to be confusion as to what establishes a sexually exploited victim

(Bromfield, 2016). With all of these misconceptions it lends itself to a lack of a clear definitive description these crimes continue to have no validity and potentially continue to go unreported.

When we look at this issue from a multiethnic and gender perspective culturally there are similarities in how women are viewed and treated (Bromfield, 2016; Wolfe, 2015). It is because of those biases and other factors that help to influence victimization of women and children in the sex trade industry (Bromfield, 2016). According to Bromfield (2016) African American women are at a higher level of risk for victimization and criminalization opposed to Caucasians. From global perspective women are always in the higher percentage in relation to unemployment and poverty. When a woman can obtain employment, they are forced to work in poor working conditions for significantly lower wages. (Bromfield, 2016; Wolfe, 2015). In the United States women typically earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by men (Wolfe, 2015). Individuals who reside in low socioeconomic communities are predisposed to an environment that fosters illegal activities. An environment where women are harassed by pimps and johns and can be actively recruited into the sex trade (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). Of the 3,000 cases reported in 2016 according to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center most sexually exploited victims are undocumented immigrants (Tan, 2016). According to the Bureau of Justice, between 2008-2010, 82 percent of the reported victims were U.S. citizens and most likely to be black and under 25 years of age (Tan, 2016).

## Consequences of Sexual Exploitation

Because of the inhumane nature of the sexual exploitation women are at risk for physical health issues as well as mental health related issues due to trauma (Hom & Woods, 2013). These health issues include anxiety disorder, substance abuse related issues, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, self-harming behaviors and overall body related symptoms and other mental health related issues (Hom & Woods). Moreover, until there is more viable data that supports the impact of sexually exploited women to the public healthcare system, there is limited data to support how the trauma of sexual exploitation affects women (Hom & Woods). Due to the nature of this industry and the potential danger created for the informant and researcher and the overall secrecy under which trafficking occurs, leaves a gap in information. This gap further leaves service providers questioning how to address the unique needs of this population. As a result, survivors are left without the specialized care they need and therefore allowing the problem to persist (Hom & Woods).

## Sexually Exploited Children

### Trends

There has been a surge of attention in human services literature and the media in recent years pertaining to the issue of sexual exploitation (Hughes, 2008). On the international level cases have increased and have sparked an



increase in public awareness in the United States. According to Hughes (2008) people remain unaware that there are more U.S. victims of sexual exploitation than foreign nationals. Recent literature suggests that American youths are the most vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual exploitation in the United States (Clawson & Goldblatt, 2007). Since this finding, authorities in the field have begun to refer to this crime against children as “domestic minor sex trafficking,” or DMST (Clawson & Goldblatt). Some authorities propose that there are presently at least 100,000 DMST victims in the United States (Kotrla, 2010).

Much like the gap reported earlier regarding the number of cases of women being sexually exploited the same goes for children. Due to many incidents of unreported cases of sexual exploitation and reliable data regarding the number of youth in the U.S. are not currently available (Thompson, Hirshberg, Corbett, Valila, & Howley, 2011). The typical age that a child is being persuaded into sexual exploitation is between 11 and 14, although some are as young as 5 years old (Smith, 2008; U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Research shows that at least 70 percent of women involved in sex trade industry were introduced into the industry before reaching the age of 18 (Hughes, 2007).

In addition to those on the streets U.S. youths also become victims through the internet (Kotrla, 2010). Not only do traffickers advertise to children on-line but they also search for victims through social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and sites like Craigslist (Kotrla, 2010). Additionally,

traffickers publish legitimate appearing advertisements for employment or other opportunities to lure victims into the sex trade industry.

Shared Hope International (2009) conducted a study across 10 cities in the United States discovered that the internet was used in all 10 locations as a way for selling children for sexual purposes. According to Albanese (2007), who reviewed the findings of The U.S. Department of Justice reports, pimps and traffickers target children and youth at arcades, malls and bus stations. Additionally, these perpetrators also focus on girls who appear to be runaways, with no occupational skills or finances. Some victims report that while attending school they were approached by pimps and traffickers who were playing the role of boyfriend. They are groomed by gift giving, compliments and overall building a rapport and developing trust (Smith, 2008).

