

Spring 5-20-2019

# From the Voices of Domestic Sex Trafficking Survivors: Experiences of Complex Trauma & Posttraumatic Growth

Heather R. Evans DSW

*University of Pennsylvania*, [heevans@sp2.upenn.edu](mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations\\_sp2](https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations_sp2)

Part of the [Counseling Commons](#), [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), [Law and Gender Commons](#), [Legal Theory Commons](#), [Other Legal Studies Commons](#), [Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), [Photography Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Evans, Heather R. DSW, "From the Voices of Domestic Sex Trafficking Survivors: Experiences of Complex Trauma & Posttraumatic Growth" (2019). *Doctorate in Social Work (DSW) Dissertations*. 126.  
[https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations\\_sp2/126](https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations_sp2/126)

---

# From the Voices of Domestic Sex Trafficking Survivors: Experiences of Complex Trauma & Posttraumatic Growth

## **Abstract**

Human sex trafficking is an ongoing global rights violation formally recognized since 2000 through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2016). Using ecological and trauma-informed lenses, this qualitative, retrospective study used participant-centered methods to explore identity, sexuality, relationships, and factors that facilitate/ hindered community reintegration for 15 adult female survivors. Interview transcripts, Photovoice captioned images, and focus groups were analyzed using multi-level conceptual and thematic coding. Participants identified with all aspects of complex trauma, including: dissociation, self-perception/identity, relations with others and systems of meaning. Key themes included losing and regaining power, shame, and the dangers of re-exploitation and re-traumatization. Critical domains of posttraumatic growth included deep appreciation for life, finding personal strength, spiritual change, ability to see beauty and perceive deeply, and finding greater meaning in life experiences, particularly helping others. Participants highlighted relationship development as the primary source of healing and growth, emphasizing the value of peer-based support and survivor leadership.

The findings of this study affirm the need for ecological and relational perspectives in care of survivors, and approaches using a trauma-informed, victim-centered lens. Findings affirm the value of understanding the nuances of complex trauma as well as celebrating the capacity for posttraumatic growth. Furthermore, while relationships are most significantly impacted from the trafficking experience, they are also considered the greatest instrument of healing, through offering long-term commitment and belief in the individual. Finally, findings suggest comprehensive recommendations directly from the voices of survivors for community members and service providers.

## **Degree Type**

Dissertation

## **Degree Name**

Doctor of Social Work (DSW)

## **First Advisor**

Allison Werner-Lin, PhD

## **Second Advisor**

Diane Langberg, PhD

## **Third Advisor**

Shea Rhodes, Esq

## **Keywords**

human trafficking, complex trauma, posttraumatic growth, photovoice, domestic sex trafficking, sexual exploitation

---

**Subject Categories**

Counseling | Criminal Law | Criminology and Criminal Justice | Law | Law and Gender | Legal Studies | Legal Theory | Other Legal Studies | Other Social and Behavioral Sciences | Photography | Political Science | Psychology | Religion | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Social Work | Sociology

**From the Voices of Domestic Sex Trafficking Survivors:  
Experiences of Complex Trauma & Posttraumatic Growth**

**Heather R. Evans, LCSW**

A DISSERTATION  
in  
Social Work

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Social Work

2019

Allison Werner-Lin, PhD  
Dissertation Chair

Sara Bachman, PhD  
Dean, School of Social Policy and Practice

**Dissertation Committee:**  
Diane Langberg, PhD  
Director, Diane Langberg & Associates

Shea Rhodes, Esq.  
Director, Villanova Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation

**From the Voices of Domestic Sex Trafficking Survivors:  
Experiences of Complex Trauma & Posttraumatic Growth**

COPYRIGHT 2019

Heather R. Evans

## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to the survivors who courageously participated in this study, giving of their wisdom, their experiences, and their deeply creative selves through words and photography.

This is also dedicated to every survivor who has not yet been seen, heard, or identified.

May you find freedom and restoration.

## Acknowledgements

**To the Survivors** who participated in this study. Thank you for using your powerful voices to amplify your depth, wisdom, knowledge, creativity and tenacity. Without your courage and vulnerability to share from your experiences, this would not have been possible. May your voices, your courage and your giftedness go far to change this world.

**To my DSW colleagues**, we are truly the BCE (Best Cohort Ever). We've accomplished this together. It's been a privilege to learn alongside remarkably gifted individuals, and I am so thankful for how much we enjoy each other and being together. I hope to see each of you go far in influencing the Social Work field and in this world.

**To my Dissertation Committee Chair, Allison Werner-Lin, PhD.** I am continually grateful to have had you as my Chair. You were the perfect match for me. Thank you for believing in me and my abilities. You were upbeat, positive, encouraging, efficient and amazingly gifted at partializing this process in the perfect way for me. Your humor and your demeanor kept me grounded. I have learned so much from you and am eternally honored and humbled by your support, help and learning you're your expertise.

**To Diane Langberg, Dissertation committee member and greatest mentor.** You have been the biggest influence on my life personally and professionally. You embody our Lord and who I want to be as a woman, clinician, author, teacher and worldwide instrument and representative of God. Your fingerprints are left all over the pages of this dissertation, my thought processes and in who I am today. May your legacy of faithfulness, courage, and bold wisdom continue on for many generations to come.

**To Shea Rhodes, Dissertation committee member and abolitionist colleague.** You are an inspiration and a hero. I learn so much from your bold tenacious spirit and you embolden me to amplify more of who I truly am in this journey towards justice, equality and freedom for all. Thank you for believing in me and being a significant sojourner. May our journeys continue to intersect locally and globally.

**To the first survivors I met through VAST and the ladies of WINGS.** You have been my greatest teachers and sources of inspiration. You have changed my life and have been patient with VAST as we have navigated new territory.

**To the staff, volunteers, fellow board members of VAST and partners around the region and the Commonwealth.** Thank you for the collaboration. The African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This is a long, slow, arduous journey, but it is a vital one. We have made much progress together. Let us continue this journey.

**To Beck, my colleague and first partner in this work.** "How did we get here?" Thank you for being on this journey of learning, acting, and mobilizing. I have learned so much from you and alongside you. Your faith, positive spirit, encouragement, prayers and belief in me have been my strength in weakness. I could not have done, nor would I want to do this journey without you.

**To Zenko, a friend and colleague in life mission.** Thank you for being the one to convince me to "let it go out."

**To Mark.** Thank you for fully supporting me to apply, accept and complete this journey. Thank you for having confidence in my ability and for the many ways you have sacrificed and helped during these years, including the ice cream treat deliveries during class and writing sessions.

**To all of my family, colleagues and friends in USA, Rwanda & Beyond.** I wish I could name you all. Thank you for believing in me and seeing more in my gifts and abilities than I can see in myself. Thank you for the many ways you have encouraged me, prayed for me, been patient with me and supported me on this journey. *Every timely text, call, Scripture, word of encouragement and expression of interest and confidence has breathed in me life and courage to persevere.*

**To Jesus Christ**, who is the first and last motivation for this work. You were the first Voice for the voiceless, the One who brings true liberty to captives, and restores beauty from ashes. You are the Treasure in darkness. Thank you for inviting me into YOUR work. Please take the powerful, beautiful, deep, wise, courageous, strong voices of the survivors in this study and those they represent and may they loudly bring sustainable change in this work and in bringing justice to this world.

## ABSTRACT

### FROM THE VOICES OF DOMESTIC SEX TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS: EXPERIENCES OF COMPLEX TRAUMA & POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

Heather R Evans, LCSW

Allison Werner-Lin, PhD

Human sex trafficking is an ongoing global rights violation formally recognized since 2000 through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2016). Using ecological and trauma-informed lenses, this qualitative, retrospective study used participant-centered methods to explore identity, sexuality, relationships, and factors that facilitate/ hindered community reintegration for 15 adult female survivors. Interview transcripts, Photovoice captioned images, and focus groups were analyzed using multi-level conceptual and thematic coding. Participants identified with all aspects of complex trauma, including: dissociation, self-perception/identity, relations with others and systems of meaning. Key themes included losing and regaining power, shame, and the dangers of re-exploitation and re-traumatization. Critical domains of posttraumatic growth included deep appreciation for life, finding personal strength, spiritual change, ability to see beauty and perceive deeply, and finding greater meaning in life experiences, particularly helping others. Participants highlighted relationship development as the primary source of healing and growth, emphasizing the value of peer-based support and survivor leadership.

The findings of this study affirm the need for ecological and relational perspectives in care of survivors, and approaches using a trauma-informed, victim-centered lens. Findings affirm the value of understanding the nuances of complex trauma as well as celebrating the capacity for posttraumatic growth. Furthermore, while relationships are most significantly impacted from the trafficking experience, they are also considered the greatest instrument of healing, through offering long-term commitment and belief in the individual. Finally, findings suggest comprehensive recommendations directly from the voices of survivors for community members and service providers.

## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Dedication .....  | iii |
| Acknowledgements .....  | iv  |
| List of Tables .....  | xii |
| List of Figures .....   | xii |
| Introduction.....   | 15  |
| Problem Statement .....   | 18  |
| Chapter One: The History & Environment in which Human Trafficking Exists..... | 21  |
| Human Trafficking Defined.....  | 21  |
| Prevalence of Human Trafficking.....  | 22  |
| Types of Human Trafficking .....  | 23  |
| History of Human Trafficking and Legislative Response.....                    | 23  |
| The Cultural Demand for Sex .....   | 26  |
| Prostitution.....   | 27  |
| Chapter 2: The Pre-Trafficking Experience.....                                | 30  |
| The Victims.....  | 30  |
| Demographics, Risk Factors and Vulnerability .....                            | 30  |
| Recruitment of the Victim.....  | 31  |
| The Traffickers.....  | 31  |
| Identification and Engagement Process .....                                   | 32  |
| Use of Power.....   | 33  |
| Trauma Bond .....   | 34  |
| Chapter 3: The Trafficking Experience: .....                                  | 35  |
| The Experiences of a Trafficking Victim .....                                 | 35  |
| The Impact on a Trafficking Victim .....                                      | 36  |
| Complex Trauma .....  | 38  |
| Dysregulation of Affect and Impulses .....                                    | 39  |
| Disturbances in Attention or Consciousness.....                               | 42  |
| Disturbances in Self-Perception.....  | 43  |
| Disturbances in Relationships.....  | 45  |
| Biological Self-Regulation.....   | 47  |
| Disturbances in Meaning Systems .....   | 49  |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Chapter 4: Post-Trafficking Experience--Needs of Trafficking Survivors .....                                  | 51 |
| Return to Traffickers: the Cyclical Nature of Escape .....  | 51 |
| The Ongoing Impact on Biopsychosocial Experience of Survivors .....   | 51 |
| The Needs of Trafficking Survivors .....  | 52 |
| Treatment and Recovery .....  | 54 |
| Aftercare Services for Sex Trafficking Survivors.....   | 55 |
| Survivors’ Voiced Experiences.....  | 58 |
| Chapter 5: Analysis of Current Research.....  | 60 |
| Implications of Study .....   | 61 |
| Chapter 6: Theoretical Framework for Understanding and Intervention with Human Trafficking<br>Survivors ..... | 62 |
| Ecological Systems Perspective.....   | 62 |
| Ecological Systems and Human Trafficking .....  | 64 |
| Strength-Based Perspective .....  | 67 |
| Victim-Centered Perspective .....   | 69 |
| Trauma Theory.....  | 70 |
| Trauma-informed Care.....   | 71 |
| Posttraumatic Growth .....  | 72 |
| Chapter 7: Research Methodology.....  | 76 |
| Research Approach .....   | 76 |
| Qualitative Semi-structured Interviews .....  | 76 |
| Photovoice.....   | 77 |
| Sampling and Selection.....   | 81 |
| Exclusionary Criteria: .....  | 81 |
| Recruitment Procedure.....  | 81 |
| Consent Process .....   | 81 |
| Study Instrumentation .....   | 82 |
| Data Management .....   | 82 |
| Strengths and Limitations .....   | 83 |
| Risks & Benefits .....  | 84 |
| Vulnerable Population .....   | 86 |
| Institutional Review Board .....  | 87 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Retention and Subject Payment .....                                 | 87  |
| Timeline .....  | 87  |
| Reflexivity Statement.....  | 88  |
| Analysis .....  | 89  |
| Interview Analysis: .....   | 89  |
| Photovoice Analysis: .....  | 91  |
| Chapter 8: Findings.....  | 93  |
| Characterization of the Trafficking Experience.....                 | 95  |
| The Role of Power .....   | 96  |
| Pre-trafficking Loss of Power .....                                 | 97  |
| Recognizing & Living the Loss of Power:.....                        | 98  |
| Peri-trafficking Perception of Power .....                          | 99  |
| Power and the Relationship with the Trafficker: .....               | 100 |
| Tools of Power used by the Trafficker: .....                        | 102 |
| Loss of Power with Buyers: .....                                    | 103 |
| The Powerlessness of Seeing no Options: .....                       | 103 |
| Post-trafficking Experience of Power and Social Services:.....      | 104 |
| Mechanisms for Managing Abuse of Power:.....                        | 105 |
| Use of Personal Power and Strength to Reclaim Control: .....        | 107 |
| Finding Power to Exit: .....  | 107 |
| Post-Trafficking Recognition of Loss of Power: .....                | 110 |
| Finding and Using Power during Post-trafficking Experience: .....   | 110 |
| Finding Power in Boundaries: Some .....                             | 111 |
| Finding to Access Services: .....                                   | 111 |
| Finding Power through Education: .....                              | 111 |
| Finding Power to Testify: .....                                     | 111 |
| Finding Power through Advocacy: .....                               | 112 |
| Experiences of Reintegration .....                                  | 112 |
| Experiences of Need: .....  | 113 |
| Chapter 9: Findings of Complex Trauma .....                         | 118 |
| Complex Trauma Alteration 1-Regulation of Affect and Impulses:..... | 118 |
| Experience of Emotions:.....  | 118 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Experiences of Trauma Symptoms: .....   | 120 |
| Complex Trauma Alteration 2-Attention or Consciousness .....                    | 122 |
| Coping with Dissociation during Trafficking: .....                              | 122 |
| Coping with Dissociation after Trafficking .....                                | 122 |
| Complex Trauma Alteration 3-Identity/Perception of Self.....                    | 124 |
| Pre-trafficking Experiences' Impact on Identity:.....                           | 124 |
| Trafficking Experience Impact on Identity:.....                                 | 125 |
| Trafficking Experience and Identity Formation:.....                             | 126 |
| Post-Trafficking Experience and Finding Identity as Trafficking Survivors:..... | 128 |
| Post-trafficking and Growth in Identity Formation: .....                        | 129 |
| Post-trafficking Identity Formation as an Ongoing Process: .....                | 131 |
| Complex Trauma Alteration 4-Relationships .....                                 | 132 |
| Experiences of Trust and Distrust and Relationship Development: .....           | 132 |
| Traffickers' Use of Trust and Relationship as Tools: .....                      | 132 |
| Isolation from Relationship during Trafficking Experience: .....                | 134 |
| Trust and Relationship Development after Trafficking Experience: .....          | 135 |
| Rebuilding Trust in Relationships: .....  | 137 |
| Relationships with Family .....   | 138 |
| Post-Trafficking Relationships with Partners: .....                             | 141 |
| Sexuality .....   | 144 |
| Relationships with Support Persons.....   | 151 |
| Complex Trauma Alteration 5-Somatization:.....                                  | 155 |
| Complex Trauma Alteration 6-Systems of Meaning.....                             | 155 |
| Experiences of Loss .....   | 156 |
| Shame:.....   | 158 |
| Hope and Despair.....   | 162 |
| Chapter 10: Findings-Post-Trafficking Experiences of Coping and Services .....  | 165 |
| Satisfaction with Care:.....  | 166 |
| Counseling/Therapy:.....  | 166 |
| Support Groups:.....  | 166 |
| Shelter/Residential Programs: .....   | 167 |
| Faith-based programs: .....   | 167 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Memorable Experiences with Providers: .....             | 168 |
| Descriptions of Helpful Care: .....                     | 169 |
| Descriptions of Dissatisfaction with Care:.....         | 171 |
| Court-Mandated Services:.....                           | 173 |
| Experiences with Peer Support: .....                    | 174 |
| Chapter 11: Findings of Posttraumatic Growth .....      | 177 |
| Posttraumatic Growth and Photovoice:.....               | 177 |
| PTG Domain 1-Personal Strength: .....                   | 178 |
| PTG Domain 2-New Possibilities:.....                    | 179 |
| Seeking Purpose:.....                                   | 180 |
| Experiences of Learning: .....                          | 183 |
| Goals and Dreams: .....                                 | 185 |
| PTG Domain 3-Relating to Others.....                    | 192 |
| Personal Growth in Relationships:.....                  | 192 |
| PTG Domain 5-Appreciation for Life.....                 | 193 |
| Perceptions of Experience:.....                         | 193 |
| Perception of Self:.....                                | 194 |
| Perceptions of Life:.....                               | 195 |
| Perceptions of Growth/Healing:.....                     | 199 |
| PTG Domain 5-Spiritual Change:.....                     | 200 |
| Chapter 12: Recommendations from Survivors.....         | 208 |
| Recommendations for Service Providers:.....             | 208 |
| Prevention Education: .....                             | 208 |
| More Services: .....                                    | 208 |
| Trauma-informed and Trafficking-informed Services:..... | 209 |
| Immediate Assistance for Stabilization: .....           | 209 |
| Early Intervention/Response for Sexual Abuse: .....     | 210 |
| Intervention: .....                                     | 210 |
| Pursuit/Care: .....                                     | 210 |
| Offered Resources/options:.....                         | 211 |
| Recommendations for Medical Professionals:.....         | 219 |
| Recommendations for Clinicians: .....                   | 219 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Recommendations for the Criminal Justice System: .....  | 222 |
| Recommendations for Community Members: .....  | 224 |
| Recommendations for Loved Ones:.....  | 227 |
| Recommendations from Survivors for Survivors: .....   | 229 |
| Recommendations for Faith Communities and Faith-based Organizations:.....                     | 232 |
| Chapter 13: Discussion .....  | 234 |
| Power: .....  | 234 |
| Complex Trauma .....  | 236 |
| Self-Perception:.....   | 237 |
| Systems of Meaning:.....  | 238 |
| Relationships:.....   | 238 |
| Sexuality: .....  | 241 |
| Posttraumatic Growth .....  | 243 |
| Experiences of Need: .....  | 246 |
| Re-exploitation:.....   | 248 |
| Re-traumatization:.....   | 249 |
| Research Implications:.....   | 252 |
| Limitations: .....  | 252 |
| Conclusion: .....   | 253 |
| Appendix A: Glossary.....   | 255 |
| Appendix B: Timeline for Dissertation Study: .....  | 256 |
| Appendix C: Sample Interview Guide .....  | 257 |
| Appendix D Introductory Letter to Agencies .....  | 259 |
| Appendix E Recruitment Flyer (without graphics).....  | 261 |
| Appendix F Organizations who will receive information about Study:.....                       | 262 |
| Appendix G: Consent Form for Research Participants .....                                      | 263 |
| Appendix H Consent Form for Photovoice Project .....  | 267 |
| Appendix I: Consent Form: PhotoVoice Participant Consent to Use Photography for Display ..... | 270 |
| Appendix J: Voices of Survivors-Photovoice Project: Introductory Training Outline .....       | 271 |
| Appendix K: Video Conference Photovoice Group Guide.....                                      | 274 |
| Appendix L: Research Participant Screening Form.....  | 275 |
| Appendix M: Research Contact Card .....   | 277 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Appendix N: Photovoice Project.....                           | 278 |
| Appendix O: Sample Case Study Analysis: Participant 006 ..... | 295 |
| Appendix P: Codebook .....                                    | 301 |
| Bibliography .....  | 307 |

## List of Tables

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Table 1 Ethnicity of Participants.....     | 94  |
| Table 2 Participant Demographics .....     | 94  |
| Table 3 Pre-Trafficking Loss of Power..... | 97  |
| Table 4 Ways of Coping .....               | 165 |
| Table 5 Types of Accessed Services .....   | 165 |

## List of Figures

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure 1 Action-Means-Purpose Model, Polaris Project (2012) ..... | 21  |
| Figure 2 Experiences of Need.....                                 | 113 |
| Figure 3 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                        | 116 |
| Figure 4 Photovoice Participant 14.....                           | 119 |
| Figure 5 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                        | 119 |
| Figure 6 Photovoice Participant 14.....                           | 120 |
| Figure 7 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                        | 120 |
| Figure 8 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                        | 121 |
| Figure 9 Photovoice, Participant 14.....                          | 126 |
| Figure 10 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....                     | 139 |
| Figure 11 Photovoice Participant, Megan .....                     | 139 |
| Figure 12 Photovoice Participant 14.....                          | 144 |
| Figure 13 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                       | 144 |
| Figure 14 Photovoice, Participant 18.....                         | 145 |
| Figure 15 Photovoice, Participant 18.....                         | 145 |
| Figure 16 Photovoice, Participant 18.....                         | 145 |
| Figure 17 Photovoice, Participant 14.....                         | 146 |
| Figure 18 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                       | 146 |
| Figure 19 Photovoice, Participant 18.....                         | 155 |
| Figure 20 Photovoice, Participant 18.....                         | 155 |
| Figure 21 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                       | 163 |
| Figure 22 Photovoice, Participant 14.....                         | 163 |
| Figure 23 Photovoice Participant 1 .....                          | 164 |
| Figure 24 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....                     | 174 |
| Figure 25 Photovoice Participant, Megan .....                     | 175 |
| Figure 26 Photovoice Participant 15.....                          | 178 |
| Figure 27 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....                     | 179 |
| Figure 28 Photovoice, Participant 18.....                         | 179 |
| Figure 29 Photovoice Participant 18.....                          | 179 |
| Figure 30 Photovoice Participant, Megan .....                     | 180 |
| Figure 31 Photovoice Participant, Megan .....                     | 181 |
| Figure 32 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                       | 183 |
| Figure 33 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                       | 183 |
| Figure 34 Photovoice Participant 15.....                          | 183 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure 35 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                 | 184 |
| Figure 36 Photovoice Participant 14.....                    | 184 |
| Figure 37 Photovoice Participant 15.....                    | 184 |
| Figure 38 Photovoice Participant 15.....                    | 185 |
| Figure 39 Photovoice Participant, Megan.....                | 185 |
| Figure 40 Photovoice Participant 14.....                    | 186 |
| Figure 41 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                 | 187 |
| Figure 42 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 188 |
| Figure 43 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....               | 188 |
| Figure 44 Photovoice Participant, Megan.....                | 189 |
| Figure 45 Photovoice Participant, Megan.....                | 189 |
| Figure 46 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 189 |
| Figure 47 Photovoice Participant, Megan.....                | 191 |
| Figure 48 Photovoice Participant, Megan.....                | 192 |
| Figure 49 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                 | 194 |
| Figure 50 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                 | 194 |
| Figure 51 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 195 |
| Figure 52 Photovoice Participant, Cat .....                 | 195 |
| Figure 53 Photovoice Participant 15.....                    | 195 |
| Figure 54 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 196 |
| Figure 55 Photovoice Participant 14.....                    | 196 |
| Figure 56 Photovoice Participant 14.....                    | 196 |
| Figure 57 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....               | 197 |
| Figure 58 Photovoice Participant 18.....                    | 197 |
| Figure 59 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 198 |
| Figure 60 Photovoice Participant 14.....                    | 198 |
| Figure 61 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....               | 198 |
| Figure 62 Photovoice Participant 14.....                    | 199 |
| Figure 63 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 199 |
| Figure 64 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 199 |
| Figure 65 Photovoice Group Reflection .....                 | 200 |
| Figure 66 Photovoice Participant 18.....                    | 200 |
| Figure 67 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....               | 201 |
| Figure 68 Photovoice Participant, Grace .....               | 202 |
| Figure 69 Photovoice, Participant 14.....                   | 205 |
| Figure 70 Photovoice Participant, Megan.....                | 226 |
| Figure 72 The Danger of Re-Exploitation.....                | 248 |
| Figure 73 The Danger of Re-Traumatization.....              | 249 |
| Figure 74 Recommendations for Clinicians.....               | 250 |
| Figure 75 Recommendations for Service Providers.....        | 250 |
| Figure 76 Recommendations for Medical Professionals.....    | 251 |
| Figure 77 Recommendations for Criminal Justice System ..... | 251 |
| Figure 78 Recommendations for Loved Ones.....               | 251 |
| Figure 79 Recommendations for Community Members .....       | 251 |
| Figure 80 Recommendations for Survivors .....               | 251 |

## **Introduction**

Human trafficking is a global human rights violation, enslaving men, women and children. The United States' legal definition of human trafficking established in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines trafficking in persons as:

- a) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such acts has not attained 18 years of age; or
- b) The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (8 U.S.C. § 1101) (Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2016).

Human sex trafficking is the most prevalent form of trafficking (Department of State, 2017). While these crimes are not new to history, they have been recognized more formally since 2000 with the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Since that time, there has been worldwide assessment and monitoring of protection, prevention and prosecution efforts to strengthen the response to this form of modern-day slavery (Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2017).

The United States of America is a source, destination and transit country for trafficked individuals (Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2017). The National Human Trafficking Hotline has received multiple reports of human trafficking cases in each of the 50 states as well as Washington D.C. (Polaris, 2016 Statistics from the National Human Trafficking Hotline and BeFree Textline, 2017). Found in urban, rural and suburban areas, many Americans

are still unaware that the majority of sex trafficking victims in the United States are women and children from their own neighborhoods (Sher, 2011).

The prevalence of sex trafficking is far-reaching, spanning multiple demographic characteristics, such as age, socioeconomic status, nationality, education level and gender. Traffickers target vulnerability and isolation. Histories of trauma, violence and household instability are risk factors that make one susceptible to recruitment in the commercial sex industry.

In addition, there are misconceptions of prostitution that have enabled human sex trafficking to flourish as it remains a hidden crime. The general distinction between prostitution and sex trafficking is one of choice. A woman involved in prostitution may not be participating by force, fraud, or coercion. However, the research on women in prostitution causes us to challenge this distinction and see the blurred lines between prostitution and sex trafficking. For example, 90% of women involved in prostitution or sex trafficking in the United States have a childhood history of sexual abuse (Farley, 2003). While an argument is that all women have chosen prostitution as an occupation, in the United States, an average of 85% of women in prostitution are controlled by a pimp, more accurately known as a trafficker (Farley, 2003). Finally, utilization of terminology such as “child prostitute” or “teen prostitute” misrepresents that by definition, anyone under the age of 18 is considered a victim of human sex trafficking.

The impact on a victim of human sex trafficking is layered and complex. Furthermore, the physical violence, sexual violence and psychological control of a trafficker and the events during the time of sexual exploitation are factors that only compound early childhood trauma (Hardy, V, Compton, K, McPhatter, V, 2013). The effects of these experiences continue after the exploitation ends. Upon identification as a victim and separation from the trafficker, a victim

faces complicating factors and needs, including but not limited to basic living essentials and crucial aspects of ongoing independent functioning. Issues of poverty, homelessness and absence of a safe social support network are challenges that face trafficking victims and can generate a cycle of exploitation that requires immense social and health interventions to pause and reverse (Clawson, Dutch, Salomon & Goldblatt, 2009; Farley, 2003;).

Themes observed and described by victims of human sex trafficking are indicative of complex trauma. Complex Trauma (Courtois & Ford, 2009) or Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS) (Spinazzola, J, Blaustein, M, Kisiel, C, Van der Kolk, B., 2001) is terminology formulated to capture trauma that is extreme, chronic or repetitious, interpersonal, and premeditated. Complex trauma is “resulting from exposure to severe stressors that are repetitive or prolonged, involves harm or abandonment by caregivers or other adults, and occurs at developmentally vulnerable times in the victim’s life” (Courtois & Ford, 2009, p.13 ). Complex trauma or DESNOS, while not an official diagnosis listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, more accurately describes the trauma seen in victimization within human sex trafficking (Choi, H, Klein, C, Shin, M, Lee, H, August, 2009). Complex trauma emphasizes alterations in six areas: regulation of affect and impulses, attention or consciousness, self-perception, relations with others, somatization, and systems of meaning (Spinazzola, et al., 2001). In turn, to cope or regulate, victims who present with complex trauma often resort to substance abuse, self-injury, disordered eating, suicidal ideation, or other forms of self-destructive behaviors (APA, 2013). These factors are commonly observed in human sex trafficking victims, along with effects of the captivity which contribute to trauma bonds, confusion, fear, and guilt. For some, addiction or other self-destructive coping mechanisms

become additional barriers to trauma recovery (Clawson et. al 2009; Hardy et.al 2013; US Department of Health and Human Services 2009).

## **Problem Statement**

Since this issue was first defined and addressed in the United States through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, research has begun to show us the impact, complexities, and needs of victims of human sex trafficking. However, a consistent theme mentioned is the need for more robust research and the lack of empirical data for treatment of sex trafficking victims or understanding of their psychological experiences and their resiliency factors, which can then inform mental health treatment and aftercare services (Clawson et.al 2008; Williamson, Dutch, Clawson, 2009, Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). Additionally, domestic sex trafficking victims have been overlooked in the literature which has emphasized international trafficking victims (Cecchet et-al., 2014).

One author (Schmidt, 2014) commenting on sex trafficking noted that “no established therapeutic intervention exists,” (p.5) and therefore research has been limited to treatment for other issues that sex trafficking victims may encounter or similar populations that have endured trauma or isolation. Some examples include domestic violence, sexual assault, refugees, and victims of torture (Jones, 2014; Williamson & Dutch, 2009). Research has been described as “fragmented” (Jones, 2014, p.11), lacking data on best practices and interventions, and void in addressing this issue from a clinical perspective (Cecchet et.al, 2014; Dell, N; B. Maynard, K. Born, E. Wagner, B. Atkins, W. House, 2017; Armenta-Buelna L., 2017). There are increasing programs and services, yet a limited body of knowledge to identify what is successful, particularly what is effective, replicable, and grounded in theoretical research (APA, 2014).

Research contributions have provided a general understanding of victims, factors of vulnerability prior to being trafficked, the means of recruitment, the impact of physical, sexual and psychological violence, along with the control and isolation of a victim. Furthermore, studies have given a general overview of identified needs of victims, have reviewed current resources and services and have outlined several recommendations for treatment of domestic sex trafficking victims: trauma-informed services that address education on violence and victimization, empowerment, strength, resilience, cultural uniqueness and collaboration (Elliot, Bjelajac, & FalLOT, 2005); peer-to-peer models and group processes that address themes of trauma healing, coping skills, and purpose (Hardy et al., 2009); and comprehensive, multidisciplinary services to assist with housing, legal issues, medical care, social services, trauma therapy and substance abuse treatment (Department of Health and Human Services, 2009; Macy, R, Johns, N., 2011). However, consistently these recommendations include the call for additional research to test their effectiveness (US Department Health and Human Services, 2009) and to understand the factors that make treatment successful (Countryman-Roswurm, K & DiLollo, A, 2016). Finally, there is more to understand about the contributing factors to long-term, sustainable healing and how service providers and the general community may understand their role in that process.

The majority of studies have surveyed service providers and employees of domestic and international organizations who are supporting trafficking victims. Yet, the voices of survivors have remained on the fringe. The research is begging for additional depth that highlights the voices of survivors and addresses the nuances of both the impact of victimization in sex trafficking, the challenges that they encounter, as well as their perspective of the most helpful components of recovery and reintegration after they have been separated from the trafficker. It

seems responsible to consult with and learn from our greatest teachers, those who directly experienced this complex form of victimization.

To add to the literature, this qualitative retrospective study focused on the voices of female domestic survivors of human sex trafficking who have been separated from their trafficker. Interview topics included impact of experiences during exploitation and escape, but highlighted their experiences of survivorship, to determine what impacts the reintegration process. Furthermore, through the theoretical lenses of ecological systems, complex trauma and posttraumatic growth, interviews probed about survivor experience of services, support systems, barriers and what factors seem to be most helpful and pertinent. Photovoice methodology was incorporated into the interview process as an additional means for survivors to express their experiences. The mission is to share their experiences in a way that promotes the nuanced impact of their experiences, while upholding their humanity and the fullness of their identities.

An ideal outcome of these interviews with sex trafficking survivors is to highlight their voices and wisdom to further define, recommend and test effective interventions and support systems. Because the impact is complex and the barriers to reintegration are numerous, this issue deserves multi-faceted strong models that not only are trauma-informed, but facilitate stabilization and quality of life for those who have been victimized. The voice of survivors will serve as a guide to evaluate and then provide recovery model recommendations and insight into contributing factors to reintegration. Specifically this research aimed to explore the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of adult female domestic sex trafficking survivors?
2. How do women view these experiences as influencing identity, sexuality, relationships, and seeking services after separation from trafficker?
3. What factors do survivors believe contribute to community reintegration?

# Chapter One: The History & Environment in which Human Trafficking Exists

## Human Trafficking Defined

Human trafficking is an issue receiving increased attention, and one of critical concern for social workers. Considered a form of modern day slavery, it is a global human rights violation, enslaving men, women and children. The legal definition of human trafficking in the United States was established in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) and defines trafficking in persons as:

- a) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such acts has not attained 18 years of age; or
- b) The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, enticement, advertising, soliciting, patronizing, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (8 U.S.C. § 1101; Title 18 U.S.1591) (Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2016; Congressional Research Service, 2015).

The Action-Means-Purpose Model is an image and an illustration created by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, to simplify this federal definition. For an individual to be charged with trafficking in persons, one element of **Action** (recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining), **Means** (force, fraud, coercion) and **Purpose** (labor or sex act) must be identified. In addition, if an individual is under the age of 18 and is involved with a commercial sex act, they are immediately identified as a victim of sex trafficking without proof of force, fraud or coercion (Polaris Project, 2012).

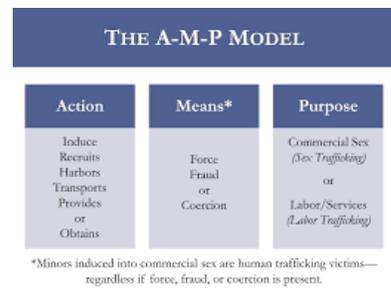


Figure 1 Action-Means-Purpose Model, Polaris Project (2012)

Human trafficking can be a misleading term, implying movement from one place to another. Trafficking does occur across borders of continent, country, state, city and town, but movement is not an essential aspect. One may be trafficked without being transported. A key component of human trafficking is the goal and implementation of exploitation by a trafficker for labor or commercial sex purposes (Department of State, 2016).

### **Prevalence of Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking occurs in every nation of the world. Human sex trafficking is the most prevalent form of trafficking, and remains a hidden, misunderstood and largely underreported crime worldwide, including in the United States of America (Department of State, 2016). The International Labour Organization estimates that there are 4.5 million victims of sex trafficking globally, of which 98% are women and children (Orme & Ross-Sheriff, 2015). The United States of America is a source, destination and transit country for trafficked individuals (Department of State, 2016). A conservative estimate from the Department of State declares between 14,500 and 17,500 individuals are trafficked into the United States (Clawson, Dutch, Salomon & Grace, 2009). Yet, some researchers, such as Clawson et al. (2009) suggest that this may not be an accurate representation and that it does not consider U.S. born citizens who are being trafficked within the United States. While there is no official data of the total number of human trafficking victims in the United States, it is estimated to reach hundreds of thousands when considering adults and minor victims of labor and sex trafficking. Many Americans are still unaware that the majority of sex trafficking victims are women and children from their own neighborhoods (Sher, 2011).

The National Human Trafficking Hotline obtained over 31,000 reports of human trafficking in the last eight years. In 2016, they identified 8,042 cases of human trafficking. The

large majority of these cases were citizens from the United States (Polaris, 2016 Statistics from the National Human Trafficking Hotline and BeFree Textline, 2017). A study of ten cities within the United States indicated an estimate of 100,000-300,000 victims of domestic minor sex trafficking, or victims who are under the age of 18 (Smith, Healy Vardaman, & Snow, 2009).

### **Types of Human Trafficking**

Types of human trafficking include labor trafficking and sex trafficking. The main focus of this literature review is human sex trafficking, particularly its depiction in the United States. The force of women into the commercial sex industry may include street prostitution, pornography, strip clubs, massage parlors, online advertisements and prostitution at truck stops, hotels, or within residential settings. Labor trafficking, or forced labor, may include cases of domestic servitude, agriculture, sweatshop, nail salons, food service industry, janitorial work, construction or landscaping. (Department of State, 2016; Clawson et al., 2009).

### **History of Human Trafficking and Legislative Response**

While there was first legislative attention to prostitution within the fifth and fifteenth centuries, commercial sexual exploitation was initially understood as a form of sexual slavery in the United States in the early twentieth century (Bromfield, 2016). During the progressive era, social reformers focused on “white slavery” and movements against sexual slavery (Bromfield, 2016; Donovan, 2006; Shah, 2011; Smolak, 2013). Social work pioneer, Jane Addams, was an advocate against the white slavery movement and saw all individuals in prostitution as being victims in need of rescue, while others in the movement saw a distinction between victims of forced prostitution and those who were voluntarily in prostitution (Bromfield, 2016). These varying perceptions are an illustration of an ongoing debate within the creation and reform of legislation.

Conservative religious groups and some feminist groups historically view all forms of prostitution as exploitation. Other parties, including other feminist groups and individuals directly involved with helping trafficking victims, have wanted to create legislation to assist both victims of sex trafficking and labor trafficking and make a distinction between forced sex trafficking and voluntary prostitution (Bromfield, 2016; Bromfield, 2012). Some of these groups are also focused on rights of those choosing to sell sex, viewing prostitution as a viable work option and a choice. This debate is influential not only in our perception, but also our intervention for trafficked individuals who are involved in or are leaving the commercial sex industry as well as prosecution of traffickers.

While these crimes are not new to history, they have been recognized more formally since 2000 with the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) by the United States Congress. As there was increased global attention to this prevalent issue through the Department's Annual Country Report on Human Rights Practice, the U.S. Department of State began monitoring the trafficking of persons in 1994. The original reports were trafficking of women and girls for sexual purposes, but since that time, the understanding of human trafficking has widened.

Considered the cornerstone of federal human trafficking legislation, the TVPA of 2000 established an official definition of human trafficking, initial protocol and intervention for prosecution of traffickers, prevention of human trafficking, and protection of its victims. This legislation included instituting human trafficking as a federal crime and initially identified restitution for victims. One service to victims provided through the TVPA is receiving T Visas. A T Visa enables international victims to become temporary residents of the United States, with eligibility to become permanent residents after three years. To qualify for a T-Visa, one must be

a victim of human trafficking and must be willing to participate in the prosecution of his/her trafficker.

Through the TVPA, The United States was declaring their commitment to preventing individuals from becoming victims of trafficking, protecting victims of trafficking and prosecuting traffickers. It inaugurated a movement to create the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons which assists in the implementation of the TVPA. This office is responsible to publish an annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, which has become the United States government's tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking. Including the United States, it assesses 186 countries for efforts of prevention, prosecution, and protection, is used to examine where resources are needed, monitors prevalence of human trafficking, and holds governments accountable to confront and eliminate human trafficking (Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2016).

Human trafficking is also being addressed on a state and local level. Most noteworthy legislative action includes enacting "Safe Harbor" legislation to protect child victims of sex trafficking and the movement to address demand for commercial sex. Safe Harbor legislation addresses the legal and social service needs of child victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. These laws seek to ensure that no child under the age of 18 is arrested for prostitution or treated like a criminal for being sexually exploited. As of 2015, 34 states have adopted some form of Safe Harbors laws (Polaris, 2015).

Additionally, there is a growing movement in the United States to address human trafficking by targeting the demand for commercial sex and those who are consumers of the commercial sex industry. Demand Abolition is one example of an organization that has analyzed

demand-reduction practices and is advocating for stronger priority and attention towards prevention efforts.

### **The Cultural Demand for Sex**

This study views the experiences of sex trafficking survivors from an ecological perspective. Therefore, it is imperative to consider the ecosystem that supports the buying and selling of women, men, and children. This includes the norms of the culture as well as the consumers that support this industry. Those who buy a woman or child for sex are often referred to as “johns”, a generic name used for the anonymous “common-man.” In this case, this term refers to men who are part of the millions who buy sex in America, including from children and victims of sex trafficking. Yet, giving buyers a name like “john” minimizes the reality of their crime. Survivor-leader, Rachel Lloyd (2011) says these men may not dream of sexually abusing a girl, but they do not hold the same value for a prostitute. They may have varying ways of justifying their actions, such as they are helping her to feed her kids or pay bills (Lloyd, 2011).

The sex buyers represent all walks of life, every age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. They are comprised of educated professionals, clergy, students, educators, law enforcement and more. As Lloyd (2011) states, “most of the men doing the buying are what we would consider ‘normal’. The buying of sex is so normalized. While we may frown upon those who get caught, there is an underlying belief that men have needs and that sometimes those needs may be legitimately, if not legally fulfilled by someone” (p.107). A University of Pennsylvania study stated that “without equivocation...the presence of preexisting adult prostitution markets contributes measurably to the creation of secondary sexual markets in which children are sexually exploited (Estes, 2001).”

Mansson (2004) reports that 16% of men in the United States have paid for sex, and 49.2% of sex buyers in another sample had never discussed their buying of sex with anyone (Atchison, 2010). Milrod & Monto (2012) conducted a study of 584 men who were paying members of TheEroticReview.com. TheEroticReview.com is a website that provides contact information, pricing and services for over 75,000 prostituted persons, allows sex buyers to leave reviews and provides information on how to meet prostituted individuals and how to avoid getting arrested. It has over one million registered users, 800,000 reviews, and over 250,000 unique users daily.

## **Prostitution**

When considering the literature on human sex trafficking, one must also consider research on prostitution. First, a current limitation of research on human sex trafficking generates a need to learn from literature on prostitution.

Furthermore, the distinction between trafficking and prostitution is often understood as one of choice. If prostitution and trafficking are merged, it may overlook the agency of individuals involved in prostitution (Butcher, 2003). However, there is more to consider when addressing the concept of choice within prostitution. Leidholdt (2003) calls prostitution and trafficking fundamentally interrelated to the extent that trafficking can be viewed as “globalized prostitution (p.167).” While an argument is that all individuals in prostitution have chosen it as an occupation, in the United States, an average of 85-95% of women in prostitution are or have been controlled by a trafficker (Farley, 2003; Stark & Hodgson, 2003, Leidholdt, 2003).

Another factor in the relationship between prostitution and sex trafficking is the prevalence of children in the commercial sex industry (Smith, L, et al., 2009). By definition, anyone under the age of 18 is considered a victim of human sex trafficking. Utilization of

terminology such as “child prostitute” or “teen prostitute” misrepresents this reality. The data revealing when women are entering prostitution must be considered in discussion of prostitution as consensual and the interwoven relationship of prostitution and sex trafficking.

Additionally, when considering the concept of choice in prostitution, we must look at factors of vulnerability. For example, 55-90% of prostitutes report a history of childhood sexual abuse (Farley, 2003). While this statistic provides preliminary data, more studies must consider the impact of childhood sexual abuse on one’s perception of self, sexuality and its impact on their involvement in prostitution or deception of a trafficker into the commercial sex industry. A study interviewing 200 female prostitutes in California to determine the history of sexual exploitation or abuse in childhood emphasized that 80% of participants felt that childhood sexual abuse affected their decision to become a prostitute (Silbert, M; Pines, A, 1983). We must consider if prostitution and sex trafficking should be included as symptoms or effects of childhood sexual abuse.

Farley (2003) addresses the question of voluntary consent to prostitution. Results of her study of nine countries reveal prevalence of homelessness (75%) and desire to leave prostitution (89%) as explanation of their lack of options for escape. She emphasizes that it is a “clinical and statistical error” to assume that most prostituted women consent to it (p.65). If key conditions such as physical safety, power and real alternatives are absent, this tests the idea that prostitution is voluntary. Sex trafficking survivor, Kathleen Mitchell, also challenges the idea of choice amongst women in prostitution. “The illusion of choice is the biggest obstacle to getting people to see these girls as the victims they are. In order to have a choice you need to have two viable options to choose from. The choice for these girls is not do you want to turn a trick or do you want a wonderful life. That’s not even on the table” (Sher, 2011, p. 53).

In Farley's nine-country study where 854 men and women in prostitution were questioned about their needs, 87% in the United States declared the need to leave prostitution, 78% said a home or safe place, followed by job training (73%), drug/alcohol treatment (67%), health care (58%), peer support (50%), individual counseling (48%), self-defense training (49%), legal assistance (42%), legalize prostitution (44%), child care (34%), and physical protection from pimp (28%) (Farley, 2003).

Farley emphasizes that until we address the social invisibility of prostitution, acknowledge its destruction, and confront its normalization, it will perpetuate trafficking and continue social harm. "Prostitution and trafficking can only exist in an atmosphere of public, professional and academic indifference" (Farley, 2003, p.65). This described atmosphere has enabled and supported victimization of sex trafficking. Therefore, these perceptions and attitudes are factors of the environment in which a sex trafficking survivor lives after being separated from her trafficker.

## **Chapter 2: The Pre-Trafficking Experience**

### **The Victims**

#### **Demographics, Risk Factors and Vulnerability**

The prevalence of sex trafficking is far-reaching, spanning multiple demographic characteristics such as age, socioeconomic status, nationality, education level and gender. Traffickers commonly target individuals with characteristics of vulnerability and isolation (Clawson, et al., 2009). Victims of human trafficking, both international and domestic, have characteristics that may increase risk of being trafficked including: poverty, young age, limited education, lack of support system (orphaned, in child welfare system), family instability/abuse, runaway/throwaway, homelessness, history of previous sexual abuse, health or mental health challenges, living in vulnerable areas, (ex. areas with high crime, or economic/political instability). In addition, being female, transgender or homosexual increases risk when combined with the above factors, such as lack of social support or homelessness. (Clawson, et al., 2009; Salvation Army, 2006; Orme et al., 2015).

In 2016, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reported data of recruitment tactics utilized by the traffickers for 2,123 of 5189 calls for sex trafficking victims. Of those calls, the majority report being recruited through intimate partners/marriage (784), followed by familial connections (464), false promises/fraud (691) or job offers (238). Top risk factors reported by victims included recent migration/relocation, substance use, runaway/homeless youth, mental health instability and unstable housing (Polaris, 2016).

In 2017, data was released from the largest study of human trafficking among homeless young people. As part of a joint project of the University of Pennsylvania, Loyola University New Orleans and Covenant House, 911 youth ages 17-25 in thirteen cities in the United States

and Canada were interviewed with the purpose to further understand the prevalence and nature of human trafficking. A mixed methods study, semi-structured interviews were conducted, also using the instruments, Human Trafficking Interview and Assessment Measures (HTIAM-14) and the Child Welfare Supplemental Survey (CWSS). The data confirmed aforementioned risk factors. Nearly one in five (19.4%) of the 911 interviewed youth were victims of human trafficking with 15% having been trafficked for sex, 7.4% for labor and 3% for both. 21.4% of young women and 10% of young men interviewed had been trafficked for sex. 26.9% of LGBTQ youth reported experiences of being trafficked; and 32.1% of the youth acknowledged engagement in some way in the sex trade (40.5% of young females, 25.3% of young men, and 56% of transgender youth) (The Field Center for Children's Policy, 2017). Of the youth interviewed by University of Pennsylvania researchers, 95% of the participants reported mistreatment during their childhood, with 49% reporting a history of childhood sexual abuse. Additionally, youth who completed high school and acknowledged the presence of a supportive adult in their lives were less likely to be sex trafficked (The Field Center for Children's Policy P. a., 2017).

## **Recruitment of the Victim**

### **The Traffickers**

Traffickers include both men and women. A study of former traffickers reveals that they often come from backgrounds of vulnerability including poverty, abuse, and deprivation. Researchers identified that 88% of traffickers experienced childhood physical abuse and 75% endured sexual assault. 60% report trafficking, more commonly known as “pimping” or prostitution as a family business, and 56% of men and 100% of women sold sex prior to becoming traffickers. Some were coerced via gang involvement and some became involved for the purpose of survival (Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010). The internet displays a variety of

resources where traffickers share their secrets of their trade. These include “The Pimp Game: Instructional Guide” and “The Pimp Game: Rules of Life.” Here is an example of the provided instruction:

“You'll start to dress her, think for her, own her. If you and your victim are sexually active, slow it down. After sex, take her shopping for one item. Hair and/or nails is fine. She'll develop a feeling of accomplishment. The shopping after a month will be replaced with cash. The love making turns into raw sex. She'll start to crave the intimacy and be willing to get back into your good graces. After you have broken her spirit, she has no sense of self value. Now pimp, put a price tag on the item you have manufactured (Royal, 1998).”

### **Identification and Engagement Process**

Understanding the backgrounds of traffickers does not dismiss or excuse the level of deception, manipulation and control that they devise and execute within the commercial sex industry. Traffickers are experts in identification and engagement. They are calculated at targeting vulnerability and isolation in their process of recruitment. A trafficker does not approach a girl and ask her if she wants to be a prostitute. He meets girls at group homes, on the streets, outside of schools, at parties, public parks, malls or any place where they may gather. The majority are meeting girls online on various forms of social media.

The trafficker establishes a relationship with a target, presenting himself as a boyfriend and protector. The mode of domestic sex traffickers is to ensnare vulnerable girls and women through tactics that combine seduction with brainwashing and terrorism—otherwise known as “seasoning” (Smith, et al., 2009). One trafficker has called himself a “street psychiatrist: I seek out girls who need my help (Sher, 2011, p.102).”

He isolates a girl from other relationships and support systems and limits access to any perspective other than his own, to convince her that he is the only one who is trustworthy (Lloyd, 2011). His goal is to exploit vulnerability and remove credibility of family, the public, law enforcement or social service providers (Smith et al., 2009).

## **Use of Power**

Traffickers use tactics that may be compared with cult leaders, hostage takers, terrorists, and dictators of small countries. Amnesty International has utilized Biderman's chart of coercion to explain techniques used in controlling prisoners and hostages: isolation; control or distortion of perceptions; humiliation or degradation; threats; demonstrating superiority & power; enforcing trivial demands; exhaustion; occasional indulgences (Amnesty International, 1973; Lloyd, 2011).

However, a trafficker most often begins with the tools of seduction and promises. A pretense of a romantic relationship is used as a means of extreme emotional control. Using relationship as his/her greatest weapon creates a complex dynamic between a trafficker and the victim. This often results in a phenomenon called "traumatic bonding" in which trafficking victims have strong feelings of attachment to their abusers. In situations of captivity, like human trafficking, the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator. Researcher Judith Herman (1993) compares captors of hostages and torture victims to human traffickers, stating they display a psychological need to justify their crimes, and for this they need their victim's affirmation. Thus, the captor relentlessly demands from his/her victim declarations of respect, gratitude, and even love. Herman notes that a perpetrator's ultimate goal is to create a willing victim. "Fear is also increased by inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence and by capricious enforcement of petty rules. The ultimate effect of these techniques is to convince the victim that the perpetrator is omnipotent, that resistance is futile, and that her life depends upon winning his indulgence through absolute compliance (p.77)."

## **Trauma Bond**

This trauma bond becomes a chief obstacle to the identification, rescue, and restoration of victims of sex trafficking. Victims often will not self-identify because they do not see themselves as victims or because of the bond and loyalty to their trafficker. They may return to their trafficker after having been separated from him (Smith, et al., 2009). Finally, this bond creates confusion in emotions, involvement in court testimony and receiving services as well as perception of choice and responsibility.

Johnson, (2012) further describes how victims comply with their abusers or traffickers. The silencing power of the trafficking experience includes the dynamic of coercion of the victim through cruelty, torture, threats, withholding of food or life necessities, withholding of drugs, and the victim's inability to identify solutions or a plan for leaving. It also involves collusion, explaining the survival mentality of the victim, including the false sense of love and belonging, emotional or financial dependence, and captive compliance by displaying positive behaviors towards the supporter. Finally, it encompasses contrition, explaining the victim's feelings of shame, guilt, self-blame, regret, worthlessness, hopelessness, family dishonor, stigmatization, or rejection (Johnson, 2012).

## Chapter 3: The Trafficking Experience:

### The Experiences of a Trafficking Victim

During time of being trafficked, assault, threats of harm to self and family, restricted freedom and coercion are the norm. There is minimal freedom to predict or manage one's own health or safety. An individual may lack choice within daily activities such as sleep, eating, and work. She lacks choice in the number of buyers or who to accept, and the nightly financial quota she is forced to produce, with punishment if she does not. She may be given material items, including hair or nail services, but she does not manage or see the money. She will be told where to move, when and with whom, while subjected to physical and sexual violence.

Traffickers have their own terminology. These slang words are descriptive of the humiliation and degradation involved in the commercial sex industry, also known as “the life.” Survivor leader and author, Rachel Lloyd (2011) describes some of the common slang words and rules used. The phrase *pimps up, hos down* means that the victim needs to be in the street while he walks on the sidewalk. Being *out of pocket* refers to showing disrespect for your pimp or another pimp and can apply to infractions such as looking another pimp directly in the eye, disagreeing with your pimp, or not making enough money. Punishment for breaking rules may include a beating, or being placed in a *pimp circle*, where a group of pimps harasses the victim and tries to force them to make eye contact so they can beat her if she does. A fine for breaking the rules is a charge, and she may be kidnapped by another pimp to make back money that is owed. These are just a few examples of the rules and codes “all designed to break down an individual will” (p.96).

Cechhet et al. (2014) report themes of systemic isolation and threat to life amongst the six interviewed in a qualitative study focused on psychological experiences of child and adolescent

sex trafficking. Williams (2010), conducting interviews with 61 teenagers commercially sexually exploited within the United States, reported themes of harm, hurt, and survival. Williams states the narratives revealed that sexual victimization is continuous and ongoing for prostituted youth. “For them, sexual violence is not a single and solitary, discrete event. Hundreds of men have sexual intercourse, oral sex, or anal penetration with prostituted teens in the course of a couple weeks” (p.48). Additionally, they are sexually victimized by the traffickers and the buyers. To consider the conservative estimate of an individual having five buyers in one night, seven days a week for one year, leads to the equivalent of 1,820 forced sexual encounters.

### **The Impact on a Trafficking Victim**

Since human trafficking was given its formal definition in 2000, the research and attention to this topic is relatively young. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services conducted a study published in 2009 which focused on trafficking victims and their specific needs, compared to existing programs and services. More concentrated academic attention has been in the last several years. Literature has originated and been applied amongst multiple disciplines, including psychiatry, social work, psychology, criminal science and public health. The various disciplines are helpful as they tend to focus on different aspects of this complex, layered, and comprehensive issue. Psychology, psychiatry and some social work literature may generally concentrate on the psychological impact of a victim. Criminal science studies have highlighted understanding the aspects of victimization. A robust portion of this literature comes from a social work perspective, as it centers on all systems to understand and address human trafficking. These include history, policies, the individual, and the various systems that are necessary for prevention and intervention.

This literature has begun to explain how the impact on a victim of human sex trafficking is layered, complex, comprehensive, and difficult to describe or enumerate. One contributing factor to this complexity is the prevalence of childhood experiences that made them vulnerable to further sexual exploitation. The physical violence, sexual violence and psychological control of a trafficker and the events during the time of sexual exploitation are factors that create symptoms of trauma and compound early childhood trauma (Hardy, Compton, & McPhatter, 2013; Choi, Klein, Shin, & Lee, 2009).

One well-known study investigating symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and prostitution-related physical and sexual violence in 475 men, women, and transgendered individuals involved in prostitution in five countries revealed that 67% met diagnostic criteria for PTSD, and the mean PTSD severity in the sample was higher than rates seen in veterans of the Vietnam War (Farley, 2003). High rates of physical and sexual violence from involvement in prostitution were also reported, including 70-95% of women experiencing physical assault, and 60-75% had been raped (Farley, 2003). Another study interviewing 204 individuals from 12 countries reported high levels of physical and sexual violence both prior to and during the trafficking experience. More than 80% during the trafficking experience had been subjected to sexual violence, threats of harm to themselves, and persistently restricted freedom (Zimmerman, Hossain, & Watts, 2011).

Hughes and Raymond (2001) provided a broad study to explore international and domestic sex trafficking, including its social consequences. Interviewing experts that included service providers and victims, physical violence reported amongst traffickers for women in prostitution includes the following: Traffickers physically abused (86%) and assaulted frequently or daily (50%). Traffickers use weapons against women (61%) and threaten the lives

of women and their families (34%). Traffickers sexually assault (80%), psychologically abuse (85%) and verbally threaten (90%) the majority of their victims. Traffickers use drugs to control (71%) and if a woman tries to leave, more than half (52%) of them will be forced to return, stalked, physically abused and threatened (Hughes & Raymond, 2001).

Furthermore, women experience physical violence from the buyers. Men who are buying sex also sexually assault (93%), rape (75%), rob (56%), physically assault (82%) and threaten with weapons (83%). Finally, in a study that interviewed women in street prostitution, 44% of women report forced or coerced sex with self-identified law enforcement (Dalla, R; Xia, Y, Kennedy, H, 2003).

### **Complex Trauma**

Although research reveals that trafficked individuals meet criteria for PTSD, this diagnosis may not fully capture the comprehensive nature of their symptoms and impact of trafficking (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Complex Trauma (Courtois, Ford, 2009), or Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS) (Spinazzola, J, Blaustein, M, Kisiel, C, Van der Kolk, B., 2001) are terminology formulated to capture trauma that is extreme, chronic or repetitious, interpersonal, and premeditated. Complex trauma is “resulting from exposure to severe stressors that are repetitive or prolonged, involves harm or abandonment by caregivers or other adults, and occur at developmentally vulnerable times in the victim’s life” (Courtois et al., 2009). Complex trauma or DESNOS, while not an official diagnosis listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, is a term that more accurately describes the trauma seen in victimization within human sex trafficking (Choi, et al., 2009; (Busch-Armendariz, N, Busch Nsonwu, M, Cook Heffron, L, 2014)). It will further assist in understanding the impact of trafficking on a victim.

Complex trauma emphasizes alterations in six areas: regulation of affect and impulses, attention or consciousness, self-perception, relations with others, somatization, and systems of meaning (Spinazzola, et al., 2001). In turn, to cope or regulate, victims who present with complex trauma may resort to substance abuse, self-injury, disordered eating, suicidal ideation or other forms of self-destructive behaviors (APA, 2013).

### **Dysregulation of Affect and Impulses**

Individuals who meet criteria for complex trauma/DESNOS have difficulty managing their emotional experiences. As a result of trauma, they may be easily overwhelmed, appear to have extreme reaction to neutral or mild stimuli and may have difficulty with self regulation (Spinazzola, et al., 2001). Victims of sex trafficking may appear as restless, angry, reactive or defensive. They live on a level of survival, something that continues after having left the trafficking experience.

Trauma creates an adaptive shift from a brain and body that focus on learning to a brain and body that become focused on survival. The learning brain may engage in exploration while the survival brain seeks to anticipate, prevent or protect against the damage caused by potential or actual dangers. Openness and discovery are replaced by harm avoidance and defensiveness (Courtois & Ford, 2009). The dominance of the survival brain over the learning brain represents a “biological trade-off between dealing with danger and facilitating growth, healing, rejuvenation, learning and self-development” (Courtois, et al., p.33). Ford (2009) states that this survival mode can be displayed in emotion regulation, information processing, and attachment. If a brain and body are distracted by defense against external threats, it hinders the brain-body system from having the resources to cope, function, and be restored.

Williams (2010) refers to the concept of survival-focused coping in her study on harm and resilience among teenage sex trafficking victims. A common theme in her interviews with these young women is that they knew the basics necessary for safety and survival were uncertain, and as a result, they “clearly devoted a significant portion of their emotional, cognitive and social resources to navigating daily life” (p.250).

For a survivor of sex trafficking who has left the commercial sex industry, survival-focused coping may continue, include feeling emotionally and circumstantially overwhelmed, distracted by her limitations, lacking resources and facing obstacles, which hinder her from moving forward towards physical and mental stabilization. Some of these limitations and obstacles are relative to the leaving and restoration process for trafficking survivors. For example, finding a job with limited education or work experience apart from the commercial sex industry and often with criminal records accrued during the time in “the life,” a term used to describe all aspects of time during prostitution. Without a job, this limits income for food, material resources, and stable shelter. A woman may be tempted to return to prostitution or the trafficker because she knows how much money can be made in one hour. She may have had no control of that money, but it still impacts ideas about money and power, carried with her upon leaving the trafficker.

The long-term psychological effects of sex trafficking are extensive and consist of mood and anxiety disorders including panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and major depression disorder, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, and suicide (Hughes et al., 2001; Zimmerman, et al., 2011, APA, 2014). Zimmerman, et al. (2011) provided assessment instruments and found that survivors of human trafficking reported the following anxiety and depression symptoms: internal nervousness or

shakiness (91%), terror/panic spells (61%), fearfulness (85%), feeling depressed or very sad (95%), and hopelessness about the future (76%). These symptoms continue or may begin after separation from the trafficker. In Hughes et al.'s study (2001), 85% of women survivors of international sex trafficking reported that they continued to experience feelings of sadness and depression several years after they were separated from their trafficker and exited the commercial sex industry (Hughes & Raymond, 2001).

Another study of 204 trafficked women, 80% had a diagnosable level for at least one mental health disorder, 77% had high levels of PTSD symptoms, and 48% scored high on general anxiety. This compares to 3.5% of the general population with PTSD, 6.7% of the general population with major depressive disorder, and 18.1% of the general population with any type of anxiety disorder (Kessler, Chiu, Demler, & Walters, 2005). The results also revealed that the mental health issues increased with severity and duration of abuse (Hossain, M, Zimmerman, C, Abas, M, Light, M, Watts, C, 2010)

### ***Substance Abuse and Addiction***

To cope with the mental impact during and after being trafficked, substance abuse and dependence are common amongst victims. For example, individuals who have suffered maltreatment as children and seek out substance abuse treatment as adults also show significant levels of complex PTSD (Rozenkranz, S., Muller, R., & Henderson, J., 2013). Traffickers also use substances as a method of control that in turn leads to addiction (Clawson et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2001; Zimmerman et al., 2003). While some victims of trafficking reported prior substance addictions, the majority of victims who reported alcohol and drug use said they began using during the time of being trafficked (Raymond et al., 2002; Zimmerman et al., 2003).

### **Disturbances in Attention or Consciousness**

According to Spinazzola et al., (2001) individuals experiencing complex trauma, such as slavery, incest, prostitution, or sex trafficking, report that they have learned to cope by dissociating, or separating these experiences from everyday level of consciousness. When an experience becomes overwhelming, various elements (visual, somatic, emotional) may be split off from one another and from the individual's personal narrative. These "split off" parts of the experience are typically perceptual or sensory in nature. Chronically traumatized individuals may have only intermittent ability to access certain information (Spinazzola et al., 2001). Williamson et al. (2003) highlighted the correlation between dissociation and human trafficking has been demonstrated through both research and the testimony of mental healthcare providers. According to Choi et al. (2009), his study of trafficked women found that dissociation may be linked both to rates of childhood physical and sexual abuse as well as the violent victimization during trafficking. Dissociative disorders are characterized as a "disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception" (APA, 2005, p. 519). Farley describes dissociation as what permits psychological survival of repeated trauma, such as that of sex trafficking (Ross, et al., 2003).

Trafficking victims may be observed as numb, disconnected or emotionally shut down. As they are asked to describe their story to law enforcement, investigators, or service providers, they may have gaps in their memory or changes in their verbal narrative from meeting to meeting. Their presentation may change from meeting to meeting or they may exhibit an emotional presentation that does not match the content of the narrative (TC-JRI, 2014). While this may cause a helping or legal professional to question the credibility of the victim, because of the prevalence of dissociation amongst trafficking survivors, a trauma-informed approach is essential for accurate understanding and response. This term implies understanding of the

symptoms and implications of trauma in the affect and behavior of a victim. Furthermore, in consideration of how trauma silences, impacting verbal communication and emotion expression, there is value in utilizing nonverbal data collection, such as Photovoice, a methodology in this study.

### **Disturbances in Self-Perception**

#### *Sense of Self*

Individuals with complex trauma often develop negative views of themselves as being helpless, ineffectual, damaged, and undesirable to others. They may also minimize their experience or believe that no one will understand it (Spinazzola, et al., 2001). For a survivor of trafficking, it may include feelings of guilt or shame for their experience. Because the trafficker has carefully crafted a “willing” victim, many trafficking individuals will assume responsibility for the experiences, believing it was her choice.

A critical aspect of the trafficking experience is an individual’s loss of identity. Herman (1992) termed it a “contaminated identity” (p.94). The trafficker and his tactics impose a false identity for the victim. Domestic minor sex trafficking survivors report self-doubt and belief that the demands issued by the trafficker were natural. A trafficker may give the victim a new name and may brand him/her with a tattoo that seals a new identity (Smith, et al., 2009).

Researcher, Melissa Farley (2003) has captured this idea of loss of identity in an introduction to her compilation of empirical literature on prostitution and trafficking. She reports that a prostituted or trafficked woman “does not stay as a whole person” (p.xii). A woman in prostitution used the movie *Pretty Woman* to highlight the perception of prostitution in the media, but the reality of its impact on identity. This individual told Farley the one line in *Pretty Woman* that was not a lie was when the buyer asked the prostitute what her name was and she

responded “Anything you want it to be.” Farley used this as an example to talk about how she is depersonalized in prostitution, as her name and identity disappear. She shuts down her feelings to protect herself. “She becomes something for him to empty himself into, acting as a kind of human toilet” (Farley, 2003, xiii). She does not stay a whole person. “She constructs a self that conforms to the masturbatory fantasies of ‘johns’, a self that smilingly accommodates verbal abuse, sexual harassment, rape and torture. Over time the prostituted self takes over more and more of the rest of her. She is disappeared. The harm she experiences in prostitution is made invisible, described not as sexual harassment, not as rape, not as intimate partner violence, but as ‘sex’” (Farley, 2003 xiii).

Corbett’s qualitative study explored factors that assist with exiting the life of commercial sexual exploitation. One theme in the interview of 13 survivors included the “naming of self” outside of their life in commercial sexual exploitation. She reports the majority of those interviewed identified their perception of self as positive. They described themselves in positive ways and some became emotional describing who they were now, years after the exiting process (Corbett, 2018).

### ***Sexual Identity***

Trafficking inevitably impacts all aspects of the identity, including sexual identity. Women may continue to believe they are only sexual objects and as a result may continue to reside in environments that objectify them (Wilson, & Butler, 2014). A recent study concentrated on the impact of sexual trafficking on an individual’s body image and sexuality. While indirectly interviewing service providers who work with trafficking survivors, the author stated that all participants report that sexual objectification of sex trafficking results in victims further believing that their bodies are commodities and are only valuable when they look appealing and sexually attractive to others.

For those who are subjected to exploitation within trafficking for an extended period of time, survivors may become desensitized, be in denial, or not able to yet truly process their experience and the impact human trafficking had on them (Perez, 2015). Finally, the dissociation involved to protect a woman from the physical and emotional pain of her experience may become a hindrance to, and create long-term problems with intimacy and sexuality. “It is difficult for women to do away with their body armor and to feel pleasure, especially sexual pleasure. A devastated sex life is part of the price of prostitution” (Hedin, U & Mansson, S, 2003, p.233). Prostitution and sex trafficking “dehumanize, commodify and fetishize women in contrast to non-commercial casual sex where both people act on the basis of sexual desire and both people are free to retract without economic consequence” (Farley, 2003, p.34).

### **Disturbances in Relationships**

According to Spinazzola et al. (2001), traumatized individuals have difficulty trusting others, often leading to re-victimization or the victimization of others. They may also have difficulty identifying cues of dysfunction or having a foundational framework for healthy interpersonal interaction. In addition, if an individual with a history of trauma feels uncomfortable with how he/she is being treated, he/she may continue interaction with an individual in spite of this discomfort. This may be related to being unable to trust or use body signals as an indication of danger or threat, or they may feel powerless or fearful to act on warning signs of threat. Considering the methods of a trafficker that include isolation and breakdown of trust in any outside support system other than the trafficker and the confusion that comes as he establishes trust, trafficking victims are susceptible to ongoing disturbances in relationships as a result of their experience. Trafficking survivors have a mistrust of others, which may have begun in childhood experiences but is reconfirmed in experiences during time of being trafficked. Traffickers have conditioned them to not trust anyone, including helping

professionals. Additionally, some survivors have negative or exploitive experiences during their time of being trafficked. This may include being sexually solicited by law enforcement during the time of being trafficked. It may involve having symptoms of being trafficked but being overlooked by a health care professional, educator, or service provider.

The mistrust of others may also include how an individual is treated by direct care providers. Holly Austin Smith (2014) describes her experience after being identified as a trafficking victim. First she discusses being interviewed by law enforcement. "...I was a child. I was being interrogated in an unfriendly environment, by myself, with two unfamiliar male detectives, and one of them spoke to me like I was an adult. I'm often asked what would have helped here...a female detective? A different room? A victim advocate? And my answer is yes! All of the above! ... I felt like nobody was concerned with *me* or what I needed or wanted. And the fact is, what I needed was serious mental health treatment. I was so angry, I was so desperately disconnected that it wasn't just an emotional pain, but a physical pain, a physical presence. These officers were questioning a child in crisis" (p.132).

### ***Representational Models of Intimacy***

While there is no known empirical data on the rate of return of trafficking victims to their trafficker, there is anecdotal evidence that this often occurs. Trafficking victims are vulnerable to re-exploitation by the same or a different trafficker. They are also vulnerable to entering abusive or destructive relationships.

As Farley describes the impact on a woman in prostitution or sex trafficking, she emphasizes the imbalance of power and the exclusion of mutuality of privilege or pleasure (2003). Mutuality is the shared experience within a relationship. A woman's ideas about sexuality, intimacy, womanhood, and her sense of value and power are all being shaped by the

commercial sex industry. This becomes her experience. Therefore, these key components of healthy relationships and sense of identity are compromised.

Hedin and Mansson (2003) share results from qualitative interviews of 23 Swedish women who left the commercial sex industry during 1985-1995. They report the family histories of the women did not provide adequate models for close relationships. Their stories include numerous examples of poor choices of partners, many describing this as a “weakness” that came from their desperation and uncertainty. These factors of disturbances in relationships are valuable for this proposed study to consider the participants’ experiences of supportive relationships and how they contribute to or are barriers in the reintegration process. Topics such as a woman’s sexuality, enjoyment, and intimacy can be limited, if not taboo in the literature. Addressing the experiences of sex trafficking survivors in these areas is included within this study.