#### Consequences of Sexual Exploitation

Due to children limited life experiences and impulsivity challenges all allow them to innately be more susceptible than adults to exploitation. Additionally, making them easier to deceive and manipulate (Varma, Gillespie, McCracken, & Greenbaum, 2015). Unfortunately, studies focusing specifically on child sexual exploitation and trafficking in the United States are very limited (Gozdziak & Bump, 2008; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013). Much like sexually exploited women, children face some of the same health-related issues including STDs, forced abortions, mental health related issues, and somatic symptoms.

At this time there is no current information detailing how many children escape or exit the industry, however there are reports that the mortality rate is 40 times higher than the national average (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). The trauma that a child experiences from being pushed into the sex trade industry is beyond likely to end in death (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver & Whitebeck, 2006). The survivors that do make it out have been capable of effectively reintegrating back into society and in their communities. The authorities suggest that due to children's resiliency they are capable of functioning in society. Furthermore, explaining how resiliency is a significant psychological phenomenon occurring during childhood, without it many children would struggle to make it into maturity with the constant difficulty they face on a daily basis (LaFromboise et al., 2006).

#### Service Provider Preparedness

The current literature supports the knowledge about sexual exploitation solely from the international realm of the industry. There is nearly no scientific data detailing the process by which American woman and children are sold into bondage within our own borders (Hom & Woods, 2013). Without an enhanced understanding and knowledge of survivor's psychological experiences, it may be next to impossible to acquire culturally applicable services for these individuals (Hom & Woods). Currently, a majority of the data gives content accounts of sex trafficking experiences with little participant follow-up (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). There are limited reports of survivor's encounters, from a clinical perspective.

With such a large gap in research in this specific area makes it difficult for mental health providers' attempts to treat and reintegrate survivors (Cecchet & Thoburn).

The significance of the project for social work is again being able to identify these individuals through proper assessments, to establish the proper form treatment for these individuals, and to bridge the gap between first responders and other service providers on how to better serve these individuals. Enlisting the help from the medical community is also critical, a nurse also has equal responsibility of preventing and controlling this crime. With the support of law enforcement nurses can help identify and recover sexually exploited victims and recognize when to call for more help (Clause & Lawler, 2013). Furthermore, nurses are often the first line of help and therefore need to be educated on the warning signs and symptoms of trauma. This could aid in the rescue and recovery of victims (Clause & Lawler). It's very imperative to have knowledge and understanding of the importance of bringing awareness of this issue to all community members and leaders and law makers in efforts to establish laws that stop blaming the victim. The victim which is more than likely a woman is punished and place in jail and fined and exposed to more degradation and humiliation while the Trafficker goes undetected (Tan, 2016). This study hopes to continue bringing awareness and establish the needs of these victims particularly in the Inland Empire. This will enable service providers, community leaders and members, politicians and law makers to be better equipped to serve these victims.

## The New Era of Sexual Exploitation

The United States is the world's second largest country behind Germany to sexually exploit and traffic women and children. (Fedina, Perdue, & Williamson, 2016; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006). There is an educated estimation that there are as many as 300,000 women being trafficked here in the United States. The numbers vary per study and this mainly because the lack of definitive data and scientific research on the scope of this problem (Hakes, 2011; Schauer & Wheaton, 2006). As previously stated the average age of a child entering prostitution is 12 years of age (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014; Hakes, 2011). The sex trade industry has manifested itself into a large profitable business that relies on the destitute to increase its margin shares. According to The U.S. Congress reports the trafficking of women and children was the third largest source of revenue for organized crime worldwide, followed closely behind drug and firearm trafficking (Shauer & Wheaton).

Today's sex trafficker has a team that is composed of 4 roles the first being the one who arranges the trafficking work (Shauer & Wheaton). The middlemen whom are known as traffickers, the seller of women and transporters. Thirdly, you have the business operator which includes brothel, night club owners, and pimps. The fourth group are unethical government officials and law enforcement who receive payment to overlook what's going on. They also aide in the capture of runaways and return them to their captors and whom also have a part in the ownership of this business (Shauer & Wheaton). So, today's trafficker

are business people with ties and connections that help continue the manifestation of enslavement on women and children.

## Roles of United States Law Makers

### International Level

Research has pointed out that there are international measures being taken to attempt to address this ever-growing crisis. According to Schauer and Wheaton, the United States authorities have taken a stand and leading the development of federal laws for trafficking. Furthermore, taking the initiative to police itself and other countries in efforts to reduce trafficking as well as other forms of human slavery. Lastly, the United States in its efforts to end human slavery by urging the passing of trafficking laws that provide local law enforcement with the necessary tools to be able to rescue victims, identify, arrest, and prosecute traffickers to the full extent of the law. Much like a double edge sword where the U.S. Immigration policies efforts have increased its international restrictions, and enforcement has been heightened. We still have the issue with poor countries, high unemployment and corrupt governments which enhances the temptation for a woman and a child to leave in hopes of a better future elsewhere (Bolin & Roswurm, 2014; Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014; Clause & Lawler, 2013; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006).

## Stateside

To take our focus back on the issues within the United States, The End of Sex Trafficking Act of 2013 mandates that those who seek sex with children will be prosecuted under federal law, especially across state line (Bromfield, 2016). Yes, there are laws being put in place to hopefully deal with this crisis and yet we run into another issue which involves prosecuting cases of this type (Heil & Nichols, 2015). Heil and Nichols report that prosecutors are claiming to have difficulty being able to prove that the victim is in fact being trafficked. The lack of police evidence which could include poor evidence collection, lack of training in awareness, lack of resources, lack of victim services and protection, lack of victim participation and unwillingness to testify against the perpetrator (Heil & Nichols). The time it takes to prosecute a case can cause a victim to disappear. Additionally, wrongful deportation due to inter-governmental agencies lack communication. These elements make it challenging for prosecutors to prosecute fully of the law when it comes to these cases (Heil & Nichols; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006).

In addition to the laws being implemented there is the launching of a collective task force one called Innocence Lost National Initiative (ILNI). This task force consists of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies working together with U.S. Attorney's Offices in efforts to combat the issue (Hakes, 2011). They gather for training opportunities and work on solutions collectively that could assist with these crimes. Furthermore, they set up different task force and

they are out in the community searching the areas that are known to have sexual exploitation taking place which include street tracks, truck stops, and internet websites (Hakes, 2011).

### Identifying Needs

Now we must look at the psychological experiences of the sexually exploited victim. This can better assist the behaviorist community in how to properly treat and serve them. It's important to understand that those serving this group of individuals will need to be aware of the inner workings of the sex trade world. (Hom & Woods 2013; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006). Moreover, the importance of being aware that these victims are coerced, lied to and physically and emotionally abused, threatened and killed. Also, have knowledge of the different roles of these Traffickers play and how they influence these victims. Additionally, understanding the pimp mentality and the various methods of control they use. Moreover, be aware that a lot of these women enter this situation as a minor and continue into adulthood and not all victims are poor and uneducated women (Hom & Woods 2013; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006).

The form of therapeutic methodologies is limited when it comes to this group of individuals (Knight, 2006). Which can be due to the lack of scientific research on this issue and the inability to get close enough to these victims to better assess their situations. The lack of proper assessment tools when these individuals encounter service providers (Hakes, 2011). There are some scarce



resources according to some front-line service providers and with limited data we can't begin the healing process for these victims (Hom & Woods, 2013). Hom and Woods assert that these victims come from abused homes and intimate abusive relationships and are therefore exposed to chronic trauma in many cases. More importantly, doing outreach and attempting to build rapport as well as providing them with resources to trafficking hotlines can go a long way. It will also show that other people care not just their pimps and traffickers (Hakes, 2011).

Knight (2006) proposed that upon a victim entering treatment or therapy we must be aware of the triggers associated with them like being around other addicts, sex workers, certain music and socializing with men. In addition to always having the know how to return back to the pimp/trafficker. Also, that there are mental health related issues and sleep disorders and. Lastly, how the survivor receives no relief from trauma and the body does not forget. As social service providers, we must continue to do the work of the pioneers before us and continue bringing awareness and education to this issue.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

When we focus on preventative practice for at risk youth the Lotus Psychoeducational Groups helped to promote protective factors and are a part of survivor- centered programs (Bolin & Roswurm, 2014). The program helps survivors let go feelings of self-blame and recognize that they have been

victimized. A study of 38 participants which included runaway, homeless, and street youth (RHSY) at an urban drop in center conducted by Bolin and Roswurm (2014) support that psychoeducational groups that encourage holistic, empowerment-promoting care was effective.

The basis of such care is the recognition to meet the needs of the victim. The service goals need to concentrate on the trauma experience in a manner that empowers and enhances the resiliency of each survivor (Bolin & Roswurm, 2012; Hom & Woods, 2013; Rafferty, 2013). It was also asserted that psychoeducational groups could benefit those that are survivors of sexual exploitation since they are the experts of their own lives. These individuals have the capability to lead their path of recovery which is intentionally implemented into the treatment model (Hom & Woods, 2013; Rafferty, 2013).