### **Biological Self-Regulation**

Spinazzola et al. (2001) explain that many who have experienced chronic trauma suffer persistent physical complaints, some without medical explanation or intervention. This speaks to the impact of repetitious traumatic experiences on a biological level. Chronic exposure to stress results in a dysregulation of hormones produced in the stress response system. These hormones prepare the body to mobilize resources to respond to threat. In addition, trauma exposure affects the limbic system and its role in evaluation of emotion perception as well as encoding of memory.

Trauma victims have general difficulties adjusting their level of physiological arousal, which can be described by having overactive sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. An example of this is an involuntary, exaggerated startle response. An overproduction of some

hormones results in general feelings of anxiety, signs of hyperarousal, such as hypervigilance or difficulty sleeping. On the other hand, an underproduction of other hormones, such as serotonin, leads to increased reactivity and emergency responses. In summary, this loss of modulation may appear as heightened irritability, impulsivity, and aggression (Spinazzola et al. 2001).

Spinazzola et al. (2001) document some common complaints among individuals with a history of trauma: Irritable Bowel Syndrome, chronic pelvic pain, headaches, and gastrointestinal challenges. Van der Kolk (1996) also has brought attention to the loss of ability to put words to traumatic experiences and therefore, physical symptoms provide trauma survivors with a “symbolic way of communicating their emotional pain” (Spinazzola et al., 2001).

Since the majority of sex trafficking survivors have endured physical violence at the hands of childhood caregivers, traffickers and buyers, they are susceptible to immediate harm and long-term physical impairments. According to Farley (2003) and Hughes et al. (2001), these include injuries (mostly head), memory problems, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, ovarian/vaginal pain or disorders, menstrual problems, unwanted pregnancies, forced abortions, cervical cancer, fertility complications, and tuberculosis. Hughes et al. (2001) states that trafficked women report high rates of sexually transmitted infections and yeast infections. Spear (2004), who highlights the need for health care intervention, also emphasizes that during the time of being trafficked, one’s nutrition and health are often neglected, under dangerous working conditions and increased exposure to infectious diseases, with less likelihood of participation in immunization or preventative health measures.

### **Disturbances in Meaning Systems**

Spinazzola et al. (2001) highlight that many who have experienced chronic trauma have a change in their worldview that leads to loss of belief in life having meaning or purpose. They may question spiritual belief or experience a profound sense of helplessness and loss of hope (TC-JRI, 2014). These can significantly impact the capacity to formulate solutions, make choices, act on one's own behalf or implement change in one's life (Spinazzola et al., 2001).

Herman (1992) describes the impact on beliefs for those who have experienced prolonged captivity, such as sexual exploitation. She states victims may be preoccupied with shame, self-loathing and a sense of failure. These alterations in the self and in relationships inevitably results in the questioning of basic tenets of faith. Furthermore, while some have a faith that remains intact or strengthened, the majority of people experience "the bitterness of being forsaken by God" (p.94). This loss of belief contributes to depression that is prevalent amongst trauma survivors.

There is a limit of research when considering how a sex trafficking victim's systems of meaning have been impacted. Freed (2003) interviewed 12 women who were trafficked into a brothel in Cambodia. Interviews included asking the women about psychological impact of prostitution. Women and adolescent girls felt shame for being sexually violated and having been prostituted. The shame was internalized from social attitudes and their concern for how others viewed them. Many reported depression, hopelessness, and a sense of resignation and despair. They expressed grief for many losses including loss of freedom, safety, family, childhood, innocence, and virginity. They have lost a sense of safety and trust.

Grief, shame, depression, and hopelessness are indicators of a disruption of systems of meaning. Grief, while healthy and appropriate, reflects a lost way of life associated with trauma.

Service providers who have expertise in supporting trafficking victims state “the assault on the souls of trafficked individuals is an attack on the essence of the self” (Talbot, E, Carlson, H, Hage, D, Palm, M, Prasadam, A, 2007, p. 187). This shame experienced by a trafficking survivor is entrenched because of its damage on the sense of self and the associated cultural and social stigma.

## **Chapter 4: Post-Trafficking Experience--Needs of Trafficking Survivors**

### **Return to Traffickers: the Cyclical Nature of Escape**

Exiting the sex industry may be a prolonged process that includes cycles of return to a trafficker (Dalla, 2006). Baker, Dalla, and Williamson (2011) provide a six stage process that includes immersion in the trade, awareness (having thoughts about exiting), preparation toward exit, initial exit, re-entry, and final exit. Upon separation from a trafficker, the effects of trafficking continue. Mansson and Hedin (1999) identified four difficulties faced by victims who have exited the sex industry: challenges in working through the experiences of having been in the sex trade, dealing with associated shame, living in a situation with feelings of not belonging, and dealing with intimate and close relationships. In addition, a victim faces complicating factors and needs, including but not limited to basic living essentials and crucial aspects of ongoing independent function. Clawson et al. (2009) in their review of service providers and Farley (2003) who interviewed women in prostitution report issues of poverty, homelessness and absence of a safe social support network are challenges that face trafficking victims and increase vulnerability, such as vulnerability to re-exploitation.

### **The Ongoing Impact on Biopsychosocial Experience of Survivors**

An outside observer may expect that a survivor experiences relief and satisfaction upon being separated from a trafficker and the horrific experiences endured. However, consider this possible scenario for an illustration of what he/she may encounter. An individual accompanied by the previously described symptoms of complex trauma, confronted by many decisions and stressors, faces unemployment, while also being requested to participate in a court process. The idea of testifying includes fear, guilt, and indicators of a trauma bond. She may also experience stigma attached for being involved in the commercial sex industry. Her own feelings of shame and isolation may be exacerbated when returning to friends and family who may be unaware or

lack understanding of what occurred, or by having contact in public with former buyers. Active symptoms of trauma may further complicate navigating these decisions and barriers. She may lack social support from family or friends. Additional life stressors related to any one of these factors may then only increase active symptoms of trauma that already exists.

The stories of survivors, such as Rachel Lloyd (2011) begin to give us a firsthand understanding of these factors. Additionally, research of service providers or victims has given us this information, such as Williamson et al. (2009) whose interviews revealed that lack of social support and additional life stressors have been shown to influence severity of trauma symptoms. However, the voice of survivors has still been lacking. For example, do survivors feel coerced by law enforcement or prosecutors to participate in the legal process and testify against their trafficker? What contributes to the sense of shame and stigma experienced by survivors? These are among many questions not fully addressed in academic literature.

### **The Needs of Trafficking Survivors**

Busch et al. (2014) authored one study that addressed recommendations for services based on qualitative interviews of service providers and trafficking survivors. As survivors of human sex trafficking are separated from their trafficker, it is a time when they may benefit from services and community support. If these survivors have been identified by social service agencies or the legal system, it is recommended that they receive a comprehensive needs assessment, and then be connected to aftercare services or programs according to the self-identified needs and goals.

Twigg (2017) conducted a qualitative study with five providers in United States residential treatment centers. This study's conclusion can benefit the development of aftercare service delivery models and the creation of best practice guidelines. They recommend that

programs should include addressing immediate, ongoing and long-term needs. Immediate needs included crisis safety services, crisis shelter services and emergency medical care. Ongoing needs include physical health care, mental health care and safety services. Long-term needs focus on life skills training, housing, education and job skills training and development.

In a qualitative study interviewing 22 adult women from the Midwest, survivors highlighted their immediate and long-term complex support needs, including mental health services, job and life skills training (Rajaram, S. & S. Tidball, 2018).

In a study initiated by the Department of Health and Human Services, 341 representatives from 117 programs across 12 regions were interviewed to further understand the needs and existing services for human trafficking survivors. From the feedback of these service providers, Williamson et al. (2009) recommends that survivors need services in a series that first address immediate and crisis needs, then ongoing needs, and finally services that address long-term needs. Initial needs may include: immediate safety; emergency shelter, basic necessities, language interpretation, emergency medical care, and crisis legal advocacy.

After emergent necessities are addressed, survivors need assistance to cope with and recover from trauma to establish stability, including services to address their physical health, mental health, substance abuse problems, safety, transitional housing, immigration, legal issues, and language needs (interpretation and translation). Macy et al. (2011) also conducted a systematic review of agencies and resources for international sex trafficking survivors and interviewed service providers to address this issue of necessary and recommended services. As survivors enter a phase of reintegration in which they establish independence, long-term needs that may benefit from support include: life skills, language skills, education and job training, permanent housing, and decisions about family reunification and repatriation (Williamson et al.,

2009; Macy et al., 2011). While these studies are two that are comprehensive and thorough, it is important to note that the stated needs and recommendations are based on the voices of service providers, not directly from survivors. This present study has directly heard survivors describe their experiences, their perceived needs and their impression of available services to determine if their voices reinforce these previously published recommendations.

### **Treatment and Recovery**

While research on human sex trafficking and the recovery process for survivors is still growing, so are services and resources that are specific to this population. However, arising from research, there is additional literature to consider recommendations for treatment and recovery of sex trafficking survivors, as well as theoretical modalities to lay the groundwork. Macy et al. (2011), providing systematic review of resources for international sex trafficking survivors, recommended four key service delivery practices for providers: 1. Begin with a comprehensive needs assessment; 2. Ensure survivors' safety and confidentiality; 3. Engage in trauma-informed care; and 4. Provide comprehensive case management for survivors to coordinate health, human, and legal services. Additional recommendations for effective services included: 1. Speak the survivor's native language; 2. Provide culturally appropriate services; and 3. Offer special housing appropriate for survivors' security. This report acknowledged that survivors' needs change over time, but foundational services that remain constant include health care, legal advocacy, mental health care and housing. Busch et al. (2014) and Walsh (2016) produced studies that support these recommendations while also stating the importance of a multidisciplinary coordinated response and continuum of care, including the following services to address survivors' needs: basic necessities, job and life skills training, and substance abuse services. This coordinated response may include law enforcement and investigators, prosecutors,

service providers, and government and legal services. Because the needs are vast and multi-faceted, coordination seems integral for effectiveness.

Busch, et al. (2014) and Clawson, et al. (2009) provide another key finding amongst services for domestic sex trafficking survivors. Termed the coalition model, these researchers promote the benefit of a social worker who serves as a caseworker or “a single point of contact,” providing a strong understanding of local services across agencies and can improve consistent and efficient delivery of services.

Schmidt (2014) and Hardy et al. (2013) in their studies focused on aftercare of survivors, mention additional types of treatment and therapeutic modalities that may be relevant for sex trafficking survivors, but need deeper exploration and evaluation: survivor-led services that include a mentoring program, crisis intervention, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, and therapeutic goals that included addressing trauma, establishing positive, supportive relationships and empowerment. Finally, they emphasize prioritizing the provision of specialized treatment facilities and interventions.

### **Aftercare Services for Sex Trafficking Survivors**

Survivors of sex trafficking may receive services in a variety of organizations, some specifically focused on helping this population. Prior to the passage of the TVPA in 2000, law enforcement and service providers reported difficulty finding comprehensive services that are needed by survivors of human trafficking (Williamson et al. 2009). Under the TVPA, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) was designated the agency responsible for assisting survivors of human trafficking. They are responsible for providing the following: 1. A specific visa, T-Visa, for non-US citizens; 2. Outreach and education to service providers, NGOs and state and local governments; 3. Grants to provide outreach and direct services to victims; 4.

Contracts designed to provide support to organizations that lead anti-trafficking efforts; 5. Services and case management through a network of service providers across the United States. The HHS anti-trafficking program administered by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Administration for Children and Families: 1) certifies non-U.S. citizen and non-LPR victims of human trafficking; 2) provides outreach and education to service providers, NGOs, and State and local governments on the phenomenon of human trafficking; 3) awards discretionary grants designed to provide outreach and direct services to victims; 4) awards contracts designed to provide support to intermediary organizations that lead anti-trafficking efforts in localities and regions; 5) administers a public awareness campaign designed to rescue and restore victims of trafficking; and 6) provides services and case management to victims of trafficking through a network of service providers across the United States.

Trafficking victims, including United States citizens, may receive services through HHS funded programs. Williamson et al. (2009) report the barrier of limited availability of services, including mental health, substance abuse treatment, basic medical services, and housing. They also report the challenge of coordinating services, particularly due to the numerous individuals who may be involved in one case. This lack of coordination of care includes a lack of exchanging information from agency to agency. Providers give examples such as protection of client confidentiality, organizational policies and legal concerns as reasons for challenges with exchange of information. This report also highlights development in services for trafficking victims that include: one-stop agencies that provide comprehensive resources and case management, pro bono services by specialized providers, and increased collaboration through regional task forces or coalitions.

Gozdiak and Lowell (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study to better understand the characteristics of trafficking survivors and the efficacy of interventions in their stabilization. They examined case management services provided to foreign-born adult survivors of trafficking from 2006-2011. These programs were funded by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Program of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The type of these programs varied in size, secular or faith-based, and in the variety of offered services. Some organizations that specifically provide services to trafficking victims are comprehensive in providing both social and legal services. Others provide case management and refer to outside resources, such as legal assistance or mental health counseling. Service providers report caseloads from a few survivors to more than 100 clients per program. They express that work with trafficking victims is time-consuming, especially establishing initial rapport. They also express difficulty with time-limited funding for services, complex needs of this population and the lengthy process of achieving conversation from the Federal government that the survivor was a victim of trafficking as defined by the TVPA. Godziak et al. (2016) additionally stated that the majority of caseworkers reported that they perceived the survivors were not interested in the range of offered services, except for legal aid and employment.

While this section provides a brief overview of federally funded resources and their recommendations for approaching the needs of trafficking survivors, this does not accurately convey the variety or evaluation of existing resources. Furthermore, there is a lack of attention to resources for domestic sex trafficking survivors, and whether studies focused on resources for international survivors is relevant and useful. Finally, it does not highlight the perspective of the trafficking survivor, their process of accessing resources and their feedback of experiences, which is crucial for further resource development.

## **Survivors' Voiced Experiences**

Corbett (2017) is one of few studies that positioned the voices of survivors as experts, gaining their insight on experiences after exiting the commercial sex industry. The research participants recommended greater coordination and communication among victims and providers to insure that victims are receiving services. In addition, the research participants highlighted the importance of family connections. None of the 13 participants mentioned any programming or therapeutic modality that assisted with their successful exit. Family connections are the most powerful and impactful and create the biggest motivators for change. They gave recommendations to those supporting survivors: Active listening, encouragement, non-judgment and “don’t leave when we push” (p.91).

Additionally, they reported maltreatment from law enforcement. Rajaram & Tidball (2018) also conducted a qualitative study interviewing 22 adult women from the Mid-west USA to understand the complex needs of survivors. Their findings included a lack of awareness among the general public and frontline professionals such as law enforcement and health care providers, thus exacerbating their feelings of distrust, hurt or alienation, hindering reaching out and follow-through with services. This provides room for additional exploration of the role of family in aftercare programming, as well as the possibility of trauma-informed training for frontline personnel, including law enforcement.

As part of long-term research to develop and test evidence-informed mental health and human capacity building intervention programs for trafficked individuals, Okech and Hansen (2018) examined the mental health and PTSD outcomes of trafficked women in relationship with social support and dysfunctional coping mechanisms. They found that survivors who reported more difficulty reintegrating into the community perceived less social support than those who

reported easier community reintegration. Perceived social support impacted their symptoms of PTSD.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis of Current Research**

Since the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, research has begun to report the impact, complexities, and needs of survivors of human sex trafficking. However, a consistent theme mentioned is the need for more research to provide empirical data on treatment of sex trafficking survivors, understanding of their vulnerability, their psychological experiences and their resiliency factors, which can then inform treatment (Busch-Armendariz, et al., 2014; Clawson et al., 2008, Williamson et al., 2009, Cecchet et al., 2014).

Schmidt (2014) commented that “no established therapeutic intervention exists” for sex trafficking survivors (p.5) and therefore research has been limited to rely upon treatment modalities for other issues that sex trafficking survivors may experience or similar populations that have experienced trauma or isolation (ie. domestic violence, sexual assault, refugees, victims of torture, etc.) (Clawson et al., 2009; Jones, 2014; Williamson et al., 2009).

Jones (2014) describes research as “fragmented” (p.11), and Williamson et al. (2009) in their analysis of survivor needs determined that previous studies do not provide a comprehensive approach to practice recommendations. Furthermore, we do not have adequate information to know specifically about the impact of the trafficking experience on the survivor’s sexuality, sense of self and experience of intimacy within relationships, as well as what strengths and successes have contributed to their recovery process.

Finally, research lacks an inclusion of hearing the direct voices of survivors. This is a significant concern because without the voice and contribution of those who have been directly impacted, there is a risk of repeating the cycle of victimization. If a survivor has experienced a loss of voice, loss of choice and loss of support and community in the process of being trafficked, any interaction or services provided to this survivor must be the antithesis of this experience. If a service provider decides what she needs and provides this service without

acknowledging that person's articulation of needs and goals, this provider is in fact repeating the process of silence and coercion. Therefore, it is essential that the voice of the survivor, describing her wants, needs, experiences and opinions be included in the research, so that this feedback will ultimately influence the creation and improvement of treatment models and services.

### **Implications of Study**

The findings of this study contribute to further define effective interventions and support systems. Because the impact is complex and ongoing, and the barriers to reintegration are numerous, this issue deserves multi-faceted strong models that not only are trauma-informed, but facilitate stabilization and quality of life for those who have been victimized. Ideally, the voices of survivors will provide more in-depth understanding of key themes that will further educate the general community and direct service providers.

The present qualitative retrospective study provides an in-depth understanding of the human sex trafficking survivor's experiences of leaving, survivorship, and reintegration, by amplifying their voices so that service providers may be more equipped with effective care and response during the reintegration process. To contribute to literature, this study has focused on adult female survivors of domestic human sex trafficking after one year of being separated from the trafficker and leaving the commercial sex industry. Semi-structured interviews, and photos utilizing Photovoice methodology, included themes such as vulnerability, factors of recruitment, and impact of experiences during exploitation, but mainly highlighted their experiences after leaving to determine what impacts the reintegration process. The focus of this study was conducted through the theoretical lens of ecological systems, complex trauma and post-traumatic growth.

## **Chapter 6: Theoretical Framework for Understanding and Intervention with Human Trafficking Survivors**

This study was conducted through the theoretical lens of ecological systems, complex trauma and post-traumatic growth.

Recent literature has highlighted ecological, strength-based, and victim-centered perspectives as vital in effective aftercare for survivors of human trafficking. These will be explained to provide an initial theoretical framework (Busch-Armendariz, N, Busch Nsonwu, M, Cook Heffron, L, 2014) (McIntyre, 2014). In addition to these concepts, this study focused on the experiences of domestic sex trafficking survivors through the lens of complex trauma and posttraumatic growth.

### **Ecological Systems Perspective**

Germain defined an ecological perspective as an adaptive fit of organisms and their environments and with means by which they achieve dynamic equilibrium and mutuality (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1986) further describes an ecological perspective as human beings “nested” within influential structures. Suggesting five environmental levels of function, it is within these structures that individuals and symptoms are in continual interaction. The individual and the system develop mutual understanding, influence and benefit from each other. Using ecological systems theory provides a helpful framework to address human trafficking on multiple levels with a multidisciplinary approach. It is a perspective that legitimizes the needs of the individual survivor and his/her experiences, but in view of the greater systems, such as the survivor’s family, social service eligibility and policies, and social and political movements.

The first level of functioning is within the **microsystem**, or interpersonal system, where an individual develops attachments, forms his or her beliefs about the world and develops

personality. This microsystem includes an individual's pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations in an immediate environment. Common microsystems include family, school, work, and peer groups.

The second structure of functioning is the **mesosystem**, comprised of interpersonal relationships among two or more settings in which an individual participates, such as parent-child, family and social networking relationships. The mesosystem describes the relations among microsystems or connections among contexts. An example may include the relationship between an individual's family and work.

The third level of function is the **exosystem**, referring to one or more settings that do not directly involve the individual, but in which events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, something that impacts another family member, such as job loss, or a change in funding in a social services agency that impacts access to services for an individual.

The fourth structure of functioning is the **macrosystem**, characterized by the environment that shapes an individual or family's culture. This may include the social, religious or political environment or the foundational beliefs, values, norms, laws or policies of the culture within which the developing individual exists that indirectly influence that individual (Onwuegbuzie, A; Collins, K; Frels, R, 2013).

Finally, the fifth level of function is **chronosystem**, referring to the development of an individual over a period of time, considering the era in which an individual grows, incorporating individual and environmental changes and consistencies across time (Pittenger, S; Huit, T; Hansen, J. , 2016).

Since its inception in the 1970s, the ecological framework has been used to explain the complexities of many conditions. Moreover, the field of social work has adopted a principle to acknowledge the continual interaction of these systems as a way to then address social change and social intervention. The coordination and intervention at each level must be considered.

### **Ecological Systems and Human Trafficking**

Using ecological systems theory provides a helpful framework to address human trafficking on multiple levels with a multidisciplinary approach. First of all, trauma theorist, Judith Herman describes trauma as “always embedded in a social structure that permits the abuse and exploitation of a subordinate group” (Courtois et al., 2009, p.xiv). Furthermore, Herman states trauma is always relational, giving the explanation that it takes place when a victim is in a state of captivity, under the control and domination of the perpetrator. Finally, when describing the study of psychological trauma, she says it depends on the support of a political movement, giving the example that the study of trauma in sexual or domestic life becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the subordination of women and children (Herman, 1992). These statements give a depiction of studying the victimization of human trafficking within the context of micro, meso, exo, macro and chronosystems. It is a perspective that legitimizes the needs of the individual survivor and his/her experiences, but in view of the greater systems, such as the the aspects of the cultural, community environment that contribute to the vulnerability of victims and the demand for commercial sex that drives human trafficking, the dynamics of the survivor’s family, social service eligibility and policies, and social and political movements.

Barner et al. (2018) emphasized the value of the ecological theory because of the holistic perspective. Services can be coordinated within the context of the specific family, geographic

area, nation or population. Rather than a “one size fits all approach,” intervention is based on macro, mezzo and exo needs.

On a **microsystem** level, McIntyre (2014) recommended ecological systems theory as an approach for assessment for child victims of sex trafficking. She created an assessment tool for service providers that addressed micro (individual), meso (family), and macro (community) levels. McIntyre recommends the necessity of addressing both individual (micro) and family (meso) subsystems when providing support and protection. She also emphasizes the weight of influence from community (macro) priorities, values, supports and socioeconomic opportunities. For example, a lack of resources or legislation or cultural norms that fail to protect children and their families may become barriers for the subsystems.

Furthermore, Cecchet and Thoburn (2014) highlight use of ecological systems theory in their qualitative study assessing the experiences of female sex trafficking survivors. At a microsystem level, they provide examples of childhood experiences that make one vulnerable to sex trafficking. Examples found in their research include lack of secure attachment, absence of father and history of childhood sexual abuse. They reported that the patterns impact their sense of self-worth and led to replication in relationship with their traffickers and others during their time of being trafficked. Additional examples of the needs of a trafficking survivor at the microsystem level include the physical, psychological, spiritual and social impact that has previously been described and the implications for how these individual needs are met after separation from the trafficker.

At the **mesosystem** level, we consider the survivor’s needs and impact on interpersonal relationships. If a survivor has experienced significant trauma in her familial relationships such as rape, abuse, neglect or abandonment, these patterns continue by abuse and violence of

traffickers and buyers during time of being trafficked. To address the needs of a survivor on a mesosystem level, we must consider her social support system, her relationship with her family and whether reunification with this family is possible and is healthy. We also must consider survivors who have children, and the specific implications for motivation for recovery as well as complications in receiving services that accompany a survivor who is also a mother.

The **mesosystem** also considers the interaction of service providers or agency programs that intervene with the individual as well as the individual's family or support system. The **exosystem** includes the consideration of the community, the economy and the legal/judicial system. Considering the characteristics of rural and urban communities and the nature of sex trafficking is a needed area of additional research. Authors that first identified ecological theory as useful for addressing human trafficking made a link between income inequality and globalization and the prevalence of human trafficking (Okech, D., Morreau, W., & Benson, K., 2012). The economy is a system that affects micro and mesosystems. Sex trafficking has been considered the fastest growing criminal industry in our country. It is lucrative because there is a demand for commercial sex and because the commodity, a human being, can be sold repeatedly. Finally, the interaction of a survivor during the legal/judicial system will be something addressed in this proposed study.

At a **macrosystem** level, we contemplate the greater societal factors and cultural beliefs. Cecchet et al. (2014) discuss macrosystem factors for recruitment, including participants who report growing up in a culture where prostitution was normalized and they knew friends or family members who were involved in the commercial sex industry. Participants in their study report believing this desensitized them and made them vulnerable to recruitment. Once recruited, they were immersed in an atmosphere of fear and powerlessness. Upon leaving, they

began the process of establishing a life outside of this dynamic. For participants in their study, the new environment allowed them to process their experiences and form new experiences in systems such as family, church, advocacy groups or supportive organizations.

To address the issue of sex trafficking on a macro-level, we must consider the culture's perception of sexuality, prostitution and sex trafficking. We address legislation to consider what will enhance the protection of victims and the prosecution of those who traffic them. We must consider the economic issues that drive people to sex trafficking and prostitution. Finally, we consider the demand for sex within our culture that drives the victimization and exploitation of girls, boys, men and women.

Finally, the **chronosystem** level compels us to consider how the commercial sex industry has evolved over time. For example, the age of internet has increased the expedience, accessibility and anonymity of pornography use and solicitation of sex. While prostitution has historically occurred on the streets with specific sections or roads of a city or town known as a "track", the majority of pornography is now being exchanged online.

### **Strength-Based Perspective**

Busch-Armendariz et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of a strength-based perspective when providing aftercare services for sex trafficking survivors. A strength-based perspective is defined as a different way of looking at individuals, families and communities that amplifies their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, hopes, oppression and trauma (Saleebey, 1996). Saleebey (2002) explains that the strengths-based approach requires knowing the skills and resources of an individual, family or community. It relies on ingenuity, creativity, courage and trust from both the helper and the individual. Saleebey also highlights the importance of recognizing how helping organizations and bureaucracies are often

diametrically opposed to this strength orientation. Values of strength-based perspective include empowerment, resilience, and membership (to a community). The strength-based perspective must be considered in use of language, assessment, intervention, and policy creation.

There is growing research that explores resiliency factors seen within sex trafficking survivors. This has implications for a strength-based perspective if the resiliency factors are affirmed, encouraged as key components of recovery, and considered in future prevention and intervention effort. For example, Cecchet and Thoburn (2014), in their qualitative study identified resiliency factors as a desire to live, positive thinking and motivation to change. Williams, (2010) who also studied resilience in teenage victims of sex trafficking, identified their survival of much harm and violence. Hickle (2017) interviewed 19 women who left the commercial sex industry. In this study, she highlighted these themes as factors for leaving the sex industry: connections, resources, and personal growth. The idea of connections included having support of other survivors, children, and spirituality. Resources included the development of new social networks and accessing resources that provided structure and safety. Personal growth refers to feelings of empowerment and a fear of consequences. Further consideration and affirmation of these factors is an example of strength-based intervention.

Talbot et al. (2007) describe anger as a healthy response for the survivor and a normal aspect of trauma. They wisely educate caregivers to consider the implications of a state of powerlessness and understand anger and rage as “a healthy indication that the soul has not been annihilated” (p.185). This is one additional example of considering a survivor of sex trafficking from a strength-based perspective. In this example, the perception of the caregiver informs the response, interaction, communication and intervention with the sex trafficking survivor.

## **Victim-Centered Perspective**

Busch-Armendariz et al.'s (2014) study highlighted the use and benefit of a victim-centered approach when considering and providing services for sex trafficking survivors. Highlighted in criminal justice literature, this approach is defined by the Office for Victims of Crime as the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner (OVC, 2017). A victim-centered approach seeks to minimize re-traumatization associated with the criminal justice process by empowering survivors to be engaged participants in the legal process, providing victim advocates and service providers, and to be sensitive to the cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, needs and preferences of the survivors rather than the professionals and organizational structures making decisions on their behalf. In summary, the needs of a survivor must remain central for the multiple disciplines that are involved with the case. In a victim-centered approach, the safety, wellbeing and requests of the survivor take priority in decisions and procedures. Therefore, this study sought to emulate this approach by focusing on the voices of the survivors, and what they have determined as helpful or not helpful in post-trafficking experience.

The Office for Victims of Crime advises that all professionals involved in human trafficking cases must advocate for the survivor and “avoid activities that can ostracize a victim, those that mirror the behavior of a trafficker, however unintentionally, by limiting or not offering a victim choices in the recovery process” (U.S. Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime, 2019).

The victim-centered approach plays a critical role in supporting victims' rights, dignity, autonomy, and self-determination, regardless of whether they chose to report or cooperate with law enforcement. For victims who choose to work with law enforcement, employing a victim-centered approach to criminal investigations is fundamental to a successful criminal case.

With these integral components of ecological systems, strength-based and victim-centered orientations in view, the theoretical framework for this study also included complex trauma with an emphasis on posttraumatic growth.

### **Trauma Theory**

Trauma theory has been described as a body of psychological research in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in consideration of various traumatic events, including assault, rape, war, and incarceration. This led to the official recognition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the 1980's. Trauma expert, Herman (1992) says there has been episodic focus on the issue of trauma, first referencing the concept of hysteria, described as a psychological disorder of women in the late nineteenth century. Sigmund Freud's case histories reveal multiple cases of women who disclosed sexual assault, abuse and incest. They uncovered traumatic events of childhood at the root of "hysteria" seen in women. Freud was faced with a dilemma. Hysteria was so common in women. To believe the truth of his patients' stories was to uncover an endemic issue of sexual acts against children. At that time, he chose to stop listening and start believing them (Herman, 1992).

The next episode included identifying shell shock or combat neurosis in England and the United States after World War 1 and again after the Vietnam War. Finally, the concept of PTSD first appeared in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1980. At this time, scholars saw that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic violence and incest was essentially the same as seen in survivors of war.

Attention to trauma in the twentieth century includes further understanding of the definition of trauma, the impact of trauma on memory, the brain, body, the self, and community. Judith Herman, along with Bessel van der Kolk, Joseph Spinazzola and others, were the first to

advocate for a distinction of complex trauma, or Disorders of Extreme Stress. Herman describes complex trauma as more than a simple list of symptoms, but a “coherent formulation of the consequences of prolonged and repeated trauma” (Courtois, et al. 2009, p. xiii). Complex trauma has provided a framework in which to understand the impact of experiences of a sex trafficking survivor, including childhood experiences that increased vulnerability.

### **Trauma-informed Care**

The growing attention and awareness to trauma has also led to a concept entitled trauma-informed care, another term recommended as relevant for the approach to support survivors of sex trafficking. The National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC) was launched by Substance Abuse Services and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) in 2005. They have pioneered a movement to define, educate and implement trauma-informed care. They define a trauma-informed approach as a program, organization or system that:

1. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands the potential paths for recovery.
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff and others involved with the system.
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices.
4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

They highlight key principles that may be generalized across multiple settings:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice and choice
6. Cultural, historical and gender issues

They promote survivor involvement, empowerment, and support as key expectations for trauma-informed services (Gillece, 2012).

## **Posttraumatic Growth**

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) has been defined as positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. PTG does not mean a return to “normal” or baseline after experiencing trauma, but an experience of growth that for some may be deeply profound (Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G., 2004). It is distinct from the term resilience, which can be defined as “the power or ability to return to original form or positive after being bent, compressed or stretched” (Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G., 2006, p.11). Resilience does not imply transformation or growth.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) first coined the term post-traumatic growth upon studying categories of growth in qualitative data. They determined three domains of growth: changes in the perception of self, changes in the experience of relationships with others and changes in one’s general philosophy of life. They have since expanded these to five domains of PTG that will be outlined, and then considered for its application to survivors of human sex trafficking, as they have been utilized as sensitizing concepts in the data analysis of this research study. These include **personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation of life, and spiritual change** (Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G., 2006).

1. **Personal strength** refers to an individual identifying and being surprised by his/her power or strength. The phrase to summarize this area of growth is “vulnerable yet stronger” or “I am more vulnerable than I thought, but much stronger than I ever imagined” (p.5).

2. **New possibilities** include the development of new interests, sometimes related to the trauma they experience. One example of this is when survivors identify as survivor leaders and become engaged in advocacy, peer-to-peer support, training and education or service provision for human trafficking survivors.

3. **Relating to others** refers to a greater connection to other people and increased compassion for those who suffer. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2006) report in their qualitative data, this increased experience of compassion translates into a greater degree of frequency of altruistic acts.

4. An increased **appreciation for life** or a changed sense of what is of most importance may occur for those who have experienced threat or danger in their suffering, applicable to trafficking survivors.

5. Finally, some individuals who have experienced trauma report **increased spiritual or existential meaning in their lives** (Little, S, Little, Akin-Little, A, Somerville, M, 2011). In fact, Tedeschi and Calhoun report that it is in this domain that they observe the most significant PTG. This growth reflects a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life, greater satisfaction, and greater clarity with answers given to fundamental existential questions.

PTG is founded upon theories of change that focus on the necessity of reformulation of beliefs about the world in the aftermath of distressing events for which people are not psychologically prepared. Beliefs about the world and an individual's place in it may be called their "assumptive world." Traumatic events challenge these beliefs and force a re-examination of this assumptive world. Tedeschi and Calhoun use words such as cognitive processing and cognitive engagement to describe the process of defining and redefining one's assumptive world. These processes are related to posttraumatic growth (Calhoun, L, Tedeschi, R., 2006 ).

These authors further describe a "utilitarian view" favored in the United States by scholars and clinicians. They describe this view as one that regards a decrease in distress and an increase in psychological well-being as the desirable outcome for persons who have faced highly stressful events. They suggest for individuals who have experienced trauma, it is advantageous

to broaden this perspective, with the idea that a survivor of trauma may find it more important to address “major existential questions and questions about how to live one’s life in the fullest possible way” rather than merely reduce psychological discomfort (p.10). The authors warn that posttraumatic growth may not be desirable from a utilitarian perspective, because the presence of PTG may not necessarily be accompanied by greater wellbeing and less distress. Their data reveals that the presence of PTG is an indication that persons who experience it are living lives that are self-perceived as fuller, richer and more meaningful, though this may “come at the price of the discomfort that tragedy and loss almost always produce” (p.10).

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) give reference to ecological systems theory as a framework for considering cultural context during the process of studying PTG. They recommend consideration of the mesosystem, or the primary support influence of the individual. It refers to those who a person identifies with, such as family, friends, or religious groups. Research has included consideration of the effects of negative responses to a person who has experienced trauma. They recommend additional research to examine the effects of supportive and unsupportive responses on evidence of PTG in trauma survivors. This recommendation fits the vision for this specific study. This study has considered the supportive and unsupportive responses of the various systems involved in a sex trafficking victim’s survivorship. These systems may include their basic support systems, including friends, families, other survivors, as well as service providing agencies, the legal system and the greater community and cultural responses.

Sex trafficking survivors have experienced systemic trauma that impacts sense of self, relationships and systems of meaning. While some literature has focused on the concept of resiliency seen in survivors of sex trafficking, there are only two known studies that address the

prevalence of posttraumatic growth. Perry (2015) conducted a quantitative study to explore the potentiality to experience positive behavioral changes after trauma by determining if there is a relationship between posttraumatic growth and quality of life. The study indicated small, but positive levels of PTG, as some survivors experienced psychological growth that manifested through behavioral changes in particular life domains responsible to enhance quality of life. In another quantitative study, Schultz et al. (2018) investigated links between posttraumatic stress, posttraumatic growth and religious coping. They discovered moderately high levels of PTG occurring with posttraumatic growth as well as high connections of religious coping with posttraumatic growth. This particular study contributes to the (Schultz, T; Schwer Canning, S, Eveleigh, E., 2018) research by providing more in-depth explanations from evidence of PTG in survivors of sex trafficking.

## **Chapter 7: Research Methodology**

This study utilized a phenomenological qualitative framework with the goal of amplifying the voices of survivors of human sex trafficking. It focused on 15 adult female victims of domestic human sex trafficking, after one year of being separated from the trafficker and leaving the commercial sex industry. Personal Interviews and Photovoice pictures and captions highlighted their experiences after leaving the trafficking situation to determine factors that impact their reintegration into community. A summary of these factors will be provided, including an outline of recommendations for service providers.

### **Research Approach**

#### **Qualitative Semi-structured Interviews**

A qualitative study is useful for studying complex topics and social processes, along with those that are sensitive or require emotional depth (Padgett, 2017). Qualitative methods can provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences of human sex trafficking survivors so that the experiences of survivors may further inform our knowledge and our creation and implementation of aftercare resources. A phenomenological approach to qualitative study aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of everyday experiences. Vagle (2014) states the primary purpose of phenomenology as a research methodology is to understand human experience and how things are being and becoming. It is not just studying how things work, but how a particular phenomenon manifests and appears in the “lifeworld” (p.23). This study included face-to-face and video call interviews and photography from Photovoice methodology.

#### ***Interview Process***

All participants of this study participated in a semi-structured interview, approximately 1-2 hours. They were given the option of in person meeting, audio call or video call. 6 participants had face-to-face interviews, 5 chose audio calls and 4 chose video calls. The

interview conducted a semi-structured, self-designed interview (see Appendix C). Main topics included description of self and experiences before, during and after being trafficked. This included forms of coping and key areas of impact, such as identity, emotions, sexuality and relationships. Interviewees were also asked about their experiences with services. The final section asked about their goals and dreams, as well as recommendations they have for service providers, loved ones and other survivors.

### **Photovoice**

In addition to qualitative semi-structured interviews, Photovoice methodology was used. Photovoice is defined as “a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang, Burris, 1997, p.369).

Photovoice entrusts cameras to the participants to enable them to act as recorders, artists and potential catalysts for change within their communities. It uses the visual images to provide evidence, and additional expression and promote an effective, participatory means of sharing expertise and knowledge. Wang et al. (1997) created Photovoice with these original purposes: to enable a participant to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, to promote critical dialogue and to increase knowledge about important community issues through display and discussion of the photographs to reach policymakers (Wang et al., 1997). Photovoice first seeks to empower, bringing change at the individual level by providing an opportunity for emotional engagement, reflection, and expression. Then it focuses on improving quality of life at the community level through providing an opportunity for dialogue of points of view in a supportive environment. Finally, it seeks to enforce change in policy on an institutional level as the group has an opportunity to use their photographs to raise awareness, or promote policy change or social action within a community for a specific issue. Often used with vulnerable populations to provide a way for them to share their stories, Photovoice gives power into the

hands of the participant, allowing them to become decision makers in the themes of what is represented in the photos.

This is the first known study using Photovoice methodology for adult domestic sex trafficking survivors. The purpose of utilizing Photovoice in this study was to provide an additional form of expression for survivors to share their expertise and insight into their experience. For a population who has lost power and voice, it is a format that restores these aspects of humanity, and provided an alternative form of expression to words.

### ***Photovoice Process***

The common process includes: Introduction to Photovoice methodology, photo training, provision of specific theme, timeframe of taking pictures, and discussion of pictures and social action. This final piece may include a public exhibition where individuals, including key stakeholders and policymakers, are invited to view the photographs. This final part of the project is decided by those who are involved.

The purpose of this study was to utilize Photovoice methodology as an additional form of expression of key themes of survivorship. Participants were informed that while this study does not include a plan for social action, they were encouraged that the data was collected towards this aim. Participants gave feedback and recommendations on how the photography could be utilized for awareness and advocacy purposes.

Participants of this study were introduced to Photovoice when they first learned about this study. A participant was given the freedom to participate in the interview and Photovoice or only the interview. Participants were given a brief training that included taking pictures, how to communicate concerns/feelings in their photography, and Photovoice ethics and safety. Two additional consent forms were provided: 1. A consent for the participant's participation in

Photovoice; 2. A consent form for specific photos to be used in publication.

Seven individuals participated in the Photovoice portion of this study. Six submitted eligible photos and one additionally participated in the video call. Participants were given the option to use the camera on their cell phone or were given a digital camera. Each participant was oriented to Photovoice and instructed to take as many pictures as they wanted over a period of 30 days. The main limitation of photography was no identifying information, such as faces.

The prompt given was to take pictures that express their experiences of survivorship. Additional explanation of this prompt was given in the video orientation including these questions:

- What is it like to live after being in the life?
- What in my life or community has helped me?
- What has been challenging?
- What do I want other people to understand about women who leave the sex trade or who have been sexually trafficked?
- How is my life different now from how it was before?
- What are my hopes for the future?

Because participants were located in various regions, in-person meetings with all participants were not feasible. Each person submitted their pictures to the researcher, accompanied by a caption. Photos were stored on a secure online portal called Pennbox, only accessible by the Primary Researcher and research team. The researcher contacted the participant weekly during their thirty day period, to remind them about photo submission and check in to see if they had any questions. Participants expressed how these reminders were helpful.

An important aspect of Photovoice methodology is the group process to discuss photographs and themes amongst individuals from a similar population or group. Therefore, an optional video or audio conference meeting was provided for all Photovoice participants.

Participants used the SHOWED technique to facilitate discussion of photography. Formulated by Wang and Burris (1999) this acronym includes the following questions:

1. What do you SEE here?
2. What is really HAPPENING here?
3. How does this relate to OUR lives?
4. WHY does this situation, concern or strength exist?
5. What can we DO about it?

This was simplified to the following questions:

1. What do you see in these photos?
2. How do you relate to these photos?
3. How do these photos tell the collective story of survivors?
4. What is the message from these stories that is important for others to hear?

During this meeting, the participants had the opportunity to further discuss their observations and reflections of their photographs. They shared the impact and experience of being a part of this Photovoice project and they provided ideas for how the photographs could be utilized for awareness and advocacy.

Due to scheduling challenges, it was not possible to have all six participants on the same call. Rather, four conference calls occurred. During each call, the participants viewed a powerpoint presentation of all photos and captions. After viewing all photos, some concluding questions facilitated discussion on the collective themes and message of all photos, their personal experience participating in Photovoice and their ideas for how the photos can be used to raise awareness about the experiences of Sex Trafficking Survivors. These questions included:

- What consistent themes did you see and hear in the photos, photo subjects?
- What do the pictures have in common?
- What spoke to you about the body of shared work as a whole?
- Who do you want to hear these messages? What do you wish to be conveyed in the research outcomes?
- Any additional thoughts or feedback on your experience in this Photovoice project?
- Is there anything you wish to do individually or as a group to share your photos with the community?

Appendix I provides an outline of this video/audio conference meeting. Appendix N provides a summary of all submitted photos and a summary of the conference meeting discussion.

## **Sampling and Selection**

This study utilized the sampling method of purposive convenience selection, with snowball sampling. The sampling size was 15 participants who met the following:

### **Inclusionary Criteria:**

- A survivor of human sex trafficking in the United States
- Female
- Over the age of 18
- Separated from the trafficker for one year to ten years.
- Speaks English

### **Exclusionary Criteria:**

- A survivor who was born and trafficked outside of the United States.
- Male survivors of Domestic Sex Trafficking
- A survivor who is under the age of 18.
- A survivor who was separated from the trafficker less than one year.
- Does not speak English

## **Recruitment Procedure**

Recruitment included distributing information and posting flyers through regional and national networks of community organizations and coalitions that provide services for domestic human sex trafficking survivors as well as national survivor networks. Interested participants were directed to contact the Primary Researcher. Finally, snowball sampling was incorporated as participants referred others to join the study. An introductory letter sent by email introduced the study to key contacts.

Pre-interview arrangements with participants included choosing a preferred, private, comfortable setting, providing the purpose of the study and consent information, and answering any questions prior to starting the interview.

## **Consent Process**

Informed consent was obtained by the Researcher before the interview began and after the participant received ample explanation and agreed to participate. The consent form used

language to remind potential participants of their choice to accept or decline participation. It was read and reviewed thoroughly with each participant, encouraging them to ask questions or take additional time with the consent form to review or seek counsel from a support person.

For participants who agreed to join the Photovoice project, they were opportunity to review the consent form with the understanding that they may withdraw this consent at any time during the 30 day period for taking photographs. The Researcher continued with minimum weekly contact with participants during this 30 day period to assess for any changes in consent.

Consent was also obtained for how survivors wanted to be identified throughout the research publication. Participants were given the freedom to use the name of their choice or a general Participant number. In lieu of requiring written signature, only verbal consent was requested from participants. For subjects who enrolled remotely, they were offered to have the consent form mailed to them.

### **Study Instrumentation**

Participants completed a Participant Screening and Demographic form, which included information about age, ethnicity and types/numbers of services utilized after exit from being trafficked. Participants were involved in semi-structured interviews and were provided with an explanation of the process prior to the interview. Sample Study Interview Guide is included as Appendix G. Interviews were audio recorded. Photovoice participants shared their photos on a secure web-based account accessed only by research team and research participants.

### **Data Management**

Data management was conducted by the Primary Researcher. All qualitative data was collected, stored and analyzed on the Researcher's secure password-protected computer. All demographic information was provided orally to the Researcher who completed forms. Random

identification numbers were assigned to protect participant identifying information when it is entered into the database. The list of identifying numbers was stored securely and separately from the research database. This ID number was used on all information collected from participants, including audio files. Only the researcher had access to these files, which were kept in a locked file cabinet at the office of the primary researcher. Demographic forms were kept in a separate file. The primary researcher was responsible for creating and maintaining the research database. Data used to illustrate findings will only use the respective ID number.

Additional data was stored on a secure online website which included photos and participants' captions. Photos were stored securely by insuring that the participant's camera location tag was off.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

**Strengths:** Utilizing service providing organizations for recruitment of research participants provided access to a population who otherwise is difficult to identify and track, and who can directly speak to experiences after exiting the commercial sex industry. This sampling also provided data and valuable information from a range of experiences of how services were accessed and experienced.

A sampling that included adult women within ten years of leaving the commercial sex industry provided a broad range of years to acquire enough participants for the sample, but limited the timeframe so that the length of time is not so vast that it could impact the perceptions of their experiences. This sampling also fills a gap in literature to inform research on human trafficking, trauma and post-traumatic growth.

**Limitations:** Utilizing service providing organizations to recruit participants limits access to sex trafficking survivors who may not have received services. This may restrict data

from being generalized to all domestic sex trafficking survivors. Another factor that must be considered is the process by which survivors obtained services. If their participation in a legal case obligated them to receive services, this may provide a different perspective than those who chose services. Furthermore, some willingly leave their trafficker and are ready for services and the reintegration process. Others are separated from their trafficker by law enforcement and may have a trauma bond or loyalty to their trafficker. These create diverse perspectives in the sampling, which may be perceived as a strength or limitation. An additional limitation is that this study did not focus on minors, males or international trafficking survivors, whose experiences are also worthy of being heard and understood. Finally, the presence of the researcher may impact participant's responses and the personal bias of the researcher may also influence the research data.

### **Risks & Benefits**

Potential harms to participants were minimal and there were no known physical, financial or legal risks to participating in this study. However, one possible risk for participation in this study was potential psychological distress related to content described and expressed during the study. Participants had the freedom to stop the interview at any time. The researcher was also ready to provide information about supportive services and insured that each individual had a safety plan for how to manage emotions and contact a current support system if there was distress after completion of the interview. Throughout the interview, no participants chose to stop. One participant asked to take a short break. Some commented on it being difficult to talk about, but their motivation was to share their experiences to help others. Many commented on how it was helpful to have the opportunity to share and have their experience be known.

An additional possible risk was the potential for loss of confidentiality. Participants disclosed sensitive information during interviews. All identifying information has been kept private and confidential. Any content of the interviews has not been shared with any of the referral agencies and all data was coded with ID numbers and has been stored on computerized datasets. The master list of ID numbers was kept on a password protected computer and accessible only to the main researcher. Participants were informed of their option to not participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. In addition, information about the research will not be left on a voicemail or text.

Photovoice photos were uploaded and stored on the University's secure web-based Pennbox, which is password protected, only utilized and accessed by the Research team. Participants were instructed that no identifying information should be photographed, including faces. In addition, participants were instructed to turn off location features on digital camera or cellular phone so that the photographs do not have attached identifying information. The primary researcher approved photographs to insure photographs meet the ethics, safety and privacy guidelines. If a photograph revealed faces or identifying information, the participant was reminded of the agreed guidelines and asked to remove it from the study.

During the optional video conference call, participants had the alternate choice to participate audio only with no video. The video conference call used the program Zoom, which included end to end encryption. The meeting was password protected and was locked once participants joined. The meeting was recorded. Because it was stored on Zoom cloud, which is not HIPAA compliant, participants were instructed to use their research identification numbers and not reveal their personal identifying information.

Two years after the conclusion of the study, audio recordings will be destroyed. At conclusion of the study the Photovoice photos were removed from Pennbox. Participants were given printed copies of their photographs.

There is no confirmed benefit to participate in this study. However, participants are making a contribution to understand how services are effective for survivors of sex trafficking survivors and what factors help sex trafficking survivors find physical and mental stability. Therefore, this study may benefit them indirectly. This research may influence how to make services available and useful for survivors of sex trafficking. We also hope that sharing experiences through words and/or photography was empowering for the participants. In fact, many commented on how powerful and healing the experience was for them, particularly by being involved with the Photovoice project.

### **Vulnerable Population**

By definition, victims of human trafficking have previously experienced undue influence and coercion. Therefore, it must be considered that the impact of their exploitation includes continued vulnerability to coercion. To seek maximum protection of this vulnerability, the primary researcher formed a Survivor Advisory Council for consultation. This council was comprised of individuals who are domestic sex trafficking survivors and survivor leaders within the field of anti-human trafficking advocacy and aftercare work. Their feedback based on personal and professional experiences was incorporated to aim for a survivor-centered research study.

In addition, language used within the consent forms and interviews promoted freedom of expression and freedom of choice for all aspects of participation in the study. Furthermore, the research was conducted by a clinician who has training and experience working with survivors of

complex trauma, including human sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. The survivors were supported throughout the interview and the Photovoice project to insure their wellbeing and their ongoing freedom in participation. The primary researcher was prepared to offer necessary support during the interviews and provide appropriate resources should they be needed. Finally, privacy and confidentiality was protected throughout the process including private interview settings, utilizing identification numbers for clients rather than their names, and maintaining all information on a secure computer file.

### **Institutional Review Board**

This qualitative study was conducted as a part of the doctorate in social work program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice. Because this study will utilize human participants, approval was obtained by the Institutional Review Board of University of Pennsylvania.

### **Retention and Subject Payment**

Participants agreeable to participate and who meet study criteria were compensated with a \$25 gift card for their interview time and willingness to be participants in this research. In addition, Photovoice participants were given cameras or a \$25 gift card. The camera was given at the introduction of the study and the gift card contribution was given at the completion of the interview or Photovoice project.

### **Timeline**

This study was conducted between January 2018 and April 2019. The timeline included recruitment, prescreening discussions, interviews, transcription of interviews, and data analysis.

See Appendix B.

## **Reflexivity Statement**

Padgett (2017) defines reflexivity as the ability to critically examine one's self, and a central focus for a qualitative researcher, because the researcher's self will inevitably be a part of the study. The purpose of reflexivity is to be aware of personal qualifications, experiences, beliefs, values and biases so that their impact may be managed. Reflexivity begins prior to the study and continues throughout the entire process.

As a licensed clinical social worker, the role of researcher is a new experience for me, though there was overlap in my role as clinician that served as a benefit. Giving voice is a core concept of both clinical social work and qualitative research methods. Therefore, I am familiar with the healing power of giving voice and how to provide a setting for this to occur. The clinical skills of asking questions and listening are utilized in the role of researcher. My experience and skills of establishing rapport with participants was important, as well as my recognition of the power both in a therapeutic relationship, as well as the power dynamic between a researcher and a research participant.

However, there are some differences that were important to recognize. The use of power is different within the role of researcher. For example, the researcher is setting the agenda and goals and inviting a participant to join rather than a collaborative approach to treatment and goal setting. In addition, the researcher is given power in not only how they conduct research, but how they interpret it, portray it and use it.

I was continually aware of the sensitive nature of what participants were sharing. While the identities of each participant remain confidential in qualitative research, the potential publicity of their words and personal stories can and should be empowering, but also is intrusive. Therefore, respect, communication, trust and mutuality between the researcher and participant are crucial.

I needed to be aware to not shift into my clinical role in the questions I asked and the responses given. This kind of dialogue was new and uncomfortable for me. In addition, I found the interview process to have an additional weight and impact compared to a therapy session. The research participant provided a comprehensive overview of her narrative, often with significant nuanced detail about childhood trauma, the abuse of power during the sexual exploitation, and the long-term, comprehensive impact on identity, sexuality, relationships and overall quality of life. This is a tremendous gift and responsibility for both the researcher and research participants, as the research participant has the opportunity and freedom to be seen and heard, and the researcher has the privilege of bearing witness to her story and then conveying it in an effective way to have impact on knowledge, understanding and intervention.

Reflexivity also includes the researcher being aware of personal biases, ideas and values and how they inform the research process. For this population, I have already served in other roles: clinician, case manager, administrator, trainer/presenter, legislative advocate, consultant and more. These roles and my background knowledge and experience with this topic informed my role as researcher, but I was cognizant of protecting biases as I received and analyzed participant narratives. I had to continually remember that my research is not to highlight *my* personal preconceived ideas or beliefs. The research aims to amplify the voices and experiences of the participants and to draw out themes and important content from what *their* narratives reveal.

## **Analysis**

**Interview Analysis:** All interviews were recorded on a digital recording device. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the interviews and Photovoice video call recordings. Transcriptions were coded through Dedoose software. During the process of data collection,

field notes were recorded during and after every interview and Photovoice focus group. These insights and impressions were then useful during the data analysis process, including capturing repetitious themes that became codes, connections that were incorporated into findings, and key insights expressed throughout the discussion chapter.

The researcher first read through interview transcripts several times and compiled summary case studies for each. This increased researcher familiarity with the participants and summaries of their histories. These case studies included a description of their pre, peri, and post trafficking experiences, including recruitment and exit. As key themes related to the research questions emerged, key quotes were categorized into *in vivo* codes. See an example in Appendix O.

The researcher then selected three transcripts, chosen to represent maximum variation in participant characteristics and experiences. Open coding is a process used by qualitative researchers to form ideas and concepts from the data of the participants (Padgett, 2017). The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly line-by-line from an analytic perspective, and used open coding to extract key themes. These key themes were then collapsed into codes, forming *in vivo* codes, or codes derived directly from the content of participants' feedback (Padgett, 2017).

Sensitizing concepts are ideas that come from theories or research that provide initial guidance on where a researcher begins to look during analysis (Padgett, 2017). In this study, sensitizing concepts included aspects from the research questions and theoretical orientations of complex trauma and posttraumatic growth, which formed *a priori* codes (Padgett, 2017). The researcher looked for and identified *a priori* codes and *in vivo* codes simultaneously while reading transcripts. In line with a grounded theory approach, the researcher then used axial

coding, connecting conceptually linked codes into larger theoretical proposals (Padgett, 2017), by collapsing codes into broad categories with multiple subcategories.

Next, the researcher created a codebook with code definitions, parameters for utilization, and sample participant quotes from verbatim transcripts. Appendix P provides the codebook, with *a priori* codes and sensitizing concepts annotated. Finally, after coding all the transcripts, the researcher utilized selective coding by looking for relationships between categories (Padgett, 2017). Dedoose coding software provided analysis tools to see the frequency of code co-occurrence, providing rich findings from the data.

**Photovoice Analysis:** The researcher used a narrative analytic approach for Photovoice, also used by Photovoice researcher, Laura Lorenz (2010). Narrative analysis includes four components: Thematic Analysis, Structural analysis, Dialogic/Performance Analysis, and Visual Analysis. Thematic analysis includes looking at each person's photos and captions and naming key topics from their experiences. This included studying each picture individually and collectively. The researcher took observation notes of key themes that were expressed directly through the photos. These themes were then connected to codes from the interview data.

Structural analysis looks at the form of a narrative, or its component parts, to gain insights that go beyond those suggested by its words and images (Lorenz, 2010). This included examining what each person indirectly communicated through their photos and captions. The Researcher included these in observation notes, also connected to codes from the interview data. Dialogic/Performance analysis assumes co-creation of data (Lorenz, 2010). This analysis included the impact of the data on the researcher, the researcher's impact on the data as well as the participants' impact on each other. This was achieved by recording the Researcher's

observations, the direct feedback of each participant about their own photos, and the group's feedback when seeing each other's photos. Furthermore, participants were asked to share how this experience impacted them, which was then included in the findings.

Finally, visual analysis includes the interpretation of the photographs into meaningful content (Lorenz, 2010). The researcher's visual analysis strategy included consideration of: 1. What the researcher "saw" in the pictures; 2. How the participants labeled the picture; 3. How the group analyzed the pictures. While each of these aspects was utilized to connect key themes to codes from the interview transcripts, the Researcher emphasized their individual and collective feedback from reviewing each other's photos. It was this feedback that confirmed how the photos served as vivid illustrations of the key findings from the interview data.

## Chapter 8: Findings

The findings for this dissertation are comprised of a collection of themes from the analysis of semi-structured interviews with 15 adult women who were trafficked within the United States. Additionally, the findings include analysis of entries from six Photovoice participants. The purpose of this qualitative study was to highlight the experiences of survivorship of domestic sex trafficking survivors so that their voices will serve as a guide to evaluate and provide insight for recovery model recommendations and contributing factors of reintegration. The interview questions explored issues pertaining to pre, peri and post-trafficking experiences, impact on factors of complex trauma and posttraumatic growth, such as emotions, identity, sexuality and relationships as well as experiences with receiving services.

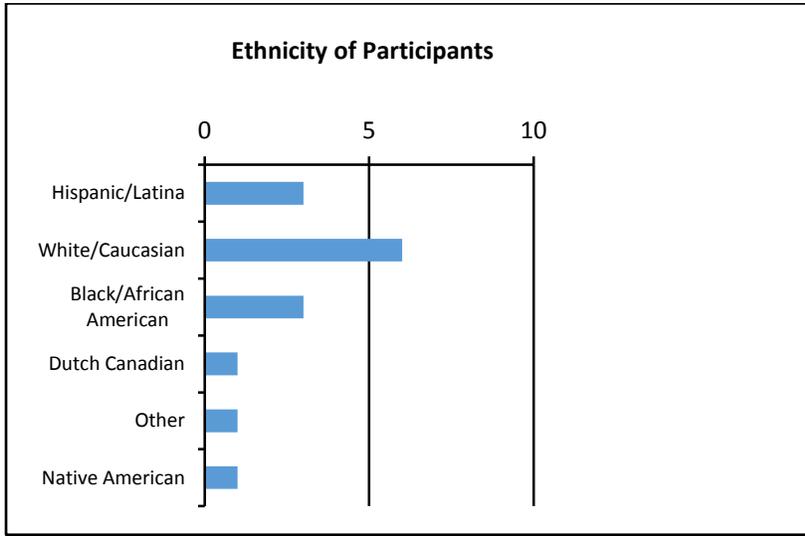
The findings of this qualitative study are organized into sections that include *a priori* themes of the research study as well as *in vivo* themes, or those emerging from the stories of survivors. The sections will be divided into key areas that came directly from the themes of the participants' feedback as well as the theoretical orientation of this study. The first sections include general descriptions of the trafficking experience and the theme of "power" that was embedded throughout the survivors' trafficking experiences. Aspects of complex trauma and posttraumatic growth will then provide a framework for exploring the impact of the trafficking experience on research participants. Finally, experience with services as well as specific recommendations from survivors will also be explored. Photovoice photos with captions will be included throughout these chapters, accompanied by group feedback about the photos.

The research participants ranged in age from 21-55, with the average age 38. The average age of entry into trafficking was 16, with the youngest age 5 and the oldest age 23. The average length of time being trafficked was 19.4 years with the highest at 25 years and the lowest

range at 2 years. The average length of time after separation from the trafficker was 7.6 years with the highest range being 29 years and the lowest length of time 1 year.

Participant Demographics are listed below:

**Table 1 Ethnicity of Participants**



**Table 2 Participant Demographics**

| Participant | Age        | Age of Entry | Years of Exploitation | Years since Exit |
|-------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Cat         | 40         | 19           | 17                    | 4                |
| Grace       | 25         | 20           | 3                     | 5                |
| 3           | 31         | 18           | 5                     | 7                |
| Emerald     | 21         | 18           | 2                     | 1.2              |
| 7           | 23         |              |                       | 1                |
| 9           | 46         | 13           | 25                    | 8                |
| 10          | 21         | 15           | 3                     | 3                |
| Kristine    | 47         | 14           | 3.5                   | 29               |
| 14          | 30         | 5            | 23                    | 8                |
| 15          | 30         | 12           | 13                    | 5                |
| 16          | 55         |              |                       |                  |
| 17          | 32         | 23           | 5                     | 5                |
| 18          | Middle-age | 8            |                       | 3                |
| Audrey      | 55         | 16           | 14                    | 25               |
| Victoria    | 24         | 19           | 3                     | 3                |

Throughout the interviews, most survivors described the overall experience of being trafficked. This is noteworthy because these descriptions give us a glimpse into the evolving perspective of their experience during and after the exploitation.

## Characterization of the Trafficking Experience

Grace was trafficked for three years and exited the industry five years ago through incarceration for drug-related charges. She gives her summary of what it is like to be trafficked:

“I was the most broken, I think, humanly possible anyone can be. The most vulnerable anybody can be. Just – like the evil in this world, to come in contact with that every day. Just how low some people can be. How forceful they can be. How abusive they can be. They don’t treat you like a human being. Just feeling out of options because once you cut ties with your family, once you cut ties with – you burn all your bridges, you feel like there’s no way out anyways. It’s just – you don’t see a future. You don’t see that there’s another way, that there’s an option, because...where I was trafficked – it’s, it’s just a black hole. It’s – everyone around you is doing what you’re doing. It’s just drug infested. It’s john infested. The cops treat you like crap, like you’re nobody. I remember the one day, I was screaming because I had gotten raped by the train tracks and nobody comes, nobody – if you hear a scream, it’s just like, oh, it is what it is. People down there – there’s just no respect for women – for men, either. It’s just – I don’t know – it’s – their lost souls – so lost.”

This quote is significant because of its broad overview of the personal, systemic, familial, and institutional factors related to human trafficking and exposes the multi-faceted barriers to escape for a victim which will further be explored in the following chapters. Additionally as survivors told their stories, approximately half described not understanding their trafficking experience as victimization and exploitation until after the post-trafficking phase.

Grace gave insight to the existing misconceptions about women in prostitution who also have drug addiction. Participants stated they experienced the world as judging them for making choices and as having the capacity to make choices. In this case, they believed they were viewed as women who chose prostitution as a way to support a drug habit. This perspective can also be held by the woman involved. “I didn’t know that what I was doing had a label. All I knew was

*“Cab involved in the incident of trafficking me. February 1, 2014”*



**Figure 2 Photovoice Participant 18**

that I was a prostitute that – nobody cared for me. I had abscesses all over me. Pick marks all over me and these men were still paying me to do sexual favors for them and it goes to show you that it's not even just the woman that's sick – it's these men.” Grace sheds light on her lack of understanding that she was being trafficked and thus a lack of clarity about her capacity to choose. She shifts responsibility to the buyers, who willingly purchase women for sex without showing regard for visual signs of drug use. The depravity yet normalization shines the light on a systemic contributing factor to commercial sexual exploitation.

Participant 14 was trafficked since she was a young girl for approximately 23 years. She explained the common theme that she did not understand her experience until receiving psychoeducation from someone, in her case, a counselor. “And for the first time, I found out what the definition of human trafficking was and for the first time, had these light-bulb moments where it was like, oh, my gosh, that's what the definition is? This is my experience? Oh, my goodness, I have something to define what's happened to me.” This realization is a critical part of the recovery process, as *naming the experience* leads to increased knowledge, understanding, empowerment and access to services and has the capacity to reduce shame and repair identity.

## **The Role of Power**

Throughout the study, power was an emergent theme in the narrative of every participant. Power is defined by the participants as freedom or the capacity to act and choose. These parsed out into the ways trafficking participants experienced loss of power and were victims of abuse of power. Loss of power was described by them as someone or something hindering personal freedom and agency. This section is devoted to exploring the *in vivo* codes, or data derived directly from the participants' words (Padgett, 2017).

### **Pre-trafficking Loss of Power**

For all of the participants in this study, this loss of power began prior to the trafficking experience, and many described this loss as setting the stage for exploitation. Two-thirds of participants disclosed a childhood history of sexual abuse. Almost all participants described a lack of emotional support or abuse within the family. Four of the participants reported being in foster care during childhood. Two-thirds discussed the divorce of parents or other significant family challenges. One-third lived in families with substance abuse. One-third experienced some type of life circumstance leading them to great financial need. One-third experienced abusive relationships. Participant 7 shared her experience which included some of these factors, including sexual abuse, parental divorce and entry into foster care: “I was raped by my neighbor and, after that, my parents just started losing their mind and that’s when they split up and then they just stopped caring for us pretty much, so, that’s when we went into the system.” Participant 7 discussed these adverse childhood experiences and subsequent neglect from primary caregivers in the context of explaining factors of vulnerability that contributed to her eventual exploitation.

| <b>Participant Factors of Vulnerability</b> | <b>%</b> |
|---|----------|
| Childhood Sexual Abuse                      | 67%      |
| Neglect/Abuse within family                 | 95%      |
| Foster Care                                 | 35%      |
| Divorce/Family challenges                   | 67%      |
| Substance Abuse within family               | 33%      |
| Life stressors leading to financial need    | 33%      |
| Domestic/intimate partner abuse             | 33%      |

**Table 3 Pre-Trafficking Loss of Power**

Participant 15 mentioned specific aspects that impacted her vulnerability in childhood: “I was born disabled. So, even before I was trafficked a lot of doctors had inappropriate levels of access to my body that wouldn’t have been normal for a non-disabled child.” She explained that this loss of power over her body, and lack of familiarity with appropriate boundaries made her vulnerable to exploitation. “And, so, by the time I was trafficked, it didn’t occur to me to, I learned to walk out being naked with people I didn’t know because I was naked with doctors I

didn't know, all the time.” She described this accessibility to her body as hindering her from developing her own “bodily autonomy.”

Participant 14 discussed how education was restricted when she was a young girl, and during the time the sexual exploitation started: “I wasn't allowed to go to school, so, I was considered “home-schooled”. I say that in quotations which basically means I didn't get an education.” Again, she understood this as a loss of freedom of possibility, to have a normal and necessary childhood experience of learning, thus increasing vulnerability and limiting opportunity.

**Recognizing & Living the Loss of Power:** There is a certain level of powerlessness that is part of every childhood experience. Developmentally, children are dependent on adult caregivers and their environment for the care, protection and love necessary to develop and thrive. Yet, additional loss of power accompanies adverse childhood experiences. In this study, *every* participant described how experiences of early loss of autonomy or power heightened vulnerability to the deception involved in the recruitment of a trafficker.

Victoria grew up in an abusive home and was raised by her grandparents. She explained how the lack of support from her grandparents hindered her development, leaving her vulnerable. “I didn't learn how to tie my shoes until I was ten. I didn't know how to tell time until I got in high school. I definitely really struggled to find the normal family and, so, I think that's definitely what led to me being trafficked, was I didn't have the right tools after coming out of years of abuse. I didn't have anyone to step in for me and take care of me and advocate for me and, so, I wasn't really taught any different, so, I didn't know how to say, no, to the situation that I was going into.” Victoria explained how this lack of support left her unprepared to protect herself

from and during the exploitation, and how she did not have the support to depend on after escaping the trafficking situation.

Audrey grew up in a family with divorced parents and in an era where “beating your children was not a crime.” She described how her mother was not nurturing and affectionate. “...The best way to say it is that I didn’t come from a place where someone would say, you’re gonna be somebody, I love you, none of that. So, it was just – I wasn’t even thinking of that. If I had a mom who was more loving, nurturing, I might not have ended up where I did.” This participant imagines the possibility of a different outcome if life had started differently, including attention, affection, and stability of married parents.

**Peri-trafficking Perception of Power** An additional emerging theme as participants shared their trafficking experience was that almost everyone described an initial perception of power at the beginning of being trafficked, believing they had a *choice* in what they were doing or that they were free to leave anytime. For the remaining few who did not describe this initial perception of power and freedom, their victimization in trafficking began in early childhood.

The majority described a gradual process of eventually recognizing the loss of power in every aspect of their lived experience, describing the feeling as trapped or stuck. Kristine described her experience with the second trafficker. He recruited her in California and eventually trafficked her as a high-end escort in Atlantic City, New Jersey. “I think I always thought I had one foot in and one foot out and then it started getting more serious where I didn’t feel like I could leave.” This realization emerged as she was under constant supervision by the trafficker and his family, and she feared for her physical safety, threatening her by carrying guns.

When she became pregnant by the trafficker, she described the ultimate recognition of feeling trapped.

Participant 9, who was trafficked for 25 years by her boyfriend and the father of her children, discussed how the recognition of loss of power was gradual. "...It started off as you think you're in a relationship and it will last. I think it would be a 2 to 3-month honeymoon type thing or something where they have you totally mentally and physically controlled, you know. They have your mind and your body. And, what I mean by that is, the intimacy that you guys are doing and then at the same time, just mentally because we be so looking for that love that they give us in the beginning but then it died down and with all the things that they say they have done for you in those three months, now is your turn to do for me." She described this repetitive theme from participants of gradual loss of power, lack of awareness of the manipulation and lack of reciprocity in the relationship *because of previous vulnerability*. She understood the trafficker used her basic need for love and attention as a weapon, created dependence, and then exploited this dependence for his own gain.

**Power and the Relationship with the Trafficker:** Another emergent theme was the role of power in the relationship with the trafficker. As participants described their relationship with the trafficker, *all* mentioned aspects of trafficker control and abuse of power. The majority described experiencing fear as a response to their trafficker wielding power. The majority had a formed relationship with the trafficker that combined violence, control, and intimidation with love or self-proclaimed care and protection. One participant had female traffickers who claimed to be best friends, also combining abuse, terror and intimidation within the relationship. Several participants discussed how the trafficker gave rules to follow. Participants reported that these

experiences confounded abuse, relationships, dependence, and trust throughout their trafficking experiences and afterwards.

Participant 10 gave examples of rules from her trafficker. “You can’t talk to another man that’s not buying sex from you. If another pimp sees you and tries to talk to you, you can’t talk to them. You have to put your head down. Like, you can’t even look them in the eye. You can’t talk to other working girls unless they work for your same trafficker. There were so many rules. Like, you have to listen to everything your trafficker says. If your trafficker says, do this or get your nails done like this, or go buy this, you have to just listen to everything they say.” Failing to comply with these rules led to punishment or withdrawal of a basic need, including approval of the trafficker. Participants stated these rules did not convey guidelines for their protection and good, but reflected control and abuse of power so pimps could protect themselves and the power over their domain.