With limited research on specific treatment options for sexually exploited victims, we have learned that sexually exploited women experience some form of trauma (Hom & Woods, 2013). While research assert that psychoeducational group can benefit at risk children as survivors when it comes to adult women we there may be a different view point. Hom and Woods assert that being in a group and being around other victims can be a trigger for some women.

What has been recognized about trauma is the mind and body have a natural inherent capacity to heal. When an individual is faced with psychological and or physical harm, the human body automatically goes into instinctive defensive responses (Hom & Woods). Hence, using the Trauma Resiliency

Model (TRM) an individual learns to pay attention to sensations associated with joy, calm and happiness. There is an increase in resilience and an expanded sense of well-being in the body, mind and spirit. (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014; Hom & Woods, 2013). The mind can bring new meaning to the traumatic experience which results in post-traumatic growth and hope anchored in the body a greater ability to be in what TRM calls the Resilient Zone (Cecchet & Thoburn; Hom & Woods).

### Summary

Throughout the literature, we continue to see a pattern of the lack of services and resources and treatment options for sexually exploited victims. These barriers could be a result of the lack of definitive data on this social injustice issue. This study will expose the lack of research, needs, resources and treatment options for sexually exploited women and children. This study will expose that the needs of sexually exploited women and children are unique in nature. Furthermore, this study will continue to explore the U.S. Governments agenda on how to best deal with this prevalent issue on a domestic level. This study seeks to bring awareness to those at risk as well as victims of sexual exploitation and stop the marginalization of women.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study showed the barriers that are faced by sexually exploited women and children. The study explored the lack of resources specifically tailored to their unique needs. Moreover, identified their needs from the service provider perspective. This chapter explains the process on how this study was carried out. The sections covered study design, sampling, data collection, procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to identify the needs of sexually exploited women and children through the lenses of service providers in the Inland Empire. This is an exploratory research project, due to the limited data that has been conducted with this population. The study looked through the lenses of the service providers who work alongside these individuals. This is a qualitative study and data was collected in the form of open-ended questions and individualize service provider interviews. With respect to qualitative research this will allow the writer to collect rich data about real life, from real people and situations. Furthermore, bringing awareness and a better understanding of behaviors, is another reason why qualitative research is essential. Similar to

exploratory research this writer attempted to determine the nature of the problem and bring awareness and a better understanding to the issue.

The limitations of using interviews with open-ended questions was dependent on the interviewee's willingness to be open and comfortable during the interview process. With regard to the line of questioning it may have contributed to inhibition and therefore answering more in favor of the interviewer. Additionally, the fact of feeling uncomfortable about sharing an open-ended line of questioning might also impeded the interview process. Giving an example, a genuinely shy person who provides limited data and would rather write their answers down than interview may provide limited feelings and inputs. Nonetheless there is a risk of data disturbance when performing interviews. Thus, it must be mentioned that qualitative data cannot be used in defining causation. Therefore, the findings of this study were not intended to define any occasional relationships between the themes that were disclosed and the disposition of sexually women and children. Lastly, being able to interview the sexually exploited individuals whom are now service providers has removed some of the limitations of this study. Who can do a better job at making others aware of their needs than the person in need? This is the intricate part of the rich data that qualitative research can flourish on.

## Sampling

This study utilized a non-random purposive sample of service providers serving the sexually exploited women and children in the Inland Empire area. The service providers are from various non-profit organizations throughout the Inland Empire area. The Open-Door Program participants who are a part of the Family Assistance program are former victims themselves. The proper approval protocol was ensued for each of these agencies. There were approximately 7 participants in the open-ended question interview of service providers including administrative staff.

## Data Collection and Instruments

A qualitative design was used to capture the experiences of trauma and means of assisting with healing and recovery for women and children who have been sexually exploited. A semi structured interview consisting of 9 open-ended questions were carried out by 7 service providers. The questions focused on what some challenges are they encountered while working with this population. Also, what are some important information for other social providers to be aware of when working with this group? More importantly, what are some of the needs and resources these individuals can benefit from? We explored how the service providers entered this field and explored their experiences working with these individuals. Moreover, what do they wish to see happen locally, globally and legally regarding this crisis? Additional probing questions were applied as

needed depending on the participant's and interviewer exchange. The goal was to include multiple disciplines involved with working with this population in efforts to provide a broader spectrum. This writer collected some demographic information consisting of age, profession, achieved education level, years of involvement with these individuals, gender and ethnicity identification.