Victoria illustrated how traffickers link basic needs, like food and shelter, with performance quotas, a system described by many participants. The traffickers gave a nightly quota and rewarded or punished based on her performance of reaching this quota. “I remember she handed this check list of rules of how much money I was supposed to make per night, how many people I was supposed to see per night. And, one of her rules that I really remember was, for example, if I was supposed to see six men per night and I didn’t meet that, then that’s how many days I would go without having food or water. And, so, to me, like that pressure was on me.” To be deprived of basic needs of survival is to exert an ultimate form of control, removing power from the victim. This happened in the context of so-called trustworthy relationships, manipulated by the trafficker. Human needs were exploited and deprived for the financial gain of the trafficker.

**Tools of Power used by the Trafficker:** All but three participants shared how traffickers used **drugs or alcohol** as a form of control to create dependence between the trafficker and the participant. For a few of these participants, their previous drug use became an instrument in the trafficker's exploitation, perpetuating their drug addiction. The remaining participants reported they were introduced to drugs or alcohol by their trafficker or during the time of exploitation. Participant 15 explained her experience: "He used drugs as a method of trying to keep me controllable and docile and that intensified when I got older because he didn't have to worry about me going home to my parents high or anything." Being addicted to a substance and relying on the trafficker for access to the substance increased dependence, implied additional loss of control, and further removed participants from their former familial or social network due to shame and stigma.

**For the majority of these participants, drug or alcohol addiction developed during the trafficking experience.** "But, you know, if I didn't make a certain amount of money a day, he would not give me any heroin and, you know, like, he pretty much controlled me with the drug because he knew I couldn't function without it. I was dependent on it at that point" (Participant 7). The altered state of mind was what enabled her to function during the exploitation. This is another example of something exploited for the trafficker's gain, leaving the victim vulnerable and dependent not only on the substance, but the trafficker.

Substance dependence thus enforced separation from supportive networks that may have emancipated participants. Drug dependence enabled another potent tool for traffickers to wield power: **isolation**. Participant 7 offered one example of this control through isolation. "He started getting violent. Like, he had drugs, too, and if I didn't make a certain amount of money, he would put his hands on me. And, they are very like possessive. They don't want you going

with nobody else.” Isolation increases the power and influence of the trafficker and disables autonomy and opportunity for the victim.

This quote also describes how **physical and sexual violence** were often threatened or exerted, as a particular form of punishment and control, and in response to a survivor attempting to use her own voice and power. “I was not a person that would get real sassy or whatever but, you know, everybody tries to like push their limits because, I think, even in that situation, you want to have some sense of freedom, even though, there’s not really any. And, I was scared of coming home too late without enough money. There is definitely that fear of him. He could just look at me and I knew when to shut up. I just kind of kept things really easy until I could figure out how to get away from it” (Kristine). Kristine described the navigation necessary for managing loss of power, and the governing presence of fear to minimize physical punishment. Thus, silence, or losing one’s voice, became self-protective, a sort of survival mechanism.

**Loss of Power with Buyers:** Participant 9 described the overall loss of power not only in the relationship with the trafficker, but also with **the buyers**: “Being made to do something against your will and just losing yourself in the process is not worth it...And, even just being in the life...I always say, we’re kinda playing Russian roulette with our own lives because you never know if that one person that we tend to exchange sex with or whatever, you don’t know if that’s the person that may even be a psychopath or something, you know. Um, so, it’s very dangerous out there” (Participant 9) A reminder of the layers of systemic powerlessness, not only is their loss of personal power with the trafficker, but with those who are financially supporting the exploitation.

**The Powerlessness of Seeing no Options:** Participants discussed varying responses to this loss of power, including **finding ways to manage and navigate because of fear**. A repeated

emerging theme from *all* participants was seeing a lack of options. Participant 15, trafficked by an instructor of an extracurricular program in the community, expressed “the idea of leaving never occurred to me or the idea of telling someone never occurred to me because I assumed if I told someone they would blame me... So, the only way that I realistically thought it would end, was either he would die, like of old age, or he would kill me. And, that idea, even as an adult...the idea of leaving or telling someone or trying to get away was so far from like, it just wasn’t even in the realm of possibility.” To see no options or no way out implies loss of power, thus perpetuating victimization.

Almost all of the interviewed survivors expressed how they wished there was **someone who would have intervened** to tell them they do indeed have options and what resources exist. Grace gave her perspective that explains the lack of choice involved and the desire for someone to intervene and provide a way out of prostitution.

“So many people think that it’s your choice or you decided to do that. Yeah, I ended up coming to that point in my life where I had to make a decision to survive in the life that I was living but, at the end of the day, I didn’t want to get beaten. I didn’t want to get raped. I didn’t want to have people cum in my face and my hair. I remember when I got locked up they had to end up cutting my hair because it was so matted. I had really, really long hair and there was just cum – who knows what was in my hair, but they ended up having to shave it off and – it just baffles me that every time I got arrested for street prostitution, that there wasn’t a woman in the back of the car saying, hey, you’re better than this. There’s options out there.”

**Post-trafficking Experience of Power and Social Services:** More than one-third of the survivors shared experiences of receiving *services which perpetuated rather than restored a loss of power*. Participant 10 shared her experience of being “coerced” to testify against a trafficker who was friends with her trafficker. In spite of not wanting to testify, she yielded and agreed. She described it as triggering to see her trafficker in the courtroom, leading to a relapse of a drug addiction.

Other participants explained how the rules, policies and structures which do not promote choice remind them of the loss of power in the trafficking experience. An example included a participant who entered a residential program. As a part of the program's policies, for the first portion of her time there, she could not have a job nor could she communicate with her family members. During this time, she could not pay for her car, bills, or apartment. Nor did she have access to phone to be able to contact anyone to notify them of her circumstances. She lost everything, her car, the apartment and all belongings within her apartment.

**Mechanisms for Managing Abuse of Power:** Another *in vivo* theme coming from almost every participant was descriptions of how they responded to loss and abuse of power within the trafficking experience. Some participants **managed voice and actions** to avoid further abuse. "So, I just followed what he said and he wouldn't hit me anymore" (Emerald). Her response to his abuse implies additional loss of voice and power.

Cat described the experience of feeling empowered within the trafficking experience as she pleased her trafficker: "...He started breaking me, meaning that I would give him the money and when I started giving him the money, it made me feel empowered. It made me feel like making him proud, you know, he's like, 'you're good, you're good, you're smart', you know. I would get somehow or another – I would always find myself in really bad situations but I would always get myself out of them. Just very quick thinking and he appreciated that about me and always told me so." She found power from how her compliance and adaptation for survival led to approval from her trafficker, again exemplifying how traffickers fill and exploit basic human needs and areas of vulnerability.

Others shared experiences of **using their voice to defend themselves or set boundaries** at the risk of the trafficker's response. Cat provided this incident, which gives an example of using voice, setting boundary, but eventual punishment, perpetuating loss of voice and power.

“And, when he hit me, I went to hit him back and when I went to hit him back he lost it and he beat the crap out of me and he left and I was shocked, because I was like, wow, I didn't see that coming... So, I decided that I was gonna go inside there – as gutsy as I was, and tell him, give me the keys because it's freezing and, you know, if we're sick, we can't work. You'll have to take us to the hospital. And, that was really stupid because he came out and he like, smacked my head into a wall and like – that's when I lost my tooth. And, my tooth – when he hit me, my tooth actually like kinda went through my lip a little bit. So, I got back in the car and didn't say anything.”

Participant 15 gave an example of using her voice to set a boundary: “He did try to get me to recruit for him but I refused – that was one of the things where I was, like, you're gonna have to kill me because I'm not gonna do that” (Participant 15). This provides a glimpse of the residual strength and power of a victim that is used to navigate their survival during victimization.

A small portion of those interviewed described ways they **used their power to protect themselves from danger with buyers**. Participant 14 stated “When I was being trafficked, I had to read my buyers to be able to survive. And, so, maybe I was reading energy that they had as well” (Participant 14).

Participant 14 also described finding a form of **coping that gave her a sense of control** in spite of loss of power. “I engaged in a lot of anorexic behaviors. So, if I could control what I ate, then I was able to control something and, so, it wasn't them telling me I couldn't eat. It wasn't them telling me what to eat. It was like I was able to control that element of my experience. And, so, I did engage in a lot of purging but, also, I engaged in water restriction” (Participant 14).

Some described using power **by gaining knowledge or planning for escape**: Megan recounted a time when her trafficker punished her for not making her nightly quota by taking away her babysitter. She was not able to work without a babysitter, hoping this would eventually enable more control over her. "...He was hoping that was gonna make me buckle down and fall under his control. But, it really gave me the opportunity. I ended up ordering a book that outlines pimp psychology and read the full thing and was like, oh, my God, this isn't about picking a better pimp. This is how pimps operate and it talks about how they will recruit you and make you feel really special, but also inspire a lot of competition among you and the other girls so you are constantly trying to outperform one another. And, I was like, oh, my God, this has been my whole life for the last five years. It's written by a self-proclaimed pimp." This gained knowledge opened a door of power that contributed to Megan eventually leaving the trafficker.

#### **Use of Personal Power and Strength to Reclaim Control:**

*"We all have an unexpected reserve of strength inside us that emerges when life puts us to the test."*



**Figure 3 Photovoice Participant 18**

**Finding Power to Exit:** This study sought to understand how women left the traffickers. An emerging repetitive theme was the reclaiming and utilization of their personal power in the process. Participants varied in how many attempts they needed to permanently exit, how long they took to prepare, and where they initially sought out support.

Approximately **one-third of survivors returned** to the trafficker prior to leaving permanently. Approximately **half of the survivors had more than one trafficker before permanent exit**. Approximately two-thirds of the participants described **an incident that became a moment of realization** of their need to leave or no longer

wanting to continue. A small portion of this group took time to **plan and prepare** to leave while approximately one-third **took the first spontaneous opportunity to escape**.

Cat discussed how she began preparation for escape. “I started stashing money. Little by little I started stashing money and figured that once I had enough money that I would just leave and that I would go somewhere else.” Yet, she inevitably took opportunity to escape. “And, I decided I was going to leave and I went in his pocket, I took some money, I took the keys to the car and I left. And, I left and I was gone for like a couple months”. After coming back to her trafficker for a short period of time, she finally took another attempt to escape. “And, so, we’re about to leave and get on the highway and he pulls over for gas and I thought to myself, I can’t do this. Like, I can see where this is going. It’s not going anywhere and, I was like, you know, I can’t do this anymore. I just can’t do it.” She continued using her power to cooperate with law enforcement, leading to the arrest and successful prosecution of the trafficker.

Megan shared a different experience of making a decision to leave and contacting the trafficker to inform him: “I called him and told him, ‘I’m leaving. I can’t do this’. And, because Vegas is so concentrated, there are so many victims out there that are easily recruitable, he did something very different than my turn-out. He was just like, ‘I don’t want to see you in the casinos. Don’t ever let me see your face working in the casinos.’” While this reveals varying responses from traffickers based on the supply of additional victims, it illustrates the remarkable power to overcome the barriers of abuse, fear and potential consequences for finally leaving the trafficker.

A small portion left because of **pregnancy**, while others decidedly left related to an act of violence or control. Kristine explained how a victim may come to a defining moment of

realization: "...and thinking I've got to deal with this person for the rest of my life, there's no way. So, I ended up losing the baby but, you know, just the stress of my body couldn't handle all of that and I really took that one opportunity to run. It just – it all worked out – money, timing, it all worked out."

One-third left after being **arrested and either going to jail** or having law enforcement offer the option of jail or a program. For these individuals, this provided a way out, but did not yet restore freedom and autonomy.

Approximately **one-third tried to leave more than one time**. Victoria explained the risk and cost of trying to escape the traffickers: "I tried to leave about four or five more times after that. So, I had a broken back twice. All my fingers and all my toes have been broken. One thing that she really liked to do was take a hammer and the other would hold my toes, my feet on the floor and she would break each toe and then, I would just pass out from the pain."

Megan also discussed attempting escape several times from her first trafficker, providing an example of how the endangerment of her children was used as a tool of power: "I tried to escape probably five times and he always found me, either by calling my Backpage ads or asking friends or social media...I finally got away from him for the last time. He put seven bullets in my babysitter's car. He did a drive-by shooting at my best friend's house. He sent two men to break into my house and held my children and I hostage and robbed me and took all of our identification documents, took my phone, everything, and really left me like a sitting duck in this apartment" (Megan).

The majority of those interviewed left with the **support and encouragement of someone** else, including clinicians, law enforcement, social service support, or concerned community

members. Specifically, the support of these individuals empowered the victims. Participant 14 explained how she was approached by a woman at a hotel who saw warning signs and gave her phone number on a piece of paper. Eventually Participant 14 called her. She said the conversation was short but it was long enough for the woman to tell her she had the power to choose.

“For her to tell me that at the age of 21, I could make my own choices now that I was an adult. I had never been told any of that before, so, those comments really started to change the way that I saw my situation in the sense of, at that time, I did not look at myself as a victim of human trafficking but here’s this person telling me my life does not have to be defined by sex acts, that, at the age of 21 I am adult and adults can make their own choices and, it’s something I have chosen to do. If not, then you can make your own choices to do whatever you want” (Participant 14).

This is an illustration of the significant emerging theme of the role of supportive relationship in the survivor finding and restoring power.

**Post-Trafficking Recognition of Loss of Power:** While participants described recognition of loss of power during the trafficking experience, many explained how it was during the post-trafficking phase that they had further understanding of the depth of this lack of choice and freedom. “That meant that I hadn’t chosen to do this – that choice was not a choice, that there was not even a choice and realizing my victimization was something that was really difficult to process” (Participant 14).

**Finding and Using Power during Post-trafficking Experience:** Another emerging theme was how the majority of participants described ways they found and used power during the reintegration process. For some participants, this included the encouragement of others, such as entering or receiving services. “I don’t know how to do this. I don’t think I can do this. There’s no way. And, my mom had convinced me, she’s like, just try it. And, I’m like, mom, I can’t do this. I don’t know how” (Grace).

**Finding Power in Boundaries:** Some participants described learning how to **set boundaries**. Participant 14 explained how this is a point of healing. "...learning I can say no to things and what consent means and all of those things...but it's also really easy for me to let my boundaries be pushed and to sacrifice too much of me because I have done that my whole life and I'm still healing and I'm still learning where my boundaries are."

**Finding to Access Services:** Participant 7 described how she used her power to **self-advocate for needed services**: "Once I got pregnant, it was just like, I couldn't do it anymore and that's when I told her I want to come here. I want to be on my own. I'm tired of somebody else telling me what to do, you know, because I'm used to that. It's all I've ever – institutionalized, no matter what somebody's always telling me what to do and I'm sick of it. I've been out of this shit since June and I want to be on my own."

**Finding Power through Education:** Participant 14, who was withheld from education as a young child, described the empowering **role of education** in her life during the post-trafficking phase. "Here, in school, I was working my butt off, but I was getting A's and I realized that I could come to my own belief system. I didn't have to take what other people are saying, that I could formulate my own thought processes and use evidence to help me get to that point."

**Finding Power to Testify:** A portion of the women proceeded to testify against their trafficker. Cat described how she came to this point of decision:

"And, while I was there, all I could think about was how I was going to get revenge on him...I felt like I had lost everything, everything that I worked so hard for was gone. I had nothing to show for all the work, all the beatings, everything that I had done and all the money that I had made and I had nothing. And, I was just like scorned. I hated him. I wanted him to pay so I talked to the D.A. and I was like, I have information on this guy and I want him to go to jail. I said I want you to put him under the jail. And, so, I started working with special agents and we started recording some stuff and people that he knew. And, it actually happened that I didn't have to really do anything because they were watching him and they caught him...Now he's in jail."

Testifying against a trafficker is a risk, but is an opportunity to restore voice and power.

**Finding Power through Advocacy:** Several participants found their own personal strength by **intervening and advocating for others**. Victoria explained different aspects of finding her power during the reintegration process, which included anti-trafficking advocacy work.

“It was hard for the first couple months, just like allowing myself to be loved unconditionally and to have people, and then I was learning these things and I was learning boundaries, and I was realizing, oh, this is the first time I’m making my own money and I can keep it. And, I began to fall in love with what I was doing. And, I was able to go and teach trainings to law enforcement. And, I was able to go and mentor girls and I was able to teach trainings to medical personnel and to high schools and middle schools and youth groups. And I learned – I definitely learned how to fight for myself and how to advocate for my needs (Victoria).

### **Experiences of Reintegration**

An *a priori* code of this study was to explore the experiences of survivors after separation from their traffickers, particularly looking for expressions of needs, challenges, impact, and experiences with services. This post-trafficking phase is often called reintegration, as they transition out of the culture of the commercial sex industry and control of the trafficker. The following quotes described repeated expressions of comprehensive challenges, multi-faceted needs and the necessary preoccupation with stabilization and survival.

“It’s been a very hard process. It’s been very difficult to get back on my feet” (Participant 14).

“So, a rude awakening to me was that the transition was going to be really easy and I was, like, oh, I’ll get out and move on with life and, after about that six months, my entire psyche just had this entire purging of toxic shit” (Megan).

“Well, initially, when I left, the challenges were keeping myself alive still because there was retaliation. I was afraid for my kids, you know, somebody would hurt them. Court cases, court hearings, struggling to pay bills, getting an apartment, struggling to pay rent, trying to get employment with my record...Not to mention just, which I didn’t know then, was PTSD. Not wanting to be around people. It’s like you’re out of the life but you’re really not because – just because you’re not out catching dates, doesn’t mean that you’re not like still surviving. Except now, it’s a whole new – it’s all different because now you don’t have that thing to fall back on” (Cat).

In the beginning, it was staying clean. It really wasn't even that. It was going through all this shit...Stability. I mean, even though I was in a shelter. I needed everything. I didn't have anything...I'm just trying to get through it, you know, and live normal again without having to have somebody helping me – resources. These are great, but one day I want to be able to do it on my own, all the way, you know” (Participant 7).

**Experiences of Need:** All of the participants discussed their needs, challenges, and complications experienced in the post-trafficking phase. The participants' represented range of time after exiting trafficking was 1-29 years. Participants were asked to describe their initial challenges, as well as ongoing needs and experiences. While descriptions of initial needs reflected primary physical stabilization, the struggle for financial and physical stability was a continued theme after varying lengths of time, even though the majority of participants had some level of employment at the time of being interviewed.

Figure 2 Experiences of Need

| Experiences of Need                      |
|--|
| Housing                                  |
| Emergency Material Assistance            |
| Employment Assistance (search, training) |
| Financial Stability/Management           |
| Trauma Counseling/Psychoeducation        |
| Education/Scholarships                   |
| Emotional/Relational Support             |

Every participant discussed the need for assistance with **housing and basic material needs**.

“I still get assistance from the county--food stamps and medical assistance” (Cat).

“When I first came out of the life, I didn't have anything, so, I needed somebody to take me or give me underwear, bras. I needed clothing. I needed legal help” (Participant 14).

The majority described **financial needs, living paycheck-to-paycheck, the need for employment, and the need for advancement in employable skills**.

Participant 15 provided an overview of the challenges that exist in finding a job and financial stability:

“On the job note, I would say understanding that it is more complicated than just go to a program, get in transitional housing, find a job. You know, it's way more complicated than that because, like, my credit is destroyed. So, I can't rent an apartment. And, so, there's not really a lot of help for that...And so now, I have a roommate and she is the one on the lease and I pay her half of the rent every month but, I'm trying to figure out on my own how to repair my credit to get in a position where I can rent my own place eventually...

So understanding those types of barriers because so many trafficking survivors I know have similar situations as far as our traffickers having ruined our credit or having to take out loans to get out of the situation we are in and having damage to our credit... I've never had any convictions like others, but in my case, my resume' had a lot of gaps and I didn't have a lot of professional experience because I held very few jobs, very few square jobs, while I was being trafficked and so, I was really starting over at age 25 and I didn't know how.

I think a lot of service providers don't really understand all the nuances of how difficult it is to job hunt when your resume' is like patchwork and you don't have a lot of experience and you're way older than the average entry-level candidate. I mean, eventually, I got hired in the call center because they would hire anyone with a pulse and worked my way up there and then I've gotten a couple of good administrative jobs since then. But, it's just – oh, my God, job hunting gives me hives, I will probably never leave the job that I'm in now because it's good and -- I'm so lucky to have this job but I also just hate job hunting as a trafficking survivor because it's such an anxiety-producing experience and I've found that it seems like there's not a lot of help and support around that from service providers.”

Her words necessitate an increased understanding of the levels of complications that exist, and the necessity to thus evaluate how to assist in removing or navigating these barriers to moving towards sustainable independence in living and employment.

Grace outlined specific needs of survivors as they approach the process of finding work and the need to learn financial management.

“It's so overwhelming to come out of that life into normal society and know how to get a job, know how to present yourself, know how to speak about things or not speak about things. How to manage money. That was like a big thing for me...I'm coming into this job where I'm making \$8.00 an hour and it's taking forever to make this amount of money when I could have made that money in 20 minutes. And, so, like somebody to – to teach me like how to budget that small amount of money that I was getting...Job interviews. I went through a couple of great programs. This one guy taught me how to write a resume, how to explain my story in an interview in a way that wouldn't be degrading...cause I was like, how am I supposed to explain these prostitution charges?”

Emerald gave an account of her overwhelming needs in finding stabilization early in the reintegration phase after transitioning from a residential program.

“My apartment – my landlord came and threw out all my stuff because he didn't know where I was. I had two cats. Somebody came and got them. My car – I had it for a while but, because I wasn't allowed to work, I couldn't afford my car anymore so they reposed my car. That was pretty much it. I didn't have a lot of money...It's too much I

had to catch up with like everything that – within the year, like, house bills and it's like any and everything...I feel like it's just paycheck to paycheck and I'm trying to get caught up on wherever I was.”

A small portion of women described how these financial/employment challenges **increased their vulnerability to returning to commercial sexual exploitation**. “It's hard to go and get a regular job then, too, because I could do this on my own and make a lot of money and be good without giving somebody all my money. So, it's hard on that aspect, too, to learn how to live a regular life and not do that to get money because it's so easy and fast and it's a lot of money” (Participant 7).

These participants discussed the experience of receiving large amounts of money in short periods of time, without the opportunity to learn to manage this money. Within the context of the commercial sex industry, the exploitation is actually what they are known for or becomes something they see as a skill. When they face the job market outside of the commercial sex industry, with low wages and limited job skills or experience, they are at risk to returning to “the life,” because it is what is familiar and seems like a viable solution to their current obstacles.

A theme when sharing about the need for employment includes the **challenges with emotional and mental stability** necessary to work. Two participants mentioned having to forego supportive services, such as counseling, because of financial constraints or needing to devote time and energy to work in order to physically survive.

“I had a hard time finding a job just because of the gaps in my employment history and also, because I was so profoundly depressed and traumatized but, I couldn't get out and go to a job interview or submit resumes...I went to therapy for the first year or so and then I had to stop because of financial constraints” (Participant 15).

Beyond housing, finances and material assistance, some participants mentioned their need **for trauma counseling or education** about their experience. Approximately one-third

mentioned specific types of resources that were needed such as **medical care or legal support**.

“Well, I had not been to the dentist and just transportation, my identity” (Participant 18).

“Medically, I needed a lot of extra care because I had been so hurt and so abused. I didn’t have medical insurance so that was really interesting to walk through that process” (Participant 14).

One-third mentioned the need for **education or education scholarships**. Almost every participant talked about the need for **relational support**, specifically mentioning someone who can intervene and direct to services, someone who can offer support, support for women, or someone who will understand. Cat provided a summary of the comprehensive needs, yet the repeated, undeniable emphasis the participants placed on **relational support**.

“Everything. Everything. From clothes to food to shelter. Medical care. Personal needs. I mean that – those needs – but I also needed people not to give up on me because I think that if I would have – I’ve experienced people that just kinda say they’re gonna do something then not do it – and that really had a profound effect on me because it made me feel like I can’t trust people even when I really wanted to start to begin to love people again and to trust people again, you know, there’s that underlying feeling of desperately wanting to fit in and trust people but not being able to because people would say they were gonna do something and then they didn’t do it. And, by having consistent people – a support system that no matter even if I said, no, or I didn’t show up for something, that just stayed and didn’t leave. That has been probably one of the major things that has helped me.

I think just in the beginning stages of coming out of the life, you know, you need to be loved aggressively, which I know I was provided with that. I was loved aggressively, you know. But, I think that the biggest – one of the biggest challenges that is happening is the stability portion of, you know, having been stable, not feeling like, oh, this is a good thing. At any minute it’s going to be taken away, you know.”

Grace also articulated the overarching desire for emotional support that understands and

*“This is almost what my life has felt like.”*



**Figure 3 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

offers choices and acceptance.

“...desperate, that out of resources, hungry, have a drug addiction, there is no other option for a woman if no one's saying, hey, there's rehabs you can go to or there's this you can go to. But, like if somebody would have said, like, okay, here's – you could go to this place or you could go to rehab or you could – there was none of that...And, any support from the system – the prison system that didn't make me feel like I was this horrible number and just this person that is drug addicted and a nobody. There was no contact in that sense that – even for a judge to give you a prostitution charge and – like why didn't anybody say, hey, I know you don't want to live like this...Somebody that understood. Somebody that could talk that language. Somebody that if I shared a story about a time that I was raped or a time that somebody did something to me, that they wouldn't look at me like had ten heads and it would be a safe place to talk about and get that off my chest...Any type of women's support in that sense” (Grace).

## Chapter 9: Findings of Complex Trauma

Complex trauma emphasizes alterations in six areas: regulation of affect and impulses, attention or consciousness, self-perception, relations with others, somatization, and systems of meaning (Spinazzola, et al., 2001). In turn, to cope or regulate, victims who present with complex trauma may resort to substance abuse, self-injury, disordered eating, suicidal ideation or other forms of self-destructive behaviors (APA, 2013). Because this study has explored the experiences of survivors through the lens of complex trauma, interview questions included these key components of complex trauma, highlighted in the following sections.

### **Complex Trauma Alteration 1-Regulation of Affect and Impulses:**

**Experience of Emotions:** Participants were asked to describe experienced emotions related to the reintegration process, particularly soon after separation from the trafficker. The overwhelming majority expressed **feelings of fear**, including fear of their trafficker or for their own safety or that of their family.

“I guess because he was constantly calling me and telling me, like, you’ll see me again and, you know, like just making threats to me. It was just kind of really unnerving” (Kristine).

“Fear, a lot of fear. Mostly, it was because of pride though, it wasn’t really that I was afraid of him so much, but afraid of the game in general. Like, what people were gonna think of me...and then, there was the other part of it where I was afraid of retaliation against me because of the gang that he was in. I didn’t know where I was gonna go. I didn’t know how I was gonna live. I didn’t know how I was gonna support my kids” (Cat).

“And, so, for the first six months, I lived in fear of him. At that time, we lived in different states but he visited there regularly and I had to report to him on a daily basis and he was still forcing me to do prostitution and stuff. And, so, I lived in absolute fear of him showing up at my house and killing me because he knew where I lived and then finally I was able to move” (Participant 15).

These descriptions of fear reflected ongoing awareness of past and sometimes present threat of retaliation by the trafficker or seeing the trafficker. They also expressed fear for their current

and future function. “And, you know, there is, like, that deep-seated fear that I will never have a fulfilling romantic relationship or something” (Participant 15). “Fear, because I was always with someone but now it’s just me and I did not know how to be by myself, or, not have someone tell me what to do” (Participant 9).

The majority of participants also described **feeling numb or shut down**, and then

**learning how to have and express emotion.**

*"Web of Tears"*



**Figure 4 Photovoice Participant 14**

“I’m just learning how to feel again because you shut yourself down. I just stuffed it down and walked forward. I didn’t realize until later that, that was going to really like have an effect on me. It does, you press down for so long” (Kristine).

“...having to understand, coming out of that life, what I’m feeling. That was a huge thing for me because I couldn’t tell you if I was frustrated, mad, sad – I couldn’t tell you...I was numb from the drugs, so I didn’t know what feelings were” (Grace).

“Emotionally, it’s taken a while. I used to be completely cut off from my emotions so it’s taken awhile for me to get to know my emotions and be okay with expressing emotions. Now, I’m very emotional but not in an unhealthy way but, I’m glad that I can feel emotions now because I never used to be able to in a sense that was something-- I really dissociated myself from emotions” (Participant 14).

Additional feelings from approximately one-third included feeling **relief/thankful, anger, shame, worthlessness, depression, loneliness, hopelessness, overwhelmed, upset and self-pity.**

“*There is beauty in tears. Tears have formed this picture and this person into the beauty that she is today. Without them I don’t feel like this picture or this person would be who they are today*” (Grace).

**Figure 5 Photovoice Group Reflection**

“I felt, for a long time, lonely – alone. Worthless. A lot of shame. Guilt. Unhappiness. Something can happen and you feel like you’re right back down into that feeling of hopelessness, the feeling of guilt, the feeling of worthlessness” (Cat)

“I was swearing and yelling all the time and drinking stuff, throwing a lot of stuff. I was really angry...I really struggle with depression...Mentally, I was in this very dark place” (Participant 14).

“At first, it was just relief of not having to put on this fantasy to make him happy and worry about his moods and his anger – everything. So, a really profound sense of relief...I had a hard time finding a job just because of the gaps in my employment history and also, because I was so profoundly depressed and traumatized but, I couldn’t get out and go to a job interview or submit resumes. So, there were a lot of emotions. The one that really stands out for me is relief” (Participant 15).

“I was just completely broken. I had been at the bottom. The only thing left for me was death” (Grace).

Therefore, participants described a myriad of experienced emotions while they were also trying to navigate physical stabilization.

*"Tears: Always Silent Never Finished"*



**Figure 6 Photovoice Participant 14**

*“Tears in silence and isolation; Sometimes there are not words for expressing the pain you felt or the fear that you have or the entrapment that you felt and sometimes your own tears speak your words for you and they heal you with the silence”*(Grace).

**Figure 7 Photovoice Group Reflection**

### **Experiences of Trauma Symptoms:**

As participants were asked to describe the emotional impact from the trafficking experience, *every participant* described symptoms of trauma in the post-trafficking phase, a few using the terms Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex trauma to describe their symptoms. Victoria discussed her understanding of the difference between PTSD and Complex Trauma, and why complex trauma more accurately conveys her experience as a survivor of human sex trafficking.

“So, I was diagnosed with complex PTSD which is a whole other level of fun above and, then I have extreme anxiety. And, then, I have really bad panic attacks. So, I – my mood fluctuates a lot. I get triggered very, very easily. And, I have definitely suffered over the past few years. I’ve learned to handle everything well and I’ve learned to talk about it in therapy and I’ve learned coping tools and mechanisms and, like, safe places and stuff like that. But, I will always have PTSD...There’s a difference between being sexually abused and having that trauma or physically abused or kidnapped or something like that, versus, trafficking, especially trafficking for so many years. And, so, my trauma – I have a whole other sector of trauma from being abused as a child but nothing that I faced as a child could prepare me for what I faced as an adult” (Victoria).

Approximately half shared their experience of having triggers or reminders of their traumatic experiences. One-third described having flashbacks or reliving memories. “Just having flashbacks of where I’ve been, what men have done to me, situations I’ve been in. Not really knowing where to put that” (Grace).

Victoria, out of the life for 3 years, discussed the experience of triggers and what she is learning on how to cope with them, including the support of others.

“And, so, because, one thing that I noticed with my trauma is, if I’m triggered, I can go to zero to 100 in, like, 90 seconds. And, so it’s very hard to bring me back down from that. And, so, I definitely have to remember through the whole process if, I’m being triggered or if there is something going on, not to bottle it up and know that there’s people that aren’t going to say, well, that didn’t happen, or, that wasn’t really her, or, something like that. I’ve had to choose.”

Megan described the ongoing reality of triggers and flashbacks even after five

years in the post-trafficking phase.

*“Just because the ugly acts are over doesn’t mean I’m completely over it. I lay in my bed and images flash like snap shots. Will I ever be able to close my eyes and sleep peacefully?”*



Figure 8 Photovoice Participant, Cat

“So, then I started having flashbacks. I started not being able to sleep through the night. I started having panic attacks and dissociating and becoming aware that I was doing those things. So, I think that was kind of ultimately what surprised me... Every time the phone rang and it was a male on the other side of that phone and I had to schedule an appointment, I had this full flashback trigger panic attack... Triggers are a mother fucker, especially smell... it was just one of those reminders, even though I’ve gone through a lot of significant healing and I’m aware of a lot of my triggers but that was one that I just had never experienced before. And, those things are still happening and they will probably always happen” (Megan).

One-third report having nightmares and sleep disturbance and one-third describe panic attacks. “I had nightmares for a while, like, they wouldn’t stop, night after night, to the point where I’m not going to sleep” (Emerald).

An additional symptom of trauma mentioned was **avoidance**.

“I really don’t get emotional unless I talk about it. Because you see me in the beginning I said oh, this doesn’t bother me, but – and then when I talk about it, it does. So, I don’t really talk about it. I don’t think about it. Because I don’t know if those feelings will ever go away because it’s just – it’s traumatizing...It doesn’t really impact me anymore. It used to but it doesn’t, unless I talk about it, you know. That’s why I hate – I don’t want to go to counseling and shit because I don’t like to talk about it. I don’t like to think about it. But, I mean, as far as with the drugs and stuff, I can actually talk about it without getting nervous and, like, get anxiety to want to go use” (Participant 7).

### **Complex Trauma Alteration 2-Attention or Consciousness**

Experiences of dissociation was an *a priori* code for this study as an exploration of specific aspects of complex trauma. Two-thirds of the participants reported symptoms of dissociation, particularly crediting dissociation as a form of coping or survival both during and after being trafficked. In fact, descriptions of dissociation were the number one given response for how participants survived the trafficking experience.

#### **Coping with Dissociation during Trafficking:**

“I did dissociate to survive. Sometimes the pain would be too unbearable that I would find myself floating at the ceiling, watching what was taking place” (Participant 14).

“Not caring...I just turned myself off...Dissociated from everything. I was never afraid of anything. I was not afraid – I mean, I would be in the most craziest, dangerous situations and I didn’t feel fear and I think that’s what actually kept me alive, you know. Just being like crazy and not caring” (Cat).

“But with or without drugs, even before the drugs, you know, when I first got in, in my first few years, I wasn’t drug dependent, you know what I mean? But, I had to develop a way to leave the building, while having sex, which was a skill that I mastered and I mastered it to such a degree to where, and I’m talking right now today, it has not improved, it has not gotten better. I’m not a highly sexual person. As a matter of fact, it’s like, oh, God, right? Because I can’t connect – trying to see the nicest way to say this without sounding really crazy. But, I can’t connect the sex, meaning the act of sex, while having sex, I cannot connect – my vagina cannot connect that there’s a penis present” (Audrey).

#### **Coping with Dissociation after Trafficking**

Audrey continues to explain her experience of coping with dissociation during the

reintegration phase. After 25 years of exit from the commercial sex industry, she described it as a long-term effect, commenting on the importance of long-term research of women who have claimed to choose sex work.

“And, one of the most blunt things I got in touch with was the dissociative disorder that I developed. When I first got clean, I didn’t – I was like, how come I don’t like sex? I thought oh, my God, cause you’re not high. I thought it all had to do with drugs, right. It wasn’t until I had about ten years clean--it wasn’t drugs you needed to be able to have sex, I developed dissociative disorder. I practiced, because when you turn tricks you’re not present anyway. It’s only when I came out and I thought – and that was my first real symptom but, again, as I said to you, I thought it was the drugs. I thought, oh, you don’t like having sex because you’re not high. But, it was the first thing I noticed when I got clean that I struggled with. And, it was – again right up to today....”