### Procedures

With the approval of the Institute Review Board (IRB) and the Family Assistance Program (see Appendix) I reached out to the supervisor of The Open Door Program to be a point of contact for any staff member that would be willing to conduct the interview. I also reached out to other non-profit organizations that have programs that are specifically structured for sexually exploited victims and seek the department approval. The interviewees were contacted, and the interviews were set up in a location that was most comfortable and confidential for the interviewee. The interviewees were informed that interview will be recorded and requested total privacy during the interview process. I requested that interviewees commit an hour of their time to complete interview. At the end of the interview I thanked them for their time.

### Protection of Human Subjects

All the data collected from this study was kept confidential. I stored all the data including recordings, interview questionnaire, transcriptions and

demographic information on a MSW Thesis Project only USB Drive under lock and key. Upon completion of the final approved project all data was appropriately discarded at that time. At the beginning of each interview a consent form was collected from each participant. The interviewee was reminded of the respect of confidentiality and informed of the importance of not utilizing real names of any victims.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the text data. I reviewed all transcribed interviews and searched for any common themes. Some of the themes that were found are challenges with rapport building as these individuals have trust issues. Also, to have knowledge of their unique needs and the importance of clinicians and other treatment personnel to be aware of the trauma they've experienced to provide proper treatment plans and goals. Another theme that appeared is the fear these victims have and therefore are afraid to report as well as leave their trafficker. I categorized the themes based on commonalities into larger groups like needs and barriers and suggestions. This established the area of needs from the perspectives of the service providers. That data from the interviews was collected and submitted through descriptive statistical analysis of demographic variables. The responses from the interview was collected, coded and entered through qualitative data analysis software.



## Summary

This study explored the needs of sexually exploited women and children and the barriers that affect them. The interview process served as a mean to assess and evaluate the needs from the service providers' perspective. Furthermore, disclose their experiences working with these individuals. This study will potentially contribute to suggestions on how to better serve these individuals.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the finding of the study is presented based on the responses of the participants. The data were obtained from seven social service providers who are currently working with sexually exploited victims in the Inland Empire. Furthermore, the themes that represent the challenges service providers encounter while working with sexually exploited victims and their service needs are also presented in this chapter.

#### Demographics

There were 7 participants in this study. The sample population were 100% female (10 participants) who worked with sexually exploited women and children. Of this sample, 42% worked with victims for over 6 years (3 participants), 28% of the participants worked with the victims from 1 to 2 years (2 participants), and 28% have less than a year's experience (2 participants). The ages of the participants ranged from 26 years to 55 years; three participants were between the ages of 48 and 55 and the other three were between the ages of 26 and 35.

Over 85% of the participants had a college degree (6 participants) and only one participant had an associate degree. When it came to job titles, 42% of

the participants identified themselves as Empowerment Advocates (3 participants), 28% identified themselves as Case Managers, and 28% identified themselves in supervisory roles (2 participants).

### Interview Results

When the participants were asked about some of the challenges they encountered while working with this population, their responses were mixed. Three of the participants (42%) stated that the lack of housing and shelter was a major challenge when working with sexually exploited clients. For example, participant 4 stated, "I'd say the top two challenges would be not enough places to put the victims if they want to get out. There's not enough housing like long-term housing for them and there's not enough shelters." On the other hand, the other three participants (42%) identified building rapport and knowing how to talk and deal with them is another challenge due to trust issues. Participant 2 stated that "in the beginning a lot of my challenges were how to talk to them, how to behave around them, and how not to trigger them."

When the participants were asked what would be some important information that another service provider should be aware of when working with the population, again the responses were mixed. Four participants (57%) shared that it's can be very difficult at times when working with these individuals. Furthermore, these victims are looking for genuine people. Participant 5 stated,

It's like rock candy- very hard on the outside in the beginning as they see that we're genuine and that we truly care, that's when you'll see that sweet inside of what they have to offer, but initially they do have their guard up.

Similarly, participant 7 stated, "Facial expressions they're looking for genuine people so when they share their stories or things with you, what they're looking for is that you don't look shocked in any way or that you don't like and you're judging." Some of the other responses were being a good listener.

Participant 3 shared, "that you need to listen to them, oftentimes, the survivors say that service providers don't listen to them. Service providers think they know and they haven't walked in their shoes."

When the participants were asked what would be considered to be a great need for this population as far as services and resources were concerned, housing/shelter (85%) was cited as a top service need, followed by job preparedness (14%). For example, participant 5 stated, "Housing is number one housing would be two categories. One would be shelter, someplace just to place them and then a transitional housing." In addition, participant 1 stated,

This question is one that I think if you were to ask any service provider will probably come up with the same answer. One of the biggest ones that I think there is a huge need for is housing. That is a problem that I've seen nationally.

On the other hand, job related issues were also mentioned as one of the major service needs. For example, participant 5 shared,

I think job resources coming out you find that there are a lot of women and girls who are looking to find jobs, but sometimes, they don't necessarily have the connections to either getting help with a resume or a little job experience.

When the participants were asked about what ages, genders, and nationalities they have encountered, all the participants (100%) reported that their clients consist of all the ethnicities including Blacks, Whites and Hispanics. Some service participants did say that they have encountered clients of multi-ethnicities (57%). Participant 1 shared, "Yes we see all races we see a lot of White, Blacks, Hispanics I have not seen too many Asians." When asked about gender identification, the majority of the participants stated their clients were female. Two of the participants (28%) shared that they have encountered individuals that identify as transgenders. Participant 2 stated, "One was a male going to female and the other one was female going to male."

The participants were asked about their levels of experience, skills, training or knowledge about this population to effectively perform their job and if not, what their reasons were. Three participants (42%) shared that they felt that their first-hand knowledge and experiences has permitted them to have the ability to be more relatable. Participant 4 disclosed, "I've worked with this population over 10 years some stuff I've learned trial by fire and some I know because I was this population." Four participants (57%) who were not survivors all agreed that continuing training is inevitable in order to keep up with current literature.

Participant 1 stated, "I think you can never have enough." Participant 6 stated, "I think it's an evolution and even though I've been working with this population for nine years, you have to continue to stay up on learning about it."

When the participants were asked about what they enjoyed most about their job and what they enjoyed least, their responses were mixed. Two participants (28%) agreed that their day is never the same. Participant 1 stated, "I enjoy the fact that every day is different I just love that." Participant 2 shared that having a supportive team of colleagues has been beneficial in her career. Participant 4 and 7 shared, "seeing small successes, seeing somebody, maybe one out of 10 it's like yes you made it you enrolled in school." "It's very rewarding to see girls get pulled out of the life and able to turn their lives around." Participant 3 shared, "I think I take pride in being a social worker I enjoy being that." Participant 6 reported that there has been a calling in her life to do this type of work.

The responses about the least enjoyment of their jobs all varied. Participant 1 described her work as a never-ending journey and even when it's time to get off from work there are still many things that need to be done. Participant 2 shared, "They're attitudes we're all humans a lot of people don't have patience." One participant who has been a social worker for that last 28 years shared that the underappreciation for the work she does can be disheartening. Two participants shared their concerns for the lack of funding. Participant 4 shared one of the least job enjoyment is when she hears that

someone didn't get out of the life and has passed away. Participant 5 understands the importance of paperwork but dislikes that is so much of it to do on a daily basis. Participant 6 reported that when some of the people she works with start off strong to only later give up.

When the participants were asked to share any success stories, all of the participants (100%) shared that in their experiences that building rapport with these individuals and supporting them has allowed many of them to get out of the life. Some of the clients have gone back to school earned degrees and have become advocates. Participant 6 shared, "I've seen women overcome both their identity how the world label them, and I've seen women come out and be free to be who they were called to be."

The participants were asked if they could gain the attention of any law-makers/politicians what would they want them to be aware of or work towards changing for these individuals they work with. Three participants (42%) agreed that more funding and resources be needed to be allocated for these victims. Participant 2 stated, "There needs to be more resources and housing for all ages." Three participants (42%) agreed that there needs to be more law enforcement training to be able to identify a victim when they encounter them. Also, there needs to be a stop to arresting victims who end up with a criminal record which causes them to have challenges with obtaining employment opportunities. Participant 4 stated, "I think expunging most records or not arresting victims in the first place." Two participants (28%) believe that there

needs to more education in the school settings that can help bring awareness and that traffickers are going after younger children as well. Participant 7 stated,

In schools we need to be more involved in schools I know there was a recent law passed in October stating that California would be the first state to get involved into schools to train on human trafficking I think that we're headed in the right direction.