That’s the best way to explain it. Like, I have to say, wait a minute, you’re having sex. Come back. I have to keep right because I mastered dissociating having sex from age 16 to age 30 and still at 55 I still practice dissociation. That’s my most obvious symptom – the most obvious trauma of being in the life. That’s why I always say, what kind of study needs to be done? I call them ‘my right to sell your coochie people’ women – like, this is my right, like, the 1-2 percent of upper middle class white women who came from a little something anyway...I like to see an honest study ten years after you get out, you know what I mean?”

Megan described the process of having increased awareness of dissociation, its triggers, and learning new ways to cope in response. She also mentioned the impact of dissociation in relationship with her husband.

“The more I heal and the more I process, it’s just – healing is such an interesting thing to be aware of. I started to notice, probably a year ago, how badly I disconnect from my physical body. I have a really hard time being, like, physically in my body and so that’s been something that I’ve been just becoming more aware of just recently. Like, I will just check out from my physical body and it’s like the weirdest thing and it’s not something that, I talk about with people that don’t understand that’s a coping thing. But, I also started to read that when I do that, it’s because I am completely overwhelmed.

And, so, using that as an indicator, I need to initiate a boundary here, so, with my family I do get very overwhelmed sometimes and even in a good way. I’ve had a great experience with them and then I’m just, I’m done. And I will start to dissociate and disconnect as opposed to starting to put my shoes on and go start the car and load up the car and go home. And, so, focusing more on recognizing when I’ve checked out like that, it’s time for me to go home

and take care of myself. I think the dissociation physically has been really hard for me to overcome being intimate, but my husband has been very understanding of that process and open to listening to me if I'm not comfortable doing something" (Megan).

### **Complex Trauma Alteration 3-Identity/Perception of Self**

Impact of perception of self/identity, another aspect of complex trauma, was intentionally investigated during the interview and coding process. The following section will outline emerging ideas surrounding impact of the trafficking experience on identity. These include pre-trafficking experiences on identity, descriptions of identity perception from the trafficking experience, and contributions to identity formation during post-trafficking reintegration. Almost every participant described their view of self, value and roles as well as the impact of the trafficking experience on their identity.

**Pre-trafficking Experiences' Impact on Identity:** One-third of the group specifically mentioned how **childhood experiences first shaped perception of self/identity**. For Audrey, this included her race and skin color. "I was an only child, a light-skinned African American and, as a kid, I was probably five shades lighter than I am now. I was bullied a lot and I was called things...So, I feel like my self-esteem was stripped and my self-worth from an early age. I wanted to be anyone but myself." She made the connection of how this made her vulnerable to the attention and recruitment of a trafficker.

Participant 14 discussed being victimized at a young age, and heard messages from the trafficker, who was also a family member, that impacted her view of self. "I was told that I was too stupid to do anything but be a prostitute and that was all I knew." Participant 7 recalled the impact of experiences in her childhood and how they were perpetuated by experiences of being trafficked. "I can't even answer that because, I don't even know what my identity is, I just know

that I'm a mom. I don't know, I have always been a lost child and being in the life, it just reiterated that, like I'm a lost child."

**Trafficking Experience Impact on Identity:** More than two-thirds expressed how they have had a **struggle with their view of self or with understanding of their personal identity after the trafficking experience.** *The majority hesitated or expressed difficulty to even answer the question about identity.* "Well, um, I think that – hmm, that's a really good question. Um, what's definitely going through – everything that I've gone through has impacted me in the sense that it definitely changed the person that I probably could have been. I am still learning about myself. So, I don't know how much I can answer that question because, um, I didn't know who I was?" (Cat)

Grace reflected on the impact of her perception of self:

"You're already ashamed because you can't believe what you've become, but at the same time, you can't even remember who you were...Mentally, it's taken a very big toll, especially, the way I view myself – the way I talk to myself in a negative way, because I've been told for so long and I've been abused for so long, I have this certain view of myself or like what I think of myself and I constantly have to remind myself that I'm not that person and that, that's a lie. So, I think, self-image. I think it's affected that, definitely...I didn't even look at myself in the mirror for, I couldn't even tell you how long, three years. The first time I looked at myself in years, I looked in the mirror in jail and I had like these scars on my face and I couldn't even recognize myself. I was like, when did that get there? When did I have these abscesses? When did I get these scars? Just like so completely out of touch with reality" (Grace).

She portrayed the impact on identity as ongoing, and how what she was told, what happened, and how she was treated shaped her view of self.

A repeated theme from the survivors was **a lack of awareness about personal interests.**

Participant 14 expressed "I honestly did not know who I was for a very long time and I did not know what my likes were. I did not know what my dislikes were."

A small portion described how their **challenges with self-perception impacted their relationships**. Kristine shared her experience of hindrance in relationship. “I think you do feel broken and, so, you, I think, get into broken relationships or broken people to be on an even ground.”

Two individuals reported **no struggle with self-esteem or struggle with impact on identity**. “They didn’t. They weren’t able to with me. I’ve always been a very strong, intelligent healthy, mind, body, heart, spirit person, very balanced, but I know they impact many girls’ self-esteem and boys’ self-esteem. They try to make people think only their sexuality is worth anything and that’s their value but that’s not true. And, I do empower people all of the time. That’s what I do with my organization. So, fortunately, for me they weren’t able to” (Participant 18).

**Trafficking Experience and Identity Formation:**

The majority of participants acknowledged how **their experiences shaped their identity or sense of value**. One-third mentioned finding value in the **attention from buyers or pleasing the trafficker**, while the majority described the **negative impact on identity and self-perception**.

*“Beyond Green: my worth is more than money”*



Figure 9 Photovoice, Participant 14

Cat conveyed her response to attention from the trafficker. “...I would give him the money and, when I started giving him the money, it made me feel empowered. It made me feel like making him proud, you know, like he’s like, you’re good, you’re good, you’re smart, you know. I would get somehow or another – I would always find myself in really bad situations but I

would always get myself out of them. Just very quick thinking and he appreciated that about me and always told me so” (Cat).

Participant 10 explained the **confusion of her self-perception**, and the dichotomy of how she gained something from the attention, but inevitably described it as destroying her sense of self.

This quote also provides an example of the many names and labels that participants used to describe themselves throughout their interviews.

“I would say that – that’s complicated. I don’t even know how begin on that one. It just kind of varies. Being in the life made me feel better about myself in it. I used to feel like, oh, I’m ugly or something like that. But, then I thought that when I was in the life, like, I can’t be ugly, look at all these men flocking to me, but, at the same time, it did destroy my self-image, beyond outward beauty because I just thought of myself as a bitch or a dog and like somebody’s property and, just like, a woman is supposed to be taken advantage of. That’s what I thought. And, the woman is supposed to serve a man. And, so it has negative and positive – how I looked at myself... “I guess before it impacted my thinking and thinking I’m a commodity and, like, men are going to give me something if they want something in return. But, I try not to think like that anymore.”

Audrey’s description addressed **the intersection of racial identity** with her experiences in the commercial sex industry.

“So, in the Combat Zone, you know, I felt, which was racist as well because in those days, even the johns would say, you know, I want a white girl. And, even in the strip clubs and the peep shows, the owner of the club would say, get them black bitches out of the front booths. Put a white girl on the stage, you know what I mean, like, blatant, because they were more profitable than black girls. But, for me, I felt, like this is the only place where if a guy couldn’t find a white girl because I was light skinned, he’d take me. If he wanted a black girl but thought the dark skinned black girls might rob him, I looked nicer – he’d take me. So, I ended up building, which I didn’t understand that then. I understand it today, is that I didn’t care what the price was, my ultimate goal was acceptance, you know what I mean?”

Megan described **identity formation according to her different roles** during the trafficking experience. “When I was being trafficked I felt like I had three identities. I had one who was the identity that I needed to show my family and that was like the divorced, single mom that’s working really hard and then I had another which was like my working name. And, that was the

personality that I put forth towards buyers of this perky, bubbly, single mom but just really enjoys sex, like oversexualized, really outgoing personality which is just like – I’m not super bubbly like that. And, then, the person that I was at home when I came home to my trafficker and, that person. I was thinking about it. That person never had a name – but that was the identity that I held the most hours out of the day often times. When I was home, that’s who I was but I was...It was just nobody.”

**Post-Trafficking Experience and Finding Identity as Trafficking Survivors:** Approximately half of the participants discussed how they found **identity in their role as survivors**, including being open with others about the trafficking experience. Participant 15 stated “To some extent, I think I’m always gonna be a violence survivor and it’s always going to be an important part of my story and when people get to know me, this is – it’s not that I like I’m waving a flag that says, I’m a survivor, I’m a survivor, but, like, you spend any time around me and you know the work that I do and we’re friends, eventually, it’s gonna come up.”

Grace acknowledged the **importance of coming to identify as a victim** as a valuable part of the healing process. “And, for any survivor to understand that, I think that’s so important because a lot of healing comes there. A lot – you can be a little more proud...you can stand on your story a little better just knowing like, no, there were other things that influenced besides myself.” Recognizing the victimization enabled her to see her experiences accurately, thus increasing confidence.

A small portion discussed the view that part of identity formation is the importance of **not being defined by experiences of victimization**. Kristine stated “there definitely is some identity crisis that you go through because you can’t let your experience be what you are.” She

provided a distinction between seeing the reality of her experiences without them defining her identity.

Half of those interviewed mentioned **finding identity and purpose in helping others**. “It’s helped me to know that I have a purpose that was intended for my life and I think that the intention – I think that what has happened was intended to happen because I would not be qualified to help another woman or even myself, and, by doing that, I’m able to give back to the community and able to help inspire another woman to know her worth and to realize her potential. And I do identify that I have potential and that, I’m gifted in many things but I do struggle still with my identity” (Cat). While identity realization is described as an ongoing challenge, she is able see her giftedness to help others, which gives her a sense of meaning.

Audrey expressed an example of **finding identity in helping others as a strength gained from the trafficking experience**. “As far as my identity and my recovery, how I look at my life now is that good, bad, or indifferent what I’ve done what a lot of other people have not done, was that I lived two different lives in one lifetime. And, so, I’m very fortunate because I also work in the field what was meant for bad, turned out to be good. And, so, my identity is, I am a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation, I’m a recovering addict, and I’m grateful because I’m alive and I love life and I live life to the fullest. I don’t take life for granted.” Embracing her identity in helping others gives meaning to the experiences in a way that also provides an appreciation for life.

**Post-trafficking and Growth in Identity Formation:** The majority discussed how they have **grown in their understanding** of their identity and self-perception since exiting the trafficking experience. Cat described both the struggle and growth of her self-perception and identity.

“Yeah, because I struggle with—I can say how it’s impacted my life in the way that I don’t trust people. I feel – it’s impacted me—I felt that I’m not worth anything, used up, you know. But, it’s also – I’ve also grown very strong because of it – because – I wouldn’t take back -- I could say this 100 times and I really know that it’s true. I hate – I hate what’s happened to me. I hate that I’ve been a victim. I hate that I have to identify as a victim. It’s very uncomfortable because I’ve been so strong and fearless but I would not take it back because I feel that I am ferocious, you know, and that I know that because of what has happened to me, it’s made me who I am and it’s made me to be so strong now. My mind is much stronger than it used to be. I – my mental health – even though I struggle with depression and these kinds of things – but now I know that I’m not gonna go crazy.”

Some participants described growth in how they learned to use their voice and set boundaries, and some explained their **journey of learning** more about their values and interests. Participant 14 shared activities that have been helpful in forming her identity. This included finding ways to identify her interests, her style and enjoying experiences that she didn’t have during childhood. She also mentioned how feedback from a supportive relationship assisted in identity formation.

“Even going through exercises of me on Pinterest or me cutting out magazine stuff and me going, I like this, maybe I like this. Do I really like this? And, doing collages and going out to the store and just looking at stuff and going, oh, I can actually acknowledge that is something I like. In the past two years, I did not know what kind of clothes I like to wear. I did not know the style that I used to wear and my adopted mom would say I think you finally got your style. Because I’m telling her, no, I don’t like that. And that’s a celebration because I actually now have something I do not like which is pretty awesome...learning to celebrate the little things, but also learning to have a voice in what those little things are and I never used to be allowed to say, yes or no to stuff and, so learning assertiveness and going, okay, this is who I am and I’m okay with that. Probably always enjoy stuff that is younger. I’m reading Harry Potter for the first time in my life and I’m 30 years old and I’m reading Harry Potter for the first time. I’m absolutely delighted by these books. And, I’m, like, that’s not what most 30-year-olds are doing for fun. And, I can completely enjoy that because this is who I am and that’s okay. And, so, it’s because I never experienced those things growing up and, so, being able to experience them now.”

Megan also expressed **the value of identity formation** as a big part of her healing process. She emphasized how she thinks identity is important to understand herself and to know her boundaries.

“It was an interesting process even with social media... finding your identity or feeling like you are different people to different people. I had two different accounts and I still do but there’s more overlap between them now because my life is becoming one finally. I think finding my identity has been a really big piece of that healing, too. And the more I know about myself and the more confident I am in who I am, the less vulnerable I feel because I know where all my edges are. I know all these pieces and I don’t have any voids – I don’t have those voids, like, somebody to place a suggestion in that spot”.

She gave examples of discovering her interests.

“I started cooking. So, I started really enjoying preparing meals. To this day, cooking is my therapy. I absolutely love it and, you know, listening – I started listening to totally different music. I started going to the gym and, just really getting back to finding who I was. But, it was, like, none of it was intentional. It was like I was just going with what my body and my mind needed. So, it’s always interesting to kind of look back, oh, my body – it just kind of took over to do what it needed during that time.”

*All* who described this **growth** in identity formation said it occurred **in the context of supportive relationships** or within their role in relationships. For Participant 14, this first began with the woman who reached out, compelling her to separate from her trafficker.

“For her to tell me that at the age of 21, I could make my own choices now that I was an adult. I had never been told any of that before, so, those comments really started to change the way that I saw my situation in the sense of, at that time, I did not look at myself as a victim of human trafficking but I did – here’s this person telling me my life does not have to be defined by sex acts, that, at the age of 21 I am adult and adults can make their own choices and, it’s something I have chosen to do. If not, then you can make your own choices to do whatever you want.”

### **Post-trafficking Identity Formation as an Ongoing Process:**

Participant 14 emphasized the ongoing development of identity. “It’s a process. It’s not over yet. I’m still figuring it out. And, most likely, it will be a process that I will engage in probably for the rest of my life. And, I will always see things differently than most people.”

Grace expressed the ongoing challenge involved with identity development, while also conveying the roles that have contributed to her identity formation.

“And, so I guess I would just want people to know, yeah, I’ve come out and that I’ve gone back to school and I’m doing all these things, but it wasn’t easy. Was it worth it? Yes. Do I still struggle on a daily basis? Yes. But, I’m not defined by that. I don’t

know – I’m a daughter. I’m an aunt. I’m a girlfriend. I’m a daughter of a doctor. Daughter of a nurse. I’m a granddaughter. This can happen to anybody. It doesn’t matter where you come from, who your parents are, what upbringing you had. It can happen to anybody and we should treat it as that. It’s not – it shouldn’t be so taboo. We have faces. We have names. And, we have stories if people are willing to listen but listen to not just listen, but to do something about it.”

### **Complex Trauma Alteration 4-Relationships**

As a core component of complex trauma and posttraumatic growth, this study explored the relationships of domestic sex trafficking survivors and the impact of relationships before during and after the trafficking victimization. *What was found is how integral relationships were throughout their experiences as well as the healing process.* Their feedback revealed how traffickers utilize relationship as a tool of deception, the trafficking experience isolates victims from relationship and greatly impacts trust, yet healing happens in the context of relationships where survivors have learning experiences of trust and safety. This is an ongoing process. The following are *in vivo* codes represented in their feedback about relationships.

**Experiences of Trust and Distrust and Relationship Development:** Emerging from the interviews was a continual theme of trust and distrust in relationships. Their gathered feedback defined experiences of trust and distrust as a person’s experiences of reliance, confidence and interaction between her and another, including the challenges, obstacles and benefits of trust within relationship. Relationship development is an *in vivo* code that captured aspects of how a participant described building relationship with another as well as perspectives, experiences, and beliefs about building relationships. In this study, all participants mentioned experiences of trust and distrust 128 times. Over two-thirds discussed relationship development. These co-occurred 28 times amongst two-thirds of participants.

**Traffickers’ Use of Trust and Relationship as Tools:** Almost all participants described the traffickers’ use of relationship and trust as his greatest tools of engagement, deception and

coercion. A repeated theme of the majority of research participants was proclaimed empty promises made by the trafficker with the sole intention of exploitation.

Participant 14 described what a female trafficker said to her, in the midst of building a relationship that would eventually lead to luring her into the commercial sex industry. She was previously trafficked by family members throughout her life and the trafficker was preying upon this vulnerability.

“She said ‘I can see that you want a family and I am your mom now and I want to be your mom. I want to take care of you and I want to love you and I want you to be my family’ ...Because my first trafficking experience had been familial and my familial people took me to the locations where the pimps were at and took me in, were the ones behind the trauma, to have this woman who had built this friendship with me and then exploit that friendship and those vulnerabilities almost seemed to be a deeper layer of betrayal because I trusted her to help me and she took that trust and she exploited it.”

Victoria had a similar experience of lacking a cohesive family foundation due to abuse. “They promised me a family. They promised me birthdays and Christmases. They promised to always take care of me. I would drive the nicest cars. I would live in the nicest apartment. Like, I would always be provided for. And, whether it’s male or female, that happens in both situations. And, then, I mean, the same thing – like, if I didn’t behave, I would be punished as well.” The traffickers capitalized on these voids, luring her with empty promises.

For almost all participants, the experience of **distrust began prior to the trafficker**, including experiences of childhood sexual abuse or being in an abusive dating relationship. This distrust in relationship continued, but not without confusion. Some share how the trafficker combined words that conveyed love, care, and protection, but interactions with his victims that included threats or violence, and always included control and deception. This not only created distrust, but distortion of what trust and love are within relationship.

Cat shared two experiences with one of her traffickers that conveyed contradiction of

words and actions:

“He took out the bat from behind – he was holding the bat from behind and he didn’t hit me but he popped me with that bat right in my mouth and it wasn’t painful but it shocked me. And he was like, ‘I don’t believe in being brutal. I don’t believe that women should be forced to do anything. If you don’t like my program, you can go. But if you stay, you’re going to work my program and you ain’t gonna tell me that you didn’t know’. And I was like, ‘I didn’t know’. And, he put that bat up again and he was like, ‘I’m letting you know now, the next time I put this bat on you, it’s not going to be a pop’. And, I was prepared. I was like, ‘I didn’t see or take anything’ and he believed me” (Cat).

His words implied that he was offering choice and fairness, but his actions included threat, punishment, control and abuse. Another incident conveyed how she was processing an act of sexual violence from him, while recalling previous things he said that promised choice and freedom. It became a defining moment for questioning what she had believed, but also implied another layer of betrayal and loss of trust.

“He knew that and he took that and he used it and I just – my head just kept spinning and I kept thinking, this is not the game. This is not the way the life is supposed to be. It’s a choosing game. You’re supposed to be able to choose what you want to do, like to a degree. You’re not supposed to be raped by your pimp who you’re supposed to trust and feel safe with. He totally took everything away and like – at that point, like everything that I felt for him, like I didn’t feel it any more” (Cat).

**Isolation from Relationship during Trafficking Experience:** Most participants reported isolation from loved ones and others in society during the trafficking experience. Cat explained this social isolation:

“I didn’t have friendships and I didn’t have relationships...the relationship between my trafficker was my only relationship and then maybe my wife-in-law but it’s affected me greatly...trust was out the window...but I would not let people to get close to me because how do you become friends with someone in the world when you’re in the life, you know. What do you talk about? What do you say to them? What do you have in common, you know? I mean, even a small conversation of your kids or something like that or grocery shopping or, you know, that would be to the extent of any conversation that I would be able to have with anybody square...and, it still remains difficult for me sometimes...”

She was describing not only isolation from the trafficker or other women, but how shame

from her experiences hindered her from connecting with others during and after the trafficking experience.

Participant 15 was not physically isolated, but still described a separation from loved ones based on perception of experience: “I wasn’t particularly private at that point about the fact that I was doing it, but everybody around me was sold on this idea that, like, I chose it and I wanted to do it and not like I was given the money to him and he had control over my finances and I was afraid for my life.”

**Trust and Relationship Development after Trafficking Experience:** When participants were asked about how the trafficking experience impacted their post-trafficking relationships, distrust of others was a repeated *in vivo* theme for the majority of participants, describing distrust and shame as factors hindering relationship development.

Kristine described how the **experiences of shame separate from relationships**: “I think that I have held back because I always feel like I have this thing lurking that nobody can really understand.” Participant 10 discussed having **fear and mistrust in both friendships and romantic relationships**:

“I think there’s been some impact in terms of like romantic relationships but, also in terms of building friendships and stuff like that in that, this is such a big part of my life but it also scares a lot of people away. It caused me to be very untrusting of people and very skeptical and very aware of my surroundings. And my relationship with men, I’m very untrusting and very on guard and I’m very fearful, initially, and, that’s just throughout the whole relationship. When I am dating and trying to meet men, I’m just very skeptical about their intentions or -- like, are they a trafficker in disguise? If they’re not, what do they want from me? Like, they’re using me for something. They want something from me. So, that’s how it impacted my relationships.”

The majority of interviewed survivors described this lack of trust as **hindering friendship**. For Participant 9, the lack of trust was connected to how others may perceive her experiences. “Yeah, I mean, you can’t tell people shit. You can’t tell regular people about this

because they don't understand and they look at you like you're a ho or something. But, they just don't understand what you really go through."

Emerald expressed it as related to her disinterest in relationship due to lack of trust. "There's like people who want to get to know me, but, I don't really want to." Participant 3 remains distant from others because of mistrust. "I'm very standoffish with friends. I don't really trust anybody."

A consistent *in vivo* theme for many participants was describing their preference of having a **small support system**. Participants' choice to have a smaller circle of friends seemed related to choosing carefully and exercising discernment for whom to trust. Cat explained:

"I'm not a person that needs a bunch of people around me to feel like I have friends or relationships. I'm kind of a recluse in that way but it has affected me trying to get to know people because of feeling judged, feeling like an outcast, you know. How do you relate? So, the friends that I have are the friends that know about my life and the amazing thing is that we don't have to talk about anything that has to do with the life now and I found that I do have rewarding relationships how that, you know, are based on respect and, you know, that means a great deal to me. And, trust, you know."

Trust was described as an **obstacle for receiving support**. "I feel like a bother to people if they're trying to help me" (Emerald). Most participants described how it **impacts relational intimacy**, one survivor claimed physical intimacy as easier than emotional intimacy.

"I've been single for a couple of years and I would like to start dating but, it terrifies me, you know, and, so, I think there's been some impact in terms of romantic relationships but, also in terms of building friendships in that, this is such a big part of my life but it also scares a lot of people away" (Participant 15).

Some survivors expressed impact on **trust of law enforcement and service providers**, and at times mistrust was reinforced by their experiences when receiving services.

“I’ve experienced some very horrific experiences with service providers that have actually deeply wounded me and have made it even harder to trust -- organizations that might actually be very well-intentioned and actually really be able to help me” (Participant 14).

“And, I kind of felt like the justice system had failed me. All the cops had failed me. Like, I hated cops. I hated anyone that had to do with law enforcement. And, so, I just felt like the world had screwed me over and that I really wasn’t going to get anywhere ever again. And, so, they’re still running free. They still have not been caught” (Victoria).

**Rebuilding Trust in Relationships: The experience of trust within relationship was repeatedly attributed as a primary source of healing and growth** from almost all of the participants. Participant 14 eloquently described how relationships may provide the opposite of the abuse in the trafficking experience. “I really believe that just as the trauma takes place in relationships – I believe that healing takes place in relationships as well and just as I have seen the pure sickness of individuals, I believe now that there is a lot of good individuals in this world and, so, those people are very much a part of my life on a daily basis and I know I can call them at any moment.”

Grace explained how she found relationships that were exceptions to her past experiences and perceptions, and how these relationships impacted her.

“The smallest things, are the people that I’ve come in contact with... it’s just the way that people were put – and I can’t deny it and I know that, that was for me and that I’m walking the right way. And, if it wasn’t for those signs, I think I’d probably have given up because, when you’re surrounded by people that don’t understand or don’t know what you’re thinking, feeling, or what it’s even like, it’s hard to see that there’s a path and that you can kind of come out of it...Just people that kind of surrounded me and said that I could do this. And, I’m like, if you say so, and I just kept walking and here I am.”

Grace gives high attribution to individuals who express understanding and confidence in her, an exception to past experiences of betrayal.

This next section will explore the specific relationships of survivors, including family

members, partners, and support persons. These emerged as *in vivo* codes as participants discussed the impact of the trafficking experience on their relationships.

### **Relationships with Family**

*Pre-trafficking History of Challenge and Vulnerability:* All participants described their relationship with their family throughout their lifetime. The majority described experiences with family prior to the trafficking experience that created **challenge and vulnerability**. This included divorce, abuse, substance addiction, incarceration, and the beginning of exploitation.

Grace is one example of several who had multiple challenges within her family, including substance use, abuse and divorce. “Both my parents are alcoholics. They were alcoholics when I was a child so I dealt with that a lot. I was sexually abused at 11 or 12 from a family member. So, although my parents were very successful in their careers, they weren’t very successful as parents. They weren’t there for me emotionally. They weren’t there through all the stuff that I had gone through. And then, through high school, my parents got divorced. So, again, I lost that support going back and forth between mom and dad.”

Participant 14 provided an example of when family members are those who exploited. “I was trafficked by my family. So, what that means is that people who are supposed to take care of me, they are the ones who perpetrated the evil...The family – I called them my biological people just because, like, I’m realizing family – that’s not what family is supposed to do and that’s not the way family is supposed to treat people.”

Some described a **lack of contact or support** during the trafficking experience and its impact on the relationship. “It has impacted my relationship with my family because it hurt me that, even then, my family wasn’t there for me or even tried to get me out” (Participant 15).

*Post-Trafficking Family as Main Support:* The majority of participants also credited their **family as key supporters** after the trafficking experience, where they experienced

improvements in their relationship with family or attributed their family to contribution for healing or inspiration. This included children. Grace explained the inspiration of her niece as well as the value of supportive reconnection with her family.

“Even having my niece, it’s been like I’m able to instill the morals that I want her to have or the upbringing that I want her to have, the safety I want her to have. I’m able to change that and to see that future...Also, just the little moments – reconnecting with family. When I first came home, I got to be at my little brother’s graduation. That was huge for me. Just little things like that that I had missed out on. I’ll never forget, my entire family came to my Drug Court graduation and, I remember when my Dad walked me down – he literally, like, we’re walking into the courtroom – he walked me down this aisle like I was getting married and it was like the most proud moment. He like held me hand-in-hand and it just felt like I was getting married but he had his daughter back and it was just such a proud moment. And, so, like those little victories is what has really, really stuck out to me.”



*“This is a picture of me holding my niece’s hand. Or her holding mine. I will be taking her by the hand in life but at the same time she’s guiding me too. Her birth 5 months ago opened my eyes to the innocence of a new life. It was like nothing I had ever experienced before. Being an aunt is my new favorite role in life. She’s a daily reminder of purity and innocence. Although my innocence may have been stolen from me at a young age, my niece has a blank white page in life. For this I am grateful for. I promise to protect her, guide her, and walk along beside her through life. She is a beautiful gift that I feel honored to receive.”*

**Figure 10 Photovoice Participant, Grace**

Megan shared how she reached out to her family when she decided to leave the trafficker and also described helpful moments of reconnection, in spite of some continued challenges.

“I called my family. They didn’t know that I was under a pimp’s control throughout any of this. And, I told them I’m completely isolated out there. I don’t have anybody. I need to move home. And, so, my sister flew out and helped me load up all my stuff. We drove sixteen hours straight back... We did Sunday dinner every single week with my parents, my sister, and my kids... They were just there. I know that they were

*“Flowers and Chicks - these were taken on Easter at my aunt’s house. Her home is so beautiful, her and her husband are extremely successful entrepreneurs, and were the first people to leave the cult my family grew up in. I respect and admire them very much. Family events are also very important to me and I love holidays getting to spend that time together. I am also a huge foodie and my family is full of incredible cooks!”*



**Figure 11 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

not equipped to deal with my chaos and I don't think they did everything perfectly by any means. There was a lot of hurt and, my mother especially is very religious and, so, looks at prostitution through that lens only. And, she is so very much that way. She's come a long way but still really struggles with--her perspective is just very different from mine."

*Post-Trafficking Ongoing Challenges with Family:* The majority of participants also described **ongoing current struggle** within familial relationship. Some stated they have no relationship with their family or know that they cannot depend on their family during their healing process.

"My family relationships are off and on. Both my parents are still struggling with alcoholism. That's been a big part of my recent anxiety and my recent – bringing up my own stuff, um, but it's also kept me in check on what I need to work on and it's brought me back to going to counseling and working through that...The trust is back. I'm able to be there for them today and not them have to be there for me. It's weird. In my family, there's ups and downs. It's like, when one person's good, then there's somebody else. I just had to learn to accept and, I still struggle with it, that my parents are not gonna change no matter how much I want them to, and, they're never gonna be the parents that I need or that I want. So, it's up to me to make it better for my future and my family when it comes" (Grace).

Participant 10 is one example of many who are missing a relationship with family that provides presence and support. "My mom and my dad, they've always been missing but it's like harder now that I'm an adult and I don't really know what I'm doing. I have a kid. I'm a mom now and I don't have a mom to like lean on or get any advice from or any help. I would say that's missing" (Participant 10).

Another ongoing post-trafficking challenge with family includes **comments from family members about the survivors' time in exploitation** that contribute to misperception and feelings of shame. Participant 10 expressed "The other emotional piece is like family that will be like, 'wow, I've had hard times, but I was never a prostitute.' It's just like the whole stigma. Like, 'oh, you used to be a prostitute.' It's just – that's difficult to deal with, too."

**Post-Trafficking Relationships with Partners:** Emerging themes included their experiences within romantic relationships. They described the challenges of fear, mistrust, and the barrier of their own self-perception. While their shared experiences reflected the risk for re-entering abusive relationships, their responses also reflected how long-term committed relationships may be a source of healing.

The majority of interviewed survivors expressed **fear and mistrust** in current relationships or a hindrance from entering into a relationship. Challenges included considering how to tell their partner about their experiences in their history and the risk of being misunderstood. They may have the desire for relationship, but hesitation that comes from mistrust, self-perception and the potential attitudes of the other.

Kristine, who has been out of the life approximately 29 years, shared her perspective of relationships:

“I mean, I know people understand it but it’s really hard to talk about with someone. You’re not gonna bring it up on a first date. So, it’s just that, that stuff – yeah, it’s just like what do you do with experience? I think that’s the major thing that comes up...Dating – dating is just like – I think, because you missed those experiences in your teenage years, that is really awkward for me, like – as normal as it used to be... I just really hope that it doesn’t hold me back from having a real relationship like a marriage.”

Participant 9, trafficked for 25 years and exited for 8 years, also described her fear and hesitation for entering a relationship, related to the potential of seeing a former buyer out in public, desiring a healthy relationship, but then fearing what the other person will think of her history:

“I have experienced being out of that relationship honestly and I got into a relationship with a person who knew nothing of the streets and no drugs, no nothing. And, that’s the type of person that I want. I want a man that held his own down and everything but, so, when the time came and – I always was scared that as we go out to dinner or to the movies, that I was gonna run into somebody that knew me from the streets or, you know, a trick or a john or whatever you want to call them. So, I was always scared going anywhere in public. So, and in the back of my mind, I always wanted to share that but

I'm like how would a person think, you know. Like, I am actually in love or dating someone that used to sell their body out on the street... "It's something in my mind because I'm always, like, wondering. Like I said, it takes a toll when you're, you know, in a relationship with another person and you haven't just lived a normal life, you know what I'm saying."

Participant 15 expressed fear of missing out on the experience of having a relationship or what expectations may come in a relationship. "I think there's still a part of me that's like, afraid that I'll never get to experience like a fulfilling relationship... Part of the fear that I have, I always assumed that, like, the other person is going to want more from me than I'm able to give."

Approximately one-third described **post-trafficking relationship experiences as abusive or unhealthy.**

"I did a lot of things that were really counterproductive in that, like, I got into another relationship right away and we ended up moving in together and that's how I was able to move. I mean, financially, it was – I loved the person I was with and they were very like – we're both trauma survivors and they were very supportive but we had a very dysfunctional relationship because none of us was healthy enough to be in a relationship. And none of us knew how to deal with our trauma. We were both kind of like clinging to each other like life rafts" (Participant 15).

Approximately **one-third were currently in dating or long-term relationships.** They described how they were navigating symptoms of trauma, challenges with trust, their sexual relationship, and described the relationship in a positive way as **a source of healing.** Grace discussed her current relationship and being aware of symptoms of trauma, particularly in the sexual relationship.

"Understanding my own triggers and trying to relay that to somebody else. It's not been easy. I still struggle with it... Like in the relationship that I'm in now, I've said my peace. I've said what I've been through. It's not something we dwell on. But, if there is a time that I feel a certain way I'll say it, but if somebody truly loves you in that sense they are not looking at what you've done. They're not looking at you as that person, but I think definitely understanding that there are sexual triggers that could bring somebody back in that sense."

Her example described the importance of open and ongoing communication and the reality of ongoing reminders of the trauma. Many survivors provided examples that revealed relationships can provide an exception to past experiences, giving a model of health.

“And, even, you know, I’m hoping to – that he’ll be the last, you know, and that I will marry him and he will be the last man that I’m with, you know. Then there’s that part of me that says, you know, I have to prepare myself that what if he’s not, you know? And that, what am I going to learn from this experience that he’s taught me, you know, what healthy love looks like. And you know this is something that I would need to look for in future relationships...from an abusive relationship to a relationship of healthiness. It’s been – I’m grateful. I’m really grateful that I have the knowledge of at least recognizing now, you know, what it feels like and what it looks like to be loved and respected by someone” (Cat).

Participant 14 is now married, and described the journey of challenges and rewards. “I am so grateful for him walking into my life but, not just that, but being okay with just the messiness of my story and – it’s not easy. But, it took a lot for me to trust him, too... we were very intentional to have like pre-engagement counseling...Long story short, it’s been a process... We still go through a lot of like normal fights and like marital stuff but, I don’t know. It’s been kind of cool to see, like, I guess, healing is possible.”

Megan is also married, sharing how they have worked through some of the challenges, including open communication and the ongoing development of trust.

“I think the hardest part for me was I had seen so many buyers that were husbands that were not happy in their marriages for a billion different reasons. But, really letting him know, I need you to just be honest with me. Like, the moment we start lying to one another is the moment that we can’t trust each other anymore. And, it’s not ever gonna be perfect but we have to talk about it and we still have to be honest with one another. And, so, that makes for some really raw, hurtful conversations sometimes. But, I think that, like, that’s better than having secrets and just furthering this divide between and either one of us just drifting away...And, so, he’s just really like rocking the fuck out of – he’s, like, my fan club. And, so that’s been really good. I do know that, bless his heart, I definitely exhaust him. But, he is just, like, that anchor, constant person. I feel, like, if both of us were manic, it would not be good. He’s just consistent and I need that. He’s good just being that which is great.”