### Summary

This study has outline some of the unique needs of these individuals by service providers that work with these victims directly. The study identified one of the significant need of these individuals as being shelter/housing followed by employment preparedness. These individuals require a sense of stability in order to succeed in getting out of the lifestyle. Additionally, the study revealed that the service providers' deal with challenges of establishing rapport and these victims can be difficult to work with due to trust issues. The majority of the service providers indicated that despite the challenges they enjoy the work they do in efforts to help serve these individuals. Furthermore, the service providers consider any alteration made by these individuals regardless of the extent, is still a success as it relates to these victims.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In this chapter, discussion on the major findings of the study will be presented. The limitations of the study will also be presented. The chapter will highlight how the lack of attention by political officials has potentially allowed this epidemic to grow. The study will suggest some recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research.

#### Discussion

The study identified one of the most underlying challenges being experienced by the participants when working with these individuals is the unavailability of resources. Particularly, the lack of transitional housing for the victims is one of the challenges that has further contributed to the lack of sufficient protection to the victims. Moreover, previous studies indicated that the extent of service needs of sexually exploited victims was not known since such issues were hidden and thus were not adequately investigated in addition to having questionable methodologies of prior studies.

The participants in this study also indicated such challenges in seeking to identify the main factors that contributed to the increment in cases of human trafficking in the society. This finding is consistent with Hom and Woods' (2013)

findings that these threats have been responsible for the current information gaps that left the service providers unable to tackle the specific needs of the victims of sexual manipulation and human trafficking. As such, the victims continue to be abandoned with minimal special care being provided in the long-run.

Consequently, they lack appropriate proper attention with regards to the issues at hand since there is no reliable data to discuss the extent of the problem (Kotrla, 2010). The lack of scientific data attributed to sexually exploited victims has also led to the lack of extensive understanding of the psychological experiences that the victims experienced with over the years. Additionally, the long-term effects of being exposed to these actions (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014) are largely unknown. In the long run, these challenges have made it difficult to create culturally appropriate services for these individuals.

This study also identified how rapport building was a challenge for the service providers. Although there was no data to support this finding, it is my belief that due to victimization and trauma experiences, these individuals have developed a sense of distrust and such lack of trust on the part of the clients could easily affect service providers' abilities to perform their jobs. It is critical for a worker-client to develop rapport and trusting relationship to have better treatment outcomes.

Another theme that featured prominently in the study related to the continuous training and educating others in order to stay current with trends. Based on the qualifications of the service providers, it is evident that additional

attention is being placed on improving the capabilities of the service providers through training. The service providers acknowledged the need to improve their knowledge and sense of awareness of risk factors associated with the victims in order to accomplish their tasks effectively. This finding is consistent with Bolin and Roswurm's (2014) finding that regular training can also equip the service providers with the necessary skills to develop advanced screening methods that could provide improved outcomes in the long run. With continuing education, there can be a development of screening protocols. Lastly, the importance of effective identification of intervention methods can be emphasized since the victims can be protected from a series of factors that may substantially affect their recovery process (Bolin & Roswurm).

Additionally, this study found that attention should be placed on the development of awareness campaigns and stronger voices of support and advocacy for these victims (Kotrla, 2010). Law enforcement as well as other stakeholders such as political leaders should be involved in the decision-making process. This finding is consistent with Shauer and Wheaton (2006) who observed that the public needs to understand the crisis that sexual exploitation and human trafficking has become over the years and be encouraged to be considerate and tolerant to the victims of sexual exploitation. The study identified the importance of cross training programs should be initiated to improve the outcomes for the victims of community-based approaches (Heil & Nichols, 2015). This finding is also consistent with Bromfield's (2016) finding that this outcome

can be attained through a community based participatory approach including sexually exploited women and children and highlighting the harm-reduction efforts at all levels of practice.

### Limitations

In this study it must be noted that the outcomes of this study reflect the experiences of individuals who are service providers who work with sexually exploited women and children in non-profit agencies. Due to the limited amount of service providers in the Inland Empire area this investigator was only able to collect data from seven participants. Thus, the findings of the study may not necessarily represent the needs of these victims as a whole. This investigator interviewed service providers that were considered to be first responders to identifying sexually exploited victims. Due to the secret nature and the dangers of sexual exploitation, this investigator only interviewed service providers who appeared to be safe enough to without placing anyone in jeopardy.

### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

Various recommendations can be provided for social work practice, policy, and research. Social workers need to be involved in extensive training to improve their adaptability to the underlying situations and ensure that they are capable of dealing with a wide range of issues that arise. They can be given incentive such as monetary rewards to appreciate their efforts. Essential information of the

needs of sexually exploited victims is necessary to understand the plight of the victims with the aim of improving the quality of life of these individuals. In some instances, the victims end up being incarcerated and charged with crimes that have been conducted against their will (Tan, 2016).

Previous research identified how the treatment of these individuals was non-standardized and few and far between and the risks of re-traumatization were also significantly higher among the survivors of human trafficking (Hom & Woods, 2013; Thomson, et al., 2011). Despite the non-standardized treatment options, therapeutic approach was considered to be an effective means of dealing with individuals that had been faced with such type of trauma.

Furthermore, group treatment was considered to provide the desired outcomes in a timely manner, thus ensuring that the victims were able to recuperate. Short-term group work was therefore essential since it provides greater healing ability than individual therapy (O'Hanlon & Bertolino, 1999).

On the macro level, the policymakers should work with other key stakeholders to provide resources to these service providers in addition to providing a favorable environment. The collaboration should also include the law enforcement agencies and the judicial officers to protect the victims from further suffering. The lack of training for service providers including law officials contributes to the unlawful prosecution of these victims which has affected their ability to acquire employment in order to self-sustain upon leaving the lifestyle.

This study attempted to bring awareness to the unique needs of these individuals in efforts to further educate other service providers in the best ways to deal with these individuals. There is a need for service providers to be properly trained to identify a victim and the best ways to work with them. Additionally, service providers need to support sexually exploited victims in ways in which they have been identified are important to them.

There needs to more scientific data to better determine an accurate of account of how many victims are really in the area of the Inland Empire. Although there has been an increase in the awareness of this issue, more research can provide data that allows one to question its accuracy in the uniform data collection system that tracks the number of victims. More research needs to be conducted regarding the unique needs of these individuals that are necessary for these individuals to become productive members of society and less desire or need of returning to the life. It is evident that these victims require unique support and until we can provide the necessary data to understand the cause, additional research is necessary

Creating awareness of the unique needs of these individuals in efforts to provide better services is one way the service providers can improve their interactions with the victims. By improving their understanding of the key concepts limiting their abilities to perform, these professionals will be able to attain the best outcomes and improve the quality of their services. The victims of

sexual exploitation should also be supported in all essential ways to enable them to get accustomed to their new environments.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to provide insight into service providers' perspective on the unique needs of sexually exploited women and children. This study attempted to explore the some of the psychological effects of sexual exploitation and the trauma these individuals face and ways to treat them. Additionally, this study intended to provide the service providers with knowledge that will be able to improve the service delivery process and protect the victims from additional harm.

This study employed a qualitative design with face-to-face interviews with seven service providers who have been working with sexually exploited victims. The participants were recruited from a few non-profit agencies in the Inland Empire area. This study found one of the most underlying challenge facing the participants when working with sexually exploited victims was the unavailability of resources, particularly, shortage of transitional housing for them. Another finding that featured prominently in the study was related to a need for continuous training and education for the service providers in order to stay current with trends. The study also identified the rapport building challenges faced by service providers and the risk of re-traumatization for these victims and proper types of treatment for these individuals.

This study recommends that the policymakers work with other key stakeholders to provide resources to these service providers in addition to providing a favorable environment. The collaboration should also include the law enforcement agencies and the judicial officers to protect the victims from further suffering. Furthermore, the study suggests that attention should be placed on the development of awareness campaigns and stronger voices of support and advocacy for these victims.



APPENDIX  
INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD FORM

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee

Researcher(s) Ruth Harrison  
Proposal Title Understanding the Unique Needs of Sexually Exploited Women and Children in San Bernardino County  
# SW1751

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

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Proposal is:

- approved  
 to be resubmitted with revisions listed below  
 to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing  
 missing informed consent  debriefing statement  
 revisions needed in informed consent  debriefing  
 data collection instruments missing  
 agency approval letter missing  
 CITI missing  
 revisions in design needed (specified below)
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Janet Cl  
Committee Chair Signature

2/9/2018  
Date

Distribution: White-Cocordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

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