## Sexuality

### "No Last Inning"



Figure 12 Photovoice Participant 14

“It is a game, that’s for sure. It is a game and so many people play it and so many people don’t come out of it. So many people get stuck. The baseball glove to me represents like it is a game and also, it’s a men’s game. It is a men’s game. When will the last inning be? When will enough be enough and when will it change into something that’s not – a woman isn’t looked at as a game, as a commodity that’s for sale, but a person of value” (Grace).

Figure 13 Photovoice Group Reflection

### *Experiences with Sexuality:* Participants were asked to

describe how trafficking experiences impacted their sexuality.

Almost every participant reported a history of childhood sexual abuse, which was credited as the initial impact on their sexuality. A portion of those interviewed also discussed sexual encounters with their trafficker. “They all make you have sex with them. Like, that’s another thing. You have to have sex with them, too, for free. That’s just part of it” (Participant 7).

Participant 9 gave insight into the **experiences of risk and danger** associated with sexuality during the time of being trafficked. “And, even just being in the life, I always say, we’re kinda playing Russian roulette with our own lives because you never know if that one person that we tend to exchange sex with or whatever, you don’t know if that’s the person that may even be a psychopath or something, you know. Um, so, it’s very dangerous out there. I mean, you can be subject to it – especially if you’re not protecting yourself, to STDs.”

Grace **expressed regret of the experiences** because of how it has impacted her sexuality.

“I wish I didn’t have all the sexual experiences that I had, just the degrading ones. The ones that I can never – I don’t know if they will ever leave my head. To see sex in that way, for somebody to treat it like it’s nothing, like, it’s – the power and mis-power of abuse in that sense, to see that side of it. I wish I had never seen it. I wish I had never seen how demonic people can be in that sense, the fetishes. I wish I never had experienced. Because even like

"awoke after being set up and drugged in my front yard then brutally raped by several men when I arrived home from work on Feb 1 2014"



Figure 14 Photovoice, Participant 18

"after being brutally raped for #pornharm film feb 1 2014 you can see where they dapped their penis on the front of my underwear after putting them back on my body"



Figure 15 Photovoice, Participant 18

"Liberty protecting me after she saw them drug me and they locked her in the bathroom as they brutally raped me for a porn video without my consent."



Figure 16 Photovoice, Participant 18

in conversation, people are like – just in normal conversation, they're like, oh, the foot fetish. And, in my head, I'm like, there's a real thing. And, so, things like that. I wish I just never had."

Participant 15 described the relief when the sexual exploitation ended. "As I gradually kind of transitioned out of the life all together, it was relief at like not having to put on this fantasy to make all the men who were buying me, happy pretend that this is like something I really wanted to do as a job, you know."

In general, the participants' feedback about experiences of sexuality reflected risk, danger, trauma, exploitation that led to shame, regret, fear, and relief after exiting.

**Post-trafficking Impact on Sexuality:** Most of them described the **post-trafficking impact on their sexuality**. *Almost every* participant expressed loss of interest or no interest in sexual experiences. For some, this was initially after exit, but for the majority this disinterest was ongoing, and only seemed to change slightly if they experienced sexuality in the context of a long-term committed relationship. There was profound repetition about

this disinterest reflected on some of their statements below.

"I think I lost any kind of sensuality about myself or I was just kind of an empty vessel inside" (Kristine).

"I don't want to do it" (Participant 3).

"There was a time there that I didn't even want to have sex. I was not into it. So, early on, it was – I wanted nothing to do with it" (Grace).

“I more struggled on the part of ever wanting to having a sexual encounter again”  
(Victoria).

*"Is Sex is More than  
Animalistic Instincts?"*



Figure 17 Photovoice, Participant 14

“I also find most men absolutely repulsive. I love my man. He’s the best. But, yeah, like, the idea of intimate relationships in general has just, like – turns my stomach, just, bleh” (Megan).

“It was really difficult for me to be sexually intimate with him and that was an area of my life that I just wanted to cut off and say, this is no longer gonna be a part of who I am” (Participant 14).

“Well, I’m not a very sexual person at all. It’s probably affected in one of the major ways in my life. I’ve only had two sexual relationships since I’ve been out of the life. The one was a very abusive relationship that really took me to a point where I stayed celibate for two years – a little less than two years and now the person that I’m with I’ve only had sex with – well, I’ve had sex with twice. It’s definitely different but I don’t put too much emphasis on our relationship in the sexual way” (Cat).

“I don’t know if it’s just because of my age, you know, my level of maturity now, but I would say for like the early years, I would say, no, I didn’t enjoy it. I thought you feel like a tool still and you feel like that’s all they want. And, I think that in some instances, I still feel like that’s all that guys want, though it’s really hard for me to see outside of that, like, you know, they want that emotional connection and I just – I’m not seeing that as often as you do the physical part . So, it’s just kind of made me like really weary of guys...It’s funny, I said to my sponsor the other day, I’m like, well, I don’t know how high I’d jump now at 55 but I said, I’d love to jump up and down on a penis. That would be fun. But, I can’t. It doesn’t, you know – if I never see another penis in my life, I’m all set” (Audrey).

More than one-third described post-traumatic symptoms as interfering with sexual activity, including **memories, triggers and dissociation**. Audrey explained the experience as dissociation, describing it as “leaving the building.”

“But with or without drugs, even before the drugs, when I first got in, in my first few years, I wasn’t drug dependent. But, I had to develop

---

---

*“I know, for myself, sex became nothing. It was a way to survive. It was a way to get money for the things that I needed. It was just – there was no emotional connection. There were no feelings behind it. It was just an act and from childhood, it was just never anything that was enjoyable and nowadays, it seems like society endorses it just to be an animalistic instinct. It’s just like. You’re treated like an animal, especially in that life, like, you are just – you are there for one reason and one reason only and it’s – it makes me sad. It says what it needs to say but it’s like – the caption on top – it makes you think, it really does. But, to me, it shows that this person is still struggling with that maybe. That sex still is that. It’s crazy that even the bunch of red – that represents, like, evil to me. It’s just demonic. But, through the healing journey, you realize that, that is not what it’s supposed to be and there is purpose behind it” (Grace).*

Figure 18 Photovoice Group Reflection

a way to leave the building while having sex, which was a skill that I mastered and I mastered it to such a degree to where and, I'm talking right now today, it has not improved, it has not gotten better. I'm not a highly sexual person. As a matter of fact, it's like, oh, God, right? Because I can't connect – trying to see the nicest way to say this without sounding really crazy. But, I can't connect the sex, meaning the act of sex, while having sex, I cannot connect – my vagina cannot connect that there's a penis present, you know what I mean?"

Approximately one-third described their **confusion about their own sexual identity**, attributed to their experiences of sexuality while being trafficked.

"Being in the life – in this certain type of lifestyle, engagement consists of maybe male, female. So, sometimes you kinda wonder where you are, you know. So, is it this or that or but then you come to times and be like, okay, it may be both. So, I mean, being in the life for so long and having different type engagement that you have to put yourself in, you know, it just – it kinda, what can I say, can become a part of your life" (Participant 9).

"I have actually wondered for a long time if I might be asexual. I don't think that I am because I still do experience sexual attraction and arousal and stuff like that but, like, it's just approaching sexual situations is so nerve wracking for me, and it ended up being a big barrier in a relationship" (Participant 15).

Emerald provided a differing perspective as she described **the difficult adjustment to no sexual activity** initially after the exit. She also described that she had never had sexual activity without drinking alcohol. "So I went from like doing almost ten guys a night to nobody, and not drinking was like really, really hard. It took a lot to adjust, like, a lot. I showered like three times a day. I had to like keep – my clothes. My body was used to like, I'm expecting some tonight."

One-third of the participants described their feelings associated with sexual experiences, including shame, confusion and fear, and how these may become **barriers to current or future relationships**.

**Shame:** "I was just so like couldn't even be made love to or something like that in a good way because of the so many people that I have slept with that I felt that I was just

damaged or, like, no good and no one, you know. And, then, you know, with my name being out there so much that, even if I meet somebody and they find out about my past, that I could never keep somebody. So, you know, a lot of that stuff ran across my mind” (Participant 9).

**Confusion:** “Everyone talks, but, like, how being in love with someone is different from just like wanting to hook up with someone. And – I don’t really know the difference, you know what I mean?”(Emerald).

**Fear:** “...I’m afraid – you know, I have this fear if I get into a relationship, my sexuality is always going to be lower than the other person’s and I’m always going to be having to navigate that even though I’m sure someday I will find somebody that just like matches my needs in that respect. Part of the fear that I have, I always assumed that, the other person is going to want more from me that I’m able to give. I definitely fear that I’m never going to have a sexually healthy relationship just because my experience thus far has been that I have a lower sex drive than everybody else, or that, maybe, like sex with me is more complicated than it would be with somebody who is not a survivor” (Participant 15).

*Post-trafficking Experiences with Sexuality:* Participant 7 was the one participant who reported there was no impact on her current sexual experiences, crediting being in a monogamous relationship. She also referenced having the opposite impact, becoming attached to him regarding their sexual relationship.

“It hasn’t really messed with me, really, because, I mean, I have been sleeping with the same person – besides when I was doing all this, I was still taking to him and that was person I wanted to have sex with, so, but, it hasn’t really impacted me. Sometimes I’m really emotional, like, I don’t know. It does the opposite for me. Some girls just don’t want to have sex at all. With him, I just got so attached with him.”

More than one-third of individuals described **healing or positive experiences with sexual activity**, which occurred in the context of safe, committed, long-term relationships. This included becoming more comfortable with sexuality, learning preferences, being able to voice preferences and set boundaries, as well as learning how sexuality can be an expression of a healthy loving relationship. These individuals describe how this took effort and practice and that challenges continue.

Kristine described having to *practice* becoming more comfortable with physical affection, but also acknowledged that emotional intimacy is more difficult. “I was really trying to focus on my sensuality and, like, hugs and...for years, I don’t think I kissed anybody, so it’s just like learning how to do all that over again. I think that it took like many years to be comfortable with that but, like I said, that part is easier because the physical part is not the problem.” She describes the disconnection of sexual activity with emotional engagement, thus the barrier to sexual activity being an overflowing expression from emotional intimacy with a relationship.

Participant 14 described having to adjust her mindset about her involvement with sexuality as she got married, *becoming more accepting of herself as a sexual person* as well as her husband as having sexual needs. She described the *ongoing struggle* of experiencing triggers, yet also *being able to enjoy and experience sexual intimacy*.

“Here I am in a relationship with this man who is like – definitely has sexual needs and realizing that I have sexual needs as well even though I don’t want to acknowledge them and, so, coming to realize that it’s okay for me to have sexual needs it doesn’t mean I’m a bad person. It doesn’t mean that I’m gross. It’s just who I am and it’s okay to embrace that element of who I am being a human person. It’s been through my relationship with my husband and also sexual likes and dislikes that has been very difficult to figure out and realizing that’s okay for me to say, yes, I like that and to say I really enjoy different elements of being sexually intimate which has been so hard because of just all of the messages that I’ve received...That doesn’t mean I still don’t get triggered. There are definitely positions. Sometimes it’s definitely, whoa, like, where did that come from and it’s, like, I need to work through this. But, now feeling safe and not to put my husband in some of those memories.”

Grace explained her attitude about sex and how it shifted when she entered into a committed relationship during the post-trafficking phase.

“Sex was just sex. It still had that price tag. It still had that – no emotional attachment. It was just a thing that you do. Until I got into a serious relationship is when that changed. The first person that like actually respected me, I felt, and that there was more than just sex, it was an actual emotional exchange and there was value to it and there was feelings with it, so that’s what kind of changed that. But, it took a lot of trial and error to get to that point. But, also, like with the person that I’m with today, I can say that I enjoy it because it’s not the kind of sex that I was used to. It’s passionate. There’s a purpose for doing it. It’s so different than that sex that I used to have.”

Megan described navigating the impact of dissociation and other triggers of trauma on her sexual experiences with her husband.

“I think the dissociation, physically has been really hard for me to overcome being intimate, but my husband has been very understanding of that process and open to listening to me if I’m not comfortable doing something. If I just can’t – I’m overstimulated right now, like, even just overall mentally and emotionally. I just can’t be intimate right now or recognizing sometimes all I need is to lay on the sofa and cuddle.”

Cat conveyed the differences of sexual experiences in a committed relationship, yet also articulated the impact of sexual experiences from being trafficked.

“Well, it’s different because I know that he loves me and I actually feel – I feel his love when we’re together. It’s tender. I feel that he – that I’m loved and that – it’s beautiful, it’s beautiful. But I feel very uncomfortable with sex because I have a lot of scars and it’s just a constant reminder of what happened to me and I haven’t really quite worked through that yet so I prefer to not be intimate. And, also, because of my beliefs and my faith. But, it’s something that’s difficult for me... Sometimes I feel that every man that I’ve lied down with has become a part of my life, like, has become – like they left a part of themselves with me and I left a part of myself with them. So, I constantly – I deal with that all the time and, even moments, moment by moment, minute by minute with my relationship now because I have to always think, this is not one of those men. This is a new man and he’s very supportive. He doesn’t understand what’s going on but he is supportive and that’s a really good thing” (Cat).

At least one-third mention their personal value of waiting until after marriage to have sex.

“I don’t want to have sex with just anybody. I have a relationship that we haven’t had sex yet but when I do, I’m hoping it’s going to be marriage. That’s just the way I believe” (Participant 18).

“I decided that I wanted to wait to be intimate until marriage and I needed that to see whether or not this person was going to respect my wishes and respect my desires” (Participant 14).

“I would hope that – I pray about it – that one day, you know, that when I have a husband that the Lord will work with me through this because it is very important to me to be able to leave that part of me, somewhere else when I’m having that moment and just to be able to enjoy what God gave a man and a woman for in that way and the beauty of it and be able to, you know, and enjoy that moment without feeling ashamed or embarrassment...they say that some scars never go away and it’s true. These scars will never go away. I will have to see them, and it’s something that I try to work through, but I’m very grateful that I have a person in my life that is understanding and that is very gentle with me in that way. He says to me that just proves how much of a warrior you are and that those are your battle wounds and – it sounds nice to think of it in that term and that way, but there’s that part of me that still doesn’t think of it like that” (Cat).

Participant 15 described her experience with PDSM (Public Display of Sadomasochism) as not only a brainwashing tool of her trafficker, but something that has been healing for her.

“He used that as a form of brainwashing to make me think that I wanted to be a good submissive to him and I wanted to make him happy. Like, the beatings were just part of that and, you know, and stuff like that. And, I’m actually involved in legal healthy, like safe – nowadays. And, it’s so, so different and, at the time, that was all I knew of it and that was my introduction to it. I haven’t had a lot of sexual experiences outside of one relationship and I’ve done some public play that has been non-sexual that has been really fulfilling. That’s one of the things I love the -- community is that, there is so much acceptance for doing public play in a safe space where, the focus isn’t on the sex, it’s like on the sensations and that’s what I’ve been doing lately. And, that’s been a really healing process for me to figure out what I like and don’t like and being able to, like, negotiate and practice healthy boundaries and stuff like that. It’s been kind of a laboratory for working on that” (Participant 15).

### **Relationships with Support Persons**

*Trust in Supportive Relationships:* Some of the interviewed survivors described the power of learning how to trust within the context of supportive relationships during the post-trafficking experience as one of their **greatest needs and what they found as most helpful.**

“I needed everything. Everything. From clothes to food to shelter. Medical care. Personal needs...but I also needed people not to give up on me because I think that if I would have – I’ve experienced people that just kinda say they’re gonna do something then not do it – and that really had a profound effect on me because it made me feel like I can’t trust people even when I really wanted to start to begin to love people again and to trust people again, you know, there’s that underlying feeling of desperately wanting to fit

in and trust people but not being able to because people would say they were gonna do something and then they didn't do it. And, by having consistent people – a support system, that no matter even if I said, no, or I didn't show up for something that just stayed and didn't leave. That has been probably one of the major things that has helped me....When a woman survivor starts to see, like, this person's not going anywhere, they really care because most of the time they're dealing with abandonment and they're dealing with a whole variety of other things, you know. And, they see a constant – constant person and figure, it helps to open up and trust. So, I just – I always tell people that, you know, just love – just love her, don't have any expectations – don't have any expectations because, you can't. You just gotta love them where they are in that moment where they're at and just keep loving them where they're at” (Cat).

Participant 14 first learned to trust a dog before she could trust the support team within the home where she was residing.

“...It was through that dog that I was to be able to regulate my own emotions and be able to engage with people. The dog could sense when I was starting to be outside of that regulation area and then the dog would help me calm down, would help me sit down and help me start petting him. And, then, the people at the house would take that as a cue to let me be but then enter into a relationship with me. So, then they would enter into a relationship with me through that dog. So, they used that dog to help calm me down but then to enter and have a relationship with me.”

Participant 14 also shared her experience in a mentor program, particularly how there was reassurance in knowing that this relationship had accountability. “It has been absolutely incredible having a community, being able to build relationships with a person who I've been able to create attachments with that are healthy attachments. But knowing that they have accountability, *knowing that it's not in isolation. It is isolation which absolutely terrifies me because my trauma happened in isolation.*”

Many of the survivors stated that they learn from the **models offered in relationships**. Adopted mothers and fathers as well as support persons become a new framework to understand healthy relationships.

“I would say that if it wasn’t for the adopted dad in my life I would have never been in a place to open myself up to the possibility of being in a relationship with a man or woman” (Participant 14).

“...It’s helped me – that I was in a home with a husband and a wife and I was able to see the dynamics of their relationship and what it looked like and it was baffling to me, you know. Like, what, they don’t – what’s going on? I did not understand and I could not wrap my brain around it but it started to stick and, um, because of that, I started to be more aware, and I am more aware now of what a healthy friendship, relationship, work relationship – these relationships – what they look like. And, it’s been very beneficial to me. Thankfully, to these people who have been my supporters” (Cat).

Grace emphasized the value of having a mentor, as providing a model of something she can aspire to be. “I found it very important to find a mentor to bounce stuff off of or just to find somebody that you kinda want what they have and you see the direction that they’re going in that type of way” (Grace).

As participants described what was helpful about their experiences with support persons in the post-trafficking phase, *almost everyone* said it was helpful **when someone believed in them**, including judges, probation officers, mentors, therapists or other service providers.

“That judge was like the first person to believe in me and to see something in me that I did not see and – yeah, I spent a year in that program and they mandated meetings and outpatient therapy and everything that I needed that I didn’t know that I needed...My probation officer was a huge support. He believed in me...This person believes in me, has inspired me, has made me think about there is a life after the life and you can overcome the trauma. It’s a process and it’s going to be a long, lengthy process, but I felt all along, that this person is in that race with me” (Grace).

“I think the surprising part was a lot of people seen a lot in me that I wasn’t seeing in myself, so, I had a lot of people believing in me and referring me to this type of work and I felt I wasn’t ever good enough” (Participant 9).

They also described **the role of unconditional love** and having someone who would not give up, would provide acceptance for where they were at and who provided presence, tangible support, and accountability. Participant 14 described her relationship with a mentor, who **provided presence, accountability, and the opportunity to practice healthy attachment.**

“To have received mentorship services and I’m currently in a mentor program and that has been absolutely incredible having a community, being able to build relationships with a person who I’ve been able to create attachments with that are healthy attachments. But, knowing that they have accountability, knowing that it’s not an isolation which is an isolation which absolutely terrifies me because my trauma happened in isolation...So, she has been through a lot of life with me, sat in a lot of doctor’s appointments with me and stuff...People that are safe have really changed my life.”

Participant 9 gave insight into how involvement with a program included the kind of love and acceptance that kept her coming back, even during her time in the trafficking experience.

“The love was unconditional and not just because you go out there and you do drugs or you sell yourself and you come back, that they’re gonna say, like why do you keep doing this? It was still with open arms, you know. And, it was like, that’s okay, baby. I’m glad to see you still here. So, it was enough love that I was getting to make me want to keep coming back, you know...The place that kinda helped build me up mentally, you know. You know, like, just giving me encouragement and trying to motivate me and just, like I said the unconditional where they wasn’t judging, you know. It was a lot. I can’t really explain what I was going through at the time because, whatever it was, it felt good. So, I just knew I wanted more of that, you know.”

Cat shared what was helpful for her in having supportive individuals who she met through a community coalition that showed love, offering consistent presence and tangible support in her daily life and needs.

“Sometimes women need to be pulled. Sometimes you have to go alongside of a woman for a job interview. Sometimes you have to say, I’m gonna sit with you and we’re gonna fill out this application, things like that. I think just in the beginning stages of coming out of the life, you need to be loved aggressively, which I know I was provided with that. I was loved aggressively. But, I think that the biggest – one of the biggest challenges that are happening are the stability portion of having been stable, not feeling like, oh, this is a good thing. At any minute it’s going to be taken away...And, they see a constant – constant person and figure, it helps to open up and trust. So, I just – I always tell people that, you know, just love – just love her, don’t have any expectations – don’t have any expectations because, you can’t. You just gotta love them where they are in that moment where they’re at and just keep loving them where they’re at.”

Another theme for the majority of the participants is that the supportive persons in their life had long-term influence and became like family for them, including staff from therapeutic homes, professors, probation officers, 12-step support group sponsors and mentors met through

local coalitions or organizations. Participant 9 described her relationship with some key individuals:

“And, to this day, I called them – one of them became like my spiritual mom. And I love her to death because it wasn’t for her encouragement and she – you can feel the sincerity of these providers. We are very observant people because we have to be being out in the life. So, we feel the love coming unconditionally and that’s what attracts us. Like, I can tell you any and everything you want to know because I feel you would keep that in confidence and help me just walk through it...It’s two people strongly – it’s funny it’s one of my probation officers is my support till today and then my mentor. Like, that’s my spiritual mom, though. But, when I call them and when I talk to both of them, they say the same thing to me but in a different way so I understand it a little bit better and I be like, okay. So, it helps a lot to keep people that want your best interest in your corner, you know. So if this go to any other ladies, it’s a lot of people out there that *will just rock with you until the end*. Them the people that you really need to keep instead of manipulating them or using them.”

*“Petroleum based gloss paint was injected into the muscles of my face and body, during yet another home invasion.”*

### Complex Trauma Alteration 5-Somatization:

Approximately one-third reported ongoing physical or medical conditions that were a result of being trafficked, including acts of violence, medical neglect and the ongoing stress and trauma from the victimization. “I do believe that it took a toll on my body, where I have certain pain that comes throughout and I know it’s from that” (Participant 9).

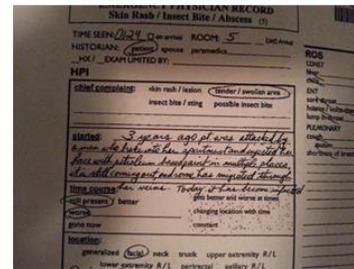


Figure 19 Photovoice, Participant 18

*“paint draining from my chin”*



Figure 20 Photovoice, Participant 18

### Complex Trauma Alteration 6-Systems of Meaning

The final aspect of complex trauma that has been explored in this study is systems of meaning, or the impact of traumatic experiences on an individual’s beliefs. Participants were asked how their experiences impacted their beliefs and perspective. As previously described,

grief, shame, depression, and hopelessness are indicators of a disruption of systems of meaning. This section will highlight **loss, shame, and hope/despair**, themes that emerged from the data as described by the participants, thus confirming the presence of this aspect of complex trauma impacting sex trafficking survivors. Systems of meaning will also be further discussed in the chapter on Posttraumatic Growth.

### **Experiences of Loss**

*Loss of Voice:* One-third reported **loss of voice with family members prior to the trafficking experience**. Participant 9 recounted how she lost her voice not only from being sexually abused as a young girl, but when prohibited to disclose the abuse because of lack of open communication within her family system. “I wouldn’t say abused or neglected but neglected in different areas where I didn’t feel safe to share what happened to me with my mom, so, because we were the type of family that kinda keep things in and then being threatened throughout those incidents, being at a young age, you really didn’t know what to do.”

The majority of participants reported **loss of voice in relationship with the trafficker**. “And, we just learned not to say anything. Even when I tried to tell him it hurts and stop, he would just continue” (Emerald). Emerald also described **loss of voice with buyers**. “So, it’s like – but I can’t talk. I’m there – I literally couldn’t say anything, like, not that I couldn’t – I couldn’t talk. I didn’t know what I was supposed to say.”

In the post-trafficking experience, one-third described **loss of voice with service providers or the criminal justice system** by not being asked for feedback or offered choices while receiving services. “I feel like survivors’ voices are always kind of like, I’ll talk for you because you’re too damaged so I’m gonna talk for you. Or, it’s misunderstood. I’m not quite sure why it’s not really taken seriously sometimes” (Kristine).

**Loss of Relationship:** A small portion described loss of relationship prior to the trafficking experience, attributing it as a contributing factor of vulnerability to recruitment by the trafficker. Example of losses included emotional neglect, absence from divorce, abuse, or addiction, death, or separation from family due to entry into child welfare system. “My mom-she just became an alcoholic and stopped even...She didn’t even try to get us back” (Participant 7).

Approximately half described experiences of **isolation from family and friends** because of the trafficker during the trafficking experience. “I didn’t have friendships and I didn’t have relationships. There was no – I mean, the relationship between my trafficker was my only relationship and then maybe my wife-in-law but it’s affected me greatly. I mean, like I said, trust was out the window...but I would not let people to get close to me because how do you become friends with someone in the world when you’re in the life, you know” (Cat).

One-third shared **experiences of miscarriage**, for two participants it was at the hand of their trafficker. “I lost the baby. I lost like – I felt like I had lost everything, like, everything that I worked so hard for was gone. Like, I had nothing to show for all the work, all the beatings, everything that I had done and all the money that I had made and I had nothing. And, I was just like scorned” (Cat).

One-third shared **experiences of death of family members** while they were being trafficked. “My parents passed away when I was 17 and they never knew when they passed away that this was going on. And, nobody had any idea, like, nobody at school” (Participant 15).

One-third shared **experiences of losing children** to the child welfare system or losing time and experiences with their children. “I wasn’t able to pay my bills. I was losing my house. I lost my son” (Participant 7). To lose children to the child welfare system was also to lose a source of motivation and purpose.

The majority of participants discussed the **impact of loss of relationship that continued post-trafficking**. Victoria illustrated the multiple layers of loss that may exist for a survivor:

“I wasn’t speaking to my family. My mom had passed away already. So, I mean, I was all alone. I was homeless and sleeping in my car. Like, I was numb for a good year-and-a-half after I got out...I wish people would have taken the time to notice. I, as a kid, just because of everything I had gone through I pushed away a lot of people and I just wish that there would have been people who would have stayed and who would have wanted to see what I made out of my life because after the trafficking, I had no friends left. No one wanted to be a part of my life anymore” (Victoria).

A small portion discussed *loss of possession*, including places to live, thus implying a loss of stability and security. “My apartment – my landlord came and threw out all my stuff because he didn’t know where I was. I had two cats. Somebody came and got them. My car – I had it for a while but, because I wasn’t allowed to work, I couldn’t afford my car any more so they reposed my car. That was pretty much it. I didn’t have a lot of money” (Emerald).

Almost half of participants discussed *loss of identity*. Some of this loss of identity or struggle to find identity is recognized during the post-trafficking phase. “And, I just sat there and I looked at myself, and like – it’s like I couldn’t see who I was. I felt like, I was like there but I wasn’t. Like I was on autopilot, kind of” (Cat).

#### **Shame:**

Experiences of shame is another *in vivo* code that captures how a survivor of sex trafficking describes interactions and experiences of shame before, during and after the trafficking experience and the impact of this shame. They articulated that shame includes the belief or experience of **seeing oneself as different, bad, flawed or lacking value**. 9 of 15 participants discussed or described shame 53 times during their interviews. It was a significant theme that emerged from the data.

***Identity in Relation to Outside World and Experiences of Shame:*** This study explored how survivors' identity is perceived and shaped in relation to the outside world, such as how perception of self was impacted by interaction within the community or attitudes from others. 13 of 15 participants mentioned 53 times their identity in relation to the outside world. This theme corresponded with experiences of shame 20 times throughout the feedback of 9 of the 15 participants.

***Experiences of Shame before Trafficking:*** One-third of the participants who discussed shame, described experiences of shame **before the trafficking experience**. Participants expressed how factors such as race, color of skin, early childhood sexual abuse or behavioral responses to childhood trauma shaped how they believed others viewed them, thus shaping their identity.

Audrey discussed experiences related to her race. "I was an only child, a light-skinned African American and, as a kid, I was probably five shades lighter than I am now. I was bullied a lot and I was called things, like, white girl, curler, are you Puerto Rican. Where did you get that white...So, I feel like my self-esteem was stripped and my self-worth from an early age. *I wanted to be anyone but myself.*"

Grace commented how the response after sexual abuse by her brother impacted her. "My brother didn't get any help so it made me feel *like something was wrong with me* kind of thing." This one-third of the participants reported that these perceptions influenced their vulnerability of being coerced or deceived into the commercial trafficking industry.

Kristine explained "I was *already labeled a bad kid*. So, I think there's a stigma thinking like, this it is, this is all I'm gonna be and, you know, you're a young mind, you don't have, you

know, any sense about you and you're influenced by emotions, by thinking a guy cares about you and, you know, really, you're just money. You're just disposable and, yeah."

While there were these few examples of pre-trafficking experiences and its impact on vulnerability to exploitation, there were also a significant number of references during the trafficking experience. Yet, most significant was the experiences of shame in relation to the outside world *after* the trafficking experience.

***Shame's influence on Identity Formation during Trafficking Experience:*** The majority of the women reported that experiences of shame impacted identity during the trafficking experience based on the **perceived and experienced attitudes of others**. Grace stated "All you hear is that *you're a piece of shit and that you're going to die this way, nobody cares.*"

Cat described an experience of having to jump out of a moving taxi car due to a threat of danger with the driver. Many cars drove by, including police officers, seeing her bleeding, walking with broken heels and a torn dress: "Nobody stopped. Nobody stopped to help me. In morning rush hour traffic where the cars were dead stopped. *Nobody looked at me. They knew who – what I was.*"

The participants saw their identity was shaped by their perceived active "participation," but in reality, forced victimization by the commercial sex industry. They experienced the outside world looking at them with shame and disgust. Their perception of worth reflected how they understood the beliefs of people around them and how it came to determine their identity: "I was a little nervous because I know from being around those kind of people that when they get drunk or they get angry they really don't care if they just knock you off because you're *just a prostitute*" (Cat).

Kristine described her definition of guilt and shame, how they are formed, and how they continue after the trafficking experience:

“So, when things happen to you, like, you might get a knife pulled on you or you get raped, it’s so ingrained that it’s something you did. You didn’t watch that person enough. You didn’t watch their hands, make sure they didn’t grab a knife. You didn’t – it was something you missed...A lot of survivors say that’s par for course. You know, if you get robbed or whatever, it’s just like, that was a bad night. Make sure that doesn’t happen again. So, when you get in the wrong car with the wrong person, you blame yourself for choosing that instead of that person choosing you. So, that’s what that guilt and shame look like. *You feel like you’re the one that’s doing this and, instead of the perpetrator that’s buying a young girl, you’re not putting any blame on that person for raping you, you’re putting the blame on yourself.*”

***Continued Experiences of Shame Post-trafficking:*** Half of the participants who mentioned shame focused on the continued impact of shame **after the trafficking experience**. Megan described it as a “very rude awakening” coming from within the commercial sexual industry where things are embraced and supported, to the perception of others that “you’re disgusting. You make really bad choices. A lot of victim blaming and just being stigmatized.” This included receiving judgment from service organizations when she reached out for help.

Grace recalled her perceptions after the trafficking experience: “Putting on a smile and interacting with society when you’re scared shitless of anybody and anything. Thinking that everybody knew where I came from and knew everything I did when really, they had no clue.” She described her first job experience as terrifying because she feared they would know she was a prostitute. She was at the time of interview receiving legal assistance to remove from her record any criminal charges that were given during the trafficking experience. She explained how it invokes shame having to explain this in interviews: “I’ve had two bosses come on to me. I ended up leaving because of the one and it’s just – I already carry enough shame with that.”

***Experiences of Shame with Support System:*** One-third reported experiencing **comments from family members** that can perpetuate shame. Families can mention the experience of being in

prostitution in a negative, demeaning way. Another repeated theme was how shame can **impact one's perceptions of being worthy to be in a relationship**. It becomes something that may hold them back from intimate relationships. Participant 9 explained "It's also affected me mentally, like wondering if a man could ever love me for me and not because of my body." There was a repeated theme from survivors that they have not lived a "normal life." Their experiences indeed are different from the norm, but these repeated expressions depict an experience of not *being* normal, an indicator of shame. This awareness of **not living a "normal" life** can be a barrier to relationships. "I think that's where the shame will probably come in at because of my past... Sometimes I do feel ashamed of what I have been through or what I have engaged in, willingly or unwillingly, that would any relationship ever be successful and go to its full potential because, if they ever found out the type of lifestyle I lived in, how would they view me and how would they feel to even be in the community or society with me" (Participant 9)

Finally, **shame can be a barrier to perceiving self as having gifts and abilities**, thus hindering future potential. This provides an opportunity for support persons to impact a survivor: Participant 9 discussed how it was confidence from others that impacted her, not her own self-perception. "I think the surprising part was a lot of people seen a lot in me that I wasn't seeing in myself, so, I had a lot of people believing in me and referring me to this type of work and I felt I wasn't ever good enough."

### **Hope and Despair**

More than two-thirds of participants made statements that mentioned experiences of hope or despair. Generally, **experiences of despair were during the trafficking experience** and occurred after specific incidents with the trafficker/s, loss and isolation, incarceration, or feelings

of desperation due to seeing lack of options/way out, or an experience of failure of the justice system.

“Just feeling out of options because once you cut ties with your family, once you cut ties with – you burn all your bridges, you feel like there’s no way out anyways. It’s just – you don’t see a future... Desperate, that out of resources, hungry, have a drug addiction, there is no other option for a woman if no one’s saying, hey, there’s rehabs you can go to or there’s this you can go to... I was just completely broken. I had been at the bottom. The only thing left for me was death” (Grace).

*"All Alone and Completely Dead"*



Figure 21 Photovoice, Participant 14

“I lost like – I felt like I had lost everything, like, everything that I worked so hard for was gone. Like, I had nothing to show for all the work, all the beatings, everything that I had done and all the money that I had made and I had nothing. And, I was just like scorned” (Cat).

### **Experiences of hope occurred after the trafficking**

**experience** with the majority commenting on experiences of

support, someone who showed love, someone who believed in

them or after starting to receive services. Two participants

mention their children as what gave them hope, one participant

mentioned education and one participant mentioned faith.

“But, the last time I went to jail, I had gotten switched to the options unit, which is actual drug and alcohol meetings come in – NA meetings, AA meetings, so it was sort of on the recovery side. And, that was life changing for me because that was the first time I was introduced to any form of treatment...to see that there’s hope and then she talks about there’s another way of life – you forget that there’s another way of life when you’re in it...So, that was big turning point for me when I first saw somebody who said, I’ve kind of been where you are and I’ve come on the other side...And, so, like things like that – it’s just the way that people were put – and it’s just like, I can’t deny it and I know that, that was for me and that I’m walking the right way. And, if it wasn’t for those signs, I think I’d probably have given up because, when you’re surrounded by people that don’t understand or don’t know

---

---

*“What it feels like; standing and the wind is knocking everything you have off and the life is stripping you of everything that you once were. Although she is completely dead, there’s still that one piece of part of the dandelion that is hanging on and that one piece is where she built from to get to where she is today. From that one little piece that hung on, she’s now not dead, but she is alive and moving forward” (Grace).*

Figure 22 Photovoice Group Reflection

what you're thinking, feeling, or what it's even like, it's hard to see that there's a path and that you can kind of come out of it" (Grace).

"And, you know, it's really allowed me to really think about, you know – even though I still have – I'm still afraid of the world, you know? I'm probably more afraid of the world now that I ever have been. Because I see the evil for what the evil is and I recognize it and it frightens me because now I feel that it can touch me because now I know what it is and I see it and – but, I feel hopeful because I do have an amazing support system" (Cat).

*"The demolition of the past.  
Club Ave. Hanover Ave."*



**Figure 23 Photovoice Participant 1**

## Chapter 10: Findings-Post-Trafficking Experiences of Coping and Services

### Ways of Coping

In response to the multi-faceted impact of victimization, this section will review forms of coping during and after the trafficking experience. As the survivors were asked what helped them to cope during the trafficking experience, the main response was descriptions of dissociation. Dissociation is also mentioned as a form of coping during the Reintegration phase.

| Form of Coping                           | %  |
|--|----|
| Talking/Support System                   | 80 |
| Dissociation                             | 70 |
| Avoidance/Faking it                      | 70 |
| Spiritual Beliefs                        | 50 |
| Substance Use                            | 50 |
| Personal Strength/Perseverance           | 35 |
| Perception                               | 35 |
| Writing                                  | 35 |
| Coping Skills/Techniques for trauma      | 35 |
| Self-Care/Exercise/Developing Interests  | 35 |
| Self-harm/Eating Disorder/Perfectionism  | 35 |
| Motivation of Children/Support of family | 35 |

Table 4 Ways of Coping

### Types of Accessed Services:

| Participant                         | Cat | Grace | 3 | Emerald | 7 | 9 | 10 | Kristine | 14 | 15 | 16 | Megan | 18 | Audrey | Victoria |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|---|---------|---|---|----|----------|----|----|----|-------|----|--------|----------|
| Shelter/Residential                 | X   |       | x | x       | x | x | x  |          | x  | x  | x  |       |    |        | x        |
| Emergency/Physical Assistance       | X   |       | x | x       | x | x | x  |          | x  | x  |    |       |    |        | x        |
| Legal Support                       | X   | X     |   |         | x | x |    |          | x  | x  |    |       |    |        |          |
| Victim Advocacy/Court Accompaniment | X   |       |   |         | x | x | x  |          |    |    |    |       |    |        |          |
| Individual Counseling               | X   | X     | x | x       | x |   | x  | x        | x  | x  | x  | x     |    |        | x        |
| Support Group                       | X   | X     |   |         | x | x |    |          | x  |    | x  | x     |    |        |          |
| Mentor/Support Person               | X   |       | x | x       |   | x | x  |          | x  |    |    |       |    |        | x        |
| Peer Support                        | X   | x     | x | x       | x | x | x  |          | x  | x  | x  | x     | x  | x      | x        |
| Case Management                     |     |       | x | x       | x | x | x  |          |    |    | x  |       |    |        |          |
| Group Therapy                       | X   |       | x |         | x |   |    |          |    |    |    |       |    |        |          |
| Referrals                           | X   |       |   | x       | x | x | x  |          | x  |    | x  |       |    |        |          |
| Job Program                         |     |       |   |         |   | x | x  |          |    |    |    |       |    |        |          |
| Survivor Leadership Training        | X   | X     |   |         |   | x |    |          |    | x  |    | x     |    |        |          |
| Substance Abuse Treatment           |     | x     |   |         | x |   |    |          |    |    |    |       |    | x      |          |
| Other                               |     |       |   | x       |   |   |    |          |    |    |    |       |    |        |          |

Table 5 Types of Accessed Services

**Satisfaction with Care:**

Throughout interviews, survivors were asked to describe their experiences with receiving services, such as accessibility, barriers and what they found helpful/not helpful. Overall, a continual theme amongst all participants is the lack of resources and the need for additional services specifically for trafficking survivors. The following sections highlight key utilized services that were discussed and considered helpful.

**Counseling/Therapy:** The majority of participants received therapy and described it as helpful, specifically the demeanor, approach and commitment of the therapist, incorporating education about trauma, and providing clarity about distortions from trafficking experience. One participant mentioned her psychiatrist and medication as helpful. Megan discussed how her experience in therapy included both “traditional talk therapy” as well as a specific technique, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), and she found both useful. This overview of her experience with therapy exemplifies these themes:

“So, I ended up going to therapy. I had a wonderful therapist and did about six months of traditional talk therapy and really stabilizing my daily routines and then six months of EMDR. And, voila, you have the half-way-functioning adult that you see before you...That was huge. That was just another piece of that healing process. I did have an amazing therapist that I felt very comfortable with and was able to trust her and I was able to access trauma recovery therapy...she was very calm which was very nice and she taught me a lot of grounding techniques.”

**Support Groups:** Approximately half of those interviewed have attended support groups. While a small portion had negative experiences going into general support groups, others expressed how helpful it was for them. Megan explained:

“She offered group therapy once and I was, like, I just don’t want to do that. It was for women who survived domestic violence in relationships and she was, like, I know that it doesn’t all-the-way meet your experiences but I think that you may find that you have some things in common with these other women and, so, I went to that group. And, some of them had experienced prostitution and trafficking but, none of them had been willing

to come out and say that until I just went into group and I was like, yeah, I was in abusive marriage but, like, what I'm here for now is, you know, this is prostitution, like, having a pimp. And, they were very welcoming. Like, I've heard, like horrible things from other survivors that have tried to go to groups for domestic violence but that was a really good normalizing experience and understanding that domestic violence cycle and just some, like, coping and life skills, and communication skills.”

**Shelter/Residential Programs:** The majority of participants lived in a shelter or residential program. Most found this helpful, though some commented on specific aspects of the program, such as the rules or the transition process from the program. Participants 3 and 6 described their opinions of the rules of the residential programs for trafficking survivors where they went after separation from the trafficker.

“I think they were absurd. A lot of girls, especially, got angry. You couldn't have your cell phone on you, which I get it, like, location. And some people would stop their boyfriend or some people would want to go back to that life, so, and I get it's for their safety but, like, I don't know, you couldn't have a TV in your room. So, there was one TV and sometimes I don't want to be with them and sometimes I want to watch TV on my own” (Participant 3).

“At first, I had to – I couldn't use my phone. I felt like I was trapped at first but it really wasn't. I got introduced to exercises. A lot of great women were there. I developed a friendship with one of the women that was there...They really had a lot of rules. So, I wasn't really used to rules -- I wasn't used to, like, going to bed when they told me...Positive atmosphere. Just the great people that they had there in general. A lot of services. Church. I really enjoyed that” (Emerald).

Emerald also commented that she did not see it as helpful to have survivors living together, showing the variety in individual needs and perceptions of services. “So they would tell me their stories and it was kind of horrible and I was thinking about my story. It was not a good idea to put us all together in the same house.”

**Faith-based programs:** Another emerging theme discussed by the participants, specifically related to shelters, were their perspectives of faith-based programs. Their feedback most often included positive experiences about it impacting their life or faith, juxtaposed with concern for

how they felt a pressure to conform to the beliefs of the program. The following quotes conveyed some of their experiences:

“...church. I don’t know. I liked it but it wasn’t an option for girls. Not everyone’s Christian where you come from. So, it’s like – there’s no other option and you have to go to church on Sundays” (Emerald).

“I was in a recovery house and I didn’t want to be there anymore. It was a Christian recovery house and they were very strict. I felt like I was in placement all over again. And, I got pregnant and they frowned upon that. I do thank that place, though, because it gave me a reason to live, like, I found God and he helped me through a lot. I started going to church. I got a mentor at the church at that place” (Participant 7).

“I received residential services and that was extremely helpful. I would also say that there are things that were done that were not helpful within that service. They’re highly faith-based and, so, if you didn’t completely comply to their way of living, or comply to certain elements, like going to church or engaging in some faith-based services, then you weren’t allowed to continue to receive services there. For me, it was, basically, if I’m not here, there’s nowhere else for me to go. So, I would say, on one hand it was very beneficial. I needed it. It changed my life in the sense that I wouldn’t be here today if it wasn’t for them. I would have never gone to school and got my undergrad and be working on academic pursuits if it wasn’t for them. So, it’s kind of like a double-edged sword” (Participant 14).

**Memorable Experiences with Providers:** Some participants had specific examples of experiences with providers, such as judges, case managers, medical providers, who cared for them in a specific memorable way. Participant 14 had medical complications as a result of the years of victimization. She described her experiences with medical care, giving an example of trauma-informed care.

“I had an amazing anesthesiologist who, even to this day, I smile when I think about her. She understood trauma and she actually called me the night before my first surgery and she talked for a whole hour. She was like, I need you to be familiar with my voice. I’m just going to read you a story so that you know what you’re going to be waking up to. It’s going to be okay. I will be talking to you throughout the whole procedure. I just want you to start to know what’s going on and, when I got to the hospital – she actually came an hour early.

So, this is like incredible. Like, she would do this on her own time because she came to the hospital an hour early – so, she created her schedule so she wouldn't have any surgeries that morning and came to the hospital a whole hour early to come into my room to meet me face-to-face, to have a conversation with me. And, she's like, okay, I want to help you. I'm going to do your hair for you. So, she actually braided my hair which was like, just helped me feel so safe just because she was going out of her way to make sure that I was going to be okay."

"I'm having medical services that understand trauma is a resource that I don't think a lot of victims get that I've been very much grateful to have and have had some incredible doctors who, in a very trauma-informed way, have met my health needs to actually get me to a place where today I am able to engage in a very healthy manner. And, compared to where I've been, I'm very healthy today" (Participant 14).

Participant 14 also described the value of legal services, particularly offered pro bono.

"My attorney is an amazing person who is very highly invested in me. I'm completely pro bono, and I would never have been able to receive the representation that she has given me. If it wasn't for her going, I'm going to make a difference and I'm going to use my skillset to make a difference in this area. And, so, I really believe that we need more attorneys to step up and say, hey, you know what? There's people out there who are very vulnerable and they need legal assistance and they need representation to protect them from the system. And, so, I'm very grateful for my attorneys. I've had multiple attorneys for different areas. So, definitely, that has been a huge resource that has been provided that has changed my life and I believe attorneys can change a victim's life" (Participant 14).

**Descriptions of Helpful Care:** Repeated themes of services that participants credited as most helpful include: **Referrals to other services (including basic stabilization needs), development of survivor leadership and empowerment skills, incorporation of peer support, and those that understood the longevity of needs for recovery.** In addition, participants stated the most helpful aspects of services included **the approach of the provider**, including those with **dedication for the duration, who were nonjudgmental, loving and provided a supportive relationship.** Participant 15 discussed the benefits of participating in online survivor leadership training:

"It has been really great because I didn't – I started to learn about trafficking shortly after I got out and recognized that, that was what had happened to me. But, I didn't have any resources that were specifically for survivors or any kind of support from other survivors or any kind of program or anything like that. So, finding this program was amazing because it's

a program you can do from anywhere so it's not like dependent on a local organization and you get all the support by the survivors and you are reading this book that completely describes so many things about what you've been through and, so, you know. I started it last year and that was incredibly helpful just from the perspective of having resources that spoke to the actual trauma I had been through and not something that was made for other people but that we're like applying to this because we don't have any other resources."

Participant 10 described an agency devoted specifically to serving trafficking survivors that acknowledged immediate and long-term needs:

"I was working with this non-profit for sex trafficking victims and I would say those things that have been helpful where there's the crisis call. Say I'm with my pimp and I don't want to be with him. They get me. Like, that's been helpful. Or, like, when I got out, just needing hygiene. Every month – we do hygiene every month – like, being able to go through a supply of hygiene and clothing or like if they've had a stroller or, like, when I was pregnant, they gave me a baby shower where they had – I made a list of the things I needed and they had volunteers to buy everything. Those types of services have been helpful. Or they'll give you gift cards if I need them. Just like having that service, like, where if I'm having a crisis they can come and get me or like meetings every other week just to like follow up and check in. That's been very helpful, too."

Participant 7 explained the prioritization of stable housing to protect vulnerability as well as to provide physical stabilization prior to receiving counseling. She also described the role and relationship with her caseworker:

"I haven't really gone to counseling yet because I've been so busy. But, like, housing for me has been the biggest thing for me...It's transitional living but it's still my own apartment. You still pay rent. There were these people. And, they're really trying to make human trafficking a big deal. I think my caseworker does a really good job at her job and advocating for me and they pushed to get me into that apartment. And, they also have this rapid rehousing where they pay your rent for a year. That's an important part, not letting them down and not putting them on the streets. If we're on the streets, then what other choice do we have? Without a car to get – you know. It's what else do you have to do? Go get a hotel room and go make some money to have a place to sleep."

Participant 9 described the value of the attitude and demeanor of the staff and program:

"The place that kinda helped build me up mentally, you know. You know, like, just giving me encouragement and trying to motivate me and just, like I said the unconditional where they wasn't judging, you know. It was a lot. I can't really explain what I was going through at the time because, whatever it was, it felt good. So, I just knew I wanted more of that, you know...I even went to their program probably a good

three times, I do believe. And, so, I stayed and went through the process. And, it was there to help me through the tears, through the hugs, through everything.”

This quote gives insight into the value she placed on their interaction with her, including when she was not quite ready for receiving help.

**Descriptions of Dissatisfaction with Care:** When survivors spoke about what was not helpful, continual themes from the majority of participants were lack of understanding of human trafficking, services that do not listen or offer choice, unfulfilled promises, lack of resources, and experiences where they were re-traumatized or re-exploited, including using a participant for organizational gain. Participant 14 explained this idea of re-exploitation:

“I’ve experienced some very horrific experiences with service providers that has actually deeply wounded me and has made it even harder to trust -- organizations that might actually be very well-intentioned and actually really be able to help me -- and, so, I think really listening...I get concerned about re-exploitation and I definitely was re-exploited and I feel like, right now, human trafficking is this hot social justice topic issue and it is easy for victims to have been victimized, to be re-exploited in whatever means – it might be financial means. It might be being the poster child of the organization but not receiving compensation for what they’re being asked to do or the story that they’re being asked to share or they could be re-exploited in the sense of them not being treated like a human being should be treated and them not being given the resources that they actually need...I think that is something that I am supersensitive to because, under the name of an organization that was supposed to help me, that promised to help me that I thought was legit, did not.”

Participant 15 described the value of having a therapist who has training to understand trauma and the specific needs and experiences of trafficking victims:

“The therapy was really helpful. I don’t think that they were really equipped to deal with trafficking survivors. Like, my therapist did not bargain for that when she first met me, and she was a great therapist but kind of approached it as like a child abuse situation or like a domestic violence situation because that was like the whole analogy she had for it...I went through a few different therapists here trying to find a new therapist because I go to someone and they’d be like, oh, I know what trafficking is but, like, the vision they had in their head was, like, the person kidnapped from overseas and chained up in a basement and, like, *they had no understanding of domestic sex trafficking and weren’t really willing to learn. I am willing to teach people if they’re willing to learn.* But, running into that, misconceptions about trafficking and people just not being very

educated about it has been a really, a tough thing just in accessing health care in general and, particularly, like, mental health care and primary care physicians and, for a while there before I found my current psychiatrist, I went through hell with that psychiatrist who didn't know what they were doing with trafficking. And, so, that's probably one of the biggest barriers as well."

Participant 15 also described her experience with a shelter, the lack of understanding and the demeanor that hindered satisfaction. In addition, it is an example of the need for long-term stabilizing support:

"When I was in the shelter after I got out of the hospital, my experience was primarily negative with that organization and they, like, rushed me out of transitional housing really fast and I haven't had stable housing in a few years since I got out of the last relationship I was in because they kind of rushed me out of transitional housing and they have this mindset that – well, first of all, supposedly they work with trafficking survivors but nobody that I worked with there had any real knowledge of trafficking or understood anything about my situation. And, primarily, all the other people in the program were domestic violence survivors. And, they had this mindset that all their clients were trying to take advantage of the program and get free stuff and not have to work, and were not shy about telling us."

Cat described the need for survivor's to be offered choice, yet the complexity for navigation of offering choice while also providing protection and structure:

"The only time I didn't feel that way was when I was in a residential home. That was the only time that I felt like I didn't have choices, you know, and that's not a really good place to be with a survivor because she didn't have choices before she came – before she got out of the life. She had no choices. I felt that way. But, for the majority -- that was probably in the beginning. And, I think, you know, that it wasn't intentional – I don't feel that it was intentional. I just feel like sometimes people don't know what to do, and they want to protect you and they want you to be safe and they feel like almost – they're keeping you safe from yourself and it's such a complex – there are so many – it's so complex. It's you keeping her safe from herself. It's keeping her safe from her trafficker. It's keeping the community safe. There's so many levels to it that it's just like, how do you break it down and what is the right thing? And, I really don't think that, as much as we can probably do, there's really gonna ever be a right way. I think it depends on the individual and what their needs are and just listening to their voice. It really is an individual process."

Participant 10 experienced lack of choice in providing court testimony, again describing how this impacted her, thus hindering her reintegration process:

“Pressuring girls to testify is not helpful ever because it’s not helpful for our safety and just the triggering, like, me being triggered, started me on a rampage using drugs to where I ended up going to jail and being in jail in six months away from my kid and having to go to rehab because I had a drug problem now. That has not been helpful.”

Victoria shared an experience of re-traumatization in a residential program. She discussed being abused by another participant and not adequately supported and protected by the staff:

“...From then on, my voice was silenced so I didn’t say anything and she continued doing what she was doing because I was, like, no matter what I say to any of the staff, their excuse to me is it’s not her in there. She’s not doing this to you which to me, I was, okay, I’ve been sexually abused pretty much since I was four years old, I’m used to this by now. It’s whatever. Everyone else has gotten away with and, so, I ended up like having enough and couldn’t do it anymore. And, had, like a full mental psychotic break while I was there. And, like, I’m talking, like on the floor screaming, I screamed at them. She’s doing this to me and you’re not doing anything about it. And, so, I got kicked out.”

Cat experienced dissatisfaction of care, and attributed the reason to lack of resources. “I think that they do the best that they can and I think that if there were more resources that there would be more that they could do to provide services for survivors and survivor leaders and those kind of things. But, you know, you can’t squeeze water from a rock.” She also explained the impact on a survivor if an organization does not follow through with offered promises:

“The offender was going to court and was supposed to keep me up to date on court dates and when he was released – was supposed to provide a service of accompanying me to court cases. They’re also supposed to provide a service of helping me find shelter when I was homeless. And, that’s what I was specifically talking about, when people say that they were going to do things, and they didn’t. It almost – and, you know, it’s really easy for a person – for a woman, a survivor -- when something like that happens, you backtrack and you even think that you don’t – *you can’t trust even the people that have been there for you because they could do the same thing* because they’re professionals, you know, and this is their job. And, it’s sad because people like – *an organization like that can – they do more damage than they do good.*”

**Court-Mandated Services:** In addition, more than one-third participated in some level of court-appointed services. In spite of there being a lack of choice offered, they admitted it was a good and helpful thing because they received services that were needed. Of those court-ordered,

the consensus is that in some cases it is a necessary intervention and provides something unknowingly beneficial.

“That judge was like the first person to believe in me and to see something in me that I did not see and – yeah, I spent a year in that program and they mandated meetings and out-patient therapy and everything that I needed that I didn’t know that I needed” (Grace).

“It was kind of a like an eye-opener. Women – we can survive that and I really thank them for doing that because I would have kept doing it and doing it” (Participant 3).

**Experiences with Peer Support:** All of the participants have had some level of peer support within services they have received, including interaction with other survivors or survivor leaders. Two-thirds of the participants gave feedback of their experiences of peer support. Of this group, all but one shared positive experiences. Emerald, who shared a differing perspective, described her experience of living in a group home with other survivors and the impact of hearing their stories. “In the home, I was just mostly adjusting to the other girls that came in and out and their stories. So they would tell me their stories and it was kind of horrible and I was thinking about my story. It was not a good idea to put us all together in the same house.”

The majority of participants expressed how support from other survivors is valuable and an integral aspect of their healing and form of coping because of the bond and mutual understanding of shared experiences.

“...Somebody that understood. Somebody that could talk that language. Somebody that if I shared a story about a time that I was raped or a time that somebody did something to me, that they wouldn’t look at me like I had ten heads and it would be a safe place to talk about and get that off my chest...But if you bring it into a setting where it’s normalized and it’s okay to – we’ve all been there, we’ve all done that and to be able to talk openly about that and to say a crazy story and people not look at you like you’re crazy, but relate and understand that there’s pain there but also it



*“Although our bodies have been abused, bruised, neglected, and mistreated...today we can use our bodies to spell out the word LOVE. In this moment, we choose to love and honor our bodies.”*

**Figure 24 Photovoice Participant, Grace**

could be funny sometimes looking back and sharing your story. And, there's a lot of healing with that, too" (Grace).

"...Because I think that once the community did come together and started talking about things that were huge, now there is more of, there's a lot more ties that way, except for the ones who start drama, you know what I mean? But, that's pretty minimal compared to the ties that tie us all together. There's a bond that all of us have seen that all of us have been through that we can look at each other and know, this girl has seen what I've seen" (Kristine).

"It's so important to have people, especially older survivors, so, like the leaders, walking alongside you because those years are so important to have someone to call on that you've seen has been through it, who has gone through the first couple years of therapy and finding the right job and all this but is now on the other side helping other people. It's so important...People have come and gone from my life since, you know, I got out of trafficking but, I think the most important ones are the other survivors that are in my life. That's pretty much all my circle is, is other survivors. It's not that I don't trust, outside people but it's just, they understand. They get why I do this and why I do that. It's the most important support system that I have" (Victoria).

"I think, even as I moved forward into my healing and started to process my experiences, I did not have any survivor support system for two, almost three years. And, so, I really felt like I was the only person that had experienced these things which made understanding it even more difficult because I really did feel like maybe I am stupid and maybe I really did make bad choices because I really didn't have anybody that had those same experiences to talk with it about and, like, okay, this happened to somebody else. I didn't get suckered into something. Like, this is something certain predators do...So, that was a critical turning point for me of being around other survivor leaders that were either at the same place as me or, you know, more fresh out or way more into their work and their healing. And, so, it was, like, there's others like me" (Megan).

*"At lunch one day this past week with a lady in our job program. When it happened, I expected her to become incredibly upset, however we all shared a good laugh - proof that as chaos in our lives begins to become a thing of the past, the little things aren't as big".*



**Figure 25 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

Grace described how it was in community that greater clarity was gained about her experience of victimization.

"I never thought of myself as a victim. I thought of myself as I put myself in that situation. I wanted to because I wanted to keep doing drugs and all that but being surrounded by survivors that know that they are a victim and know that what they did had a name besides just prostitution was just huge. I never – working at a rehab I had met

girls that had prostituted and stuff like that, but until going to my job working at the trafficking facility I never knew that it was anything besides prostitution... if it wasn't for a survivor retreat I attended, I wouldn't have realized that I was also a victim. So, just being in that presence of others that have walked close to where you've walked is huge."

A few discussed how online survivor community has been useful for them, especially if living in a region isolated from services or other survivors.

"A lot of survivors I know have had similar experiences, so, when I'm referring somebody to a program, like, we have a Facebook group where we vet organizations...I have a community of like survivor friends that I've met through an online program and online friends through a game that I played for a long time. And, really, like, those virtual relationships helped a lot" (Participant 15).

"And, so being connected with that survivor community ongoing online has been – that's just amazing with being in a rural community. There's just not survivors in my area" (Megan).

The majority recommended it as an important part of services for trafficking survivors.

"I think if there was more survivor support, I think there would be so much more success in that sense" (Grace).

## Chapter 11: Findings of Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) has been defined as positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. PTG does not mean a return to “normal” or baseline after experiencing trauma, but an experience of growth beyond the pre-trauma state, that for some may be deeply profound (Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G, 2004). The five domains of PTG include: **personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation of life, and spiritual change.** The interviews for this study were structured to look for aspects of posttraumatic growth in the experiences of domestic sex trafficking survivors. The findings indicated a strong presence of posttraumatic growth for the participants. The following sections of findings will include these domains of PTG.

### **Posttraumatic Growth and Photovoice:**

During Photovoice analysis, the researcher first observed the content of each photo to identify themes from the pictures as well as their captions. It was remarkable to see the marriage of sensitizing concepts of posttraumatic growth with *in vivo* themes of the survivor’s struggle. The pictures illustrated growth and capacity for new experiences, empowerment, and seeing and appreciating life and beauty. While some photos conveyed struggle of trauma, sadness and exploitation, the overarching message were aspects of posttraumatic growth including personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation of life, and spiritual change.

The group’s analysis of these descriptions only confirmed that these survivors expressed examples of gaining personal strength, exploring new possibilities, the value of relationships with friends, family and peers, a deeper appreciation for life, including in aspects of daily living and the ability to see and perceive deeply, as well as some examples of the importance of

spirituality. It is remarkable that all five Photovoice participants are active in some form of survivor leadership training, advocacy or activity with girls or women. While their photos conveyed ongoing challenges, memories and struggle, they portrayed the purpose, inspiration, enjoyment and hope found in helping others. As Grace reflected on the experience of Photovoice, she summarized some core themes that reflect elements of posttraumatic growth:

“It reminds me that I am not alone with the experience of trying to fit back into society after you have been so branded and broken. Everyone finds their way differently but we are also searching for the same thing. **Survivors take different avenues, but everyone can still see beauty. Out of all that darkness you can still see something that’s beautiful. That to me just shows a spirit of complete power and such strength.**... Pictures are a lot more powerful than words sometimes and it comes from such a creative...it makes people think.”

Participant 14 provided a salient summary of this project:

“I hope others see the power of Photovoice and the ways that it can be utilized to give expression to an individual, and as a survivor, the ways that I have found healing in the midst of it and the ways that it can really share that narrative and not just share the narrative but also share the future as well. **It doesn’t just tell the past narrative, it can also share the creation of a future narrative.** This is what I am leaving this experience with, which has been so powerful for me.”

Photos have been utilized throughout the findings sections, combined with their captions and comments from the other Photovoice participants as they viewed the co-participants’ photos. Photovoice submissions and a summary of group reflections in their entirety may be viewed in Appendix N.

**PTG Domain 1-Personal Strength:** As previously described in the section on power, survivors reported how they found personal strength to exit the trafficking situation. Some found personal

*“Reminding myself I have power and agency now, and can use it to do amazing things, is a daily struggle and practice.”*



Figure 26 Photovoice Participant 15

strength to testify against their trafficker or to seek services and the majority found personal strength to become an advocate for others. One-third mentioned personal strength/perseverance as a form of coping during or after the trafficking experience.

*“Liberty  
We are wonder women super heroes!”*



**Figure 28 Photovoice, Participant 18**

“I just keep trying to stay positive. I think that, for me, a lot of it has to do with I’m really stubborn and really hard-headed and I’m the kind of person that, if you tell me I can’t do something, I’m gonna do it anyway. And I think that, that’s helped me a lot because through all this – even when times have been hard, and I have to admit, that even now, I mean, I’ve been out of the life for a couple years, it’s still hard. It’s still really hard” (Cat).

A portion of the survivors described personal strength/power as a personal characteristic that developed as a result of the trafficking experience:

*“Today I went for a hike to clear my head. Whenever I’m feeling lost or anxious I go into the woods to clear my mind. Today was one of those days where I was reminded of some of the darkness from my old life. While walking, I came across these thorns. They reminded me of all the trials I have undergone and how still to this day, the abuse and trauma still feels like thorns in my skin. Yet I saw something on the thorns. There were raindrops. The rain drops symbolized me being cleansed from that life and reminded me that I am a new person. I have been washed by the water. The rain has come and renewed my beauty.”*

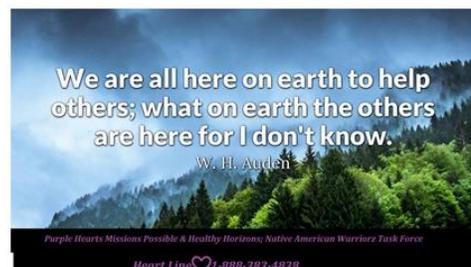


**Figure 27 Photovoice Participant, Grace**

“...How it’s impacted my life in the way that I don’t trust people. It’s impacted me that I feel – I felt that I’m not worth anything, used up, you know. But, it’s also – I’ve also grown very strong because of it – because – I wouldn’t take back -- I could say this 100 times and I really know that it’s true. I hate – I hate what’s happened to me. I hate that I’ve been a victim. I hate that I have to identify as a victim. It’s very uncomfortable because I’ve been so strong and fearless but I would not take it back because I feel that I am ferocious, you know, and that I know that because of what has happened to me, it’s made me who I am and it’s made me to be so strong now. My mind is much stronger than it used to be. I – my mental health – even though I struggle with depression and these kinds of things – but now I know that I’m not gonna go crazy (Cat).

**PTG Domain 2-New Possibilities:** In the theory of posttraumatic growth, new possibilities include the development of new interests or opportunities, sometimes related to the trauma they experienced.

*“We are here to help others.”*



**Figure 29 Photovoice Participant 18**

This section will highlight repeated themes of survivors seeking purpose, experiences of learning and expressions of their goals and dreams. This section will also address experiences of survivor leadership.

**Seeking Purpose:** Almost all participants made references to things that give them purpose and meaning and the value that these things provide. In contrast to the lack of purpose that one-third described during the trafficking experience, *almost every participant* made reference to **finding purpose in the post-trafficking phase through helping others**, or joining the anti-trafficking movement as a survivor leader who seeks justice, provides advocacy, and trains others about human trafficking.

*"Oakland CA vegan place was the best food I've ever eaten in my life! But it was also a meal shared with two ladies in my program while we had an amazing discussion about relationships, boundaries, and improving our support services to survivors."*



**Figure 30 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

“It’s very fulfilling and my wish is to be that person and to have that organization that wasn’t there” (Megan).

“It’s not what you’re trying to gather up for yourself. It has nothing to do with that. It’s how can you – how can you serve in this world to make it better? How can you help somebody not be so broken? How can you breathe life back into somebody is what keeps me going every day? I want to give back in every way that I can and I want to leave my mark here, however I can” (Grace).

“It’s helped me to know that I have a purpose that is not but – you know, it was intended for my life and I think that the intention – I think that was has happened was intended to happen because I would not be qualified to help another woman or even myself, you know, and, by doing that, I’m able to give back to the community and able to help inspire another woman to know her worth and to realize her potential, you know. And I do identify that I have potential and that, you know, I’m gifted in many things” (Cat).

“I think it’s always going to be an important part of my life even if it’s just because that’s what motivates me to do anti-trafficking work and that’s an important part of my life. And, I think I’ll always want to do that work, you know, and just – I’ve done a lot of different things but I haven’t really found my lane yet. Um, but I’m working on that, so finding my lane is definitely a goal” (Participant 15).

“I hope to help other people somehow. I’m not sure if it’s incarcerated people or people who are in the foster care system or people who were in the life. I would like to help people who are in need of it” (Participant 10).

“And, so, I’m very fortunate because I also work in the field what was meant for bad, turned out to be good...I even go home and say to my daughter whose 24, my baby, I say to her, if I drop dead today or tomorrow, sweetie, one thing I don’t want you to feel bad about – I want you to feel good about your mother had an opportunity to find out what her purpose is in life and a lot of people live, you know, long freakin’ lives and never knew what their purpose was. So, it all comes from my recovery and helping other people. That’s why it’s so important” (Audrey).

“As time goes on, like, every once in a while, it makes me sad thinking about the choices I’ve done and the things I did, and I’ll always have a criminal record. But, then I see it, as, I look at all the survivors who have criminal records who have been through what I’m through and how many lives they’re changing today and I just have to see it as – no matter how painful what happened to me was, if it meant that it would save one person, I’m willing to tell it to the world. I will go to the mountaintops to find them all to bring them home, to make sure they’re okay. I’m thankful that what happened to me, happened to me, because I’m doing everything now. Every dream that I’ve ever had, I’m able to do now. It’s definitely changed my outlook. As children, we’re brought up to be like, oh, policemen are heroes and judges are heroes and firemen are heroes and, so, when we’re bought by those kind of people, it changes your outlook and, so, I definitely see the world, not just the justice system, but the world in a whole different way. I tried to go out of my way to

make it so that no one ever has to feel like I’ve felt in my life. And, I mean whether that’s just, like, texting someone to see if they’re okay or giving someone a present for their birthday, I have seen the ultimate pain that life has had to offer. You know, not everyone who has been abused, has been abused in the way that we have been. Like, there’s a complete difference and, so, to me, it’s made me – it’s softened my heart especially over the past couple of years to just have compassion towards other people. And, the process of having compassion towards myself and teaching myself that I’m going to struggle. I’m not perfect. I may struggle for years. I still struggle right now. But, it’s okay. It’s okay to

*“Planned Parenthood tag - This weekend my family was in a bad car accident - my husband and three children were t-boned by a fully loaded uhaul. Thankfully everyone is alright, but it was the scariest thing ever getting that call and arriving on the scene. That happened about an hour before I was supposed to speak at the PPRM regional conference, which my husband assured me they were fine once we got everyone home (it happened about 5 minutes from our house), and so I went and did my presentation and it was wonderful. I am really excited to have an ongoing partnership with PPRM because I went there regularly while I was being trafficked, and just pulled my full 5 years of medical records and analyzed them to further educate medical professionals”*



**Figure 31 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

struggle. I'm human. I'm doing the best I can. I want to be in the trafficking movement. I want to fight for these people. This is everything that I've ever wanted to do. And, as a little kid, I wanted to be a ballerina and then, you know, when I was in high school, I wanted to be nurse. And, I did a little bit of nursing school and, you know, I got my CNA but, like, now I see it as, no matter what skills I've put to use or no matter what I wanted to be, like, it doesn't matter, as long as I can be a part of setting these people free and teaching other people how to help them" (Victoria).

Approximately half of those interviewed described coming to this sense of **purpose as part of their healing process**. "So, it was definitely just like this hell that I have been living in for so long and I spent a good year-and-a-half in therapy and then, it's been the past year where I've really like started to bloom and move past, you know, I'm healing, I'm doing good. Now I want to bring justice. I want to help stop what's happening" (Victoria).

Participant 14 described finding purpose from education, wishing that more survivors had access to educational opportunities because of its value for her.

"It's give me this huge dream to like continue in these academic pursuits and it's like, oh, my goodness, how I do not have to believe the stupid shit I was told growing up but, I can come and create my own way of thinking and being able to come to conclusions. It just makes me so excited because that's the reason why I had to go through so much crap then, maybe there's a little bit of beauty. It's a lot of work. But, I was really – I'm very passionate about giving back because I've been given so much."

Almost half stated they found purpose through children (their own or a family member).

"Even having my niece, it's been like I'm able to instill the morals that I want her to have or the upbringing that I want her to have, the safety I want her to have. I'm able to change that and to see that future" (Grace).

"I have too much to live for and I got my son back and I have an apartment now. It's just not worth me losing everything again. It's just – I don't think I could do it again. I really don't...My son and this one on the way. They give me a reason to live" (Participant 7).

"...I would end up losing custody of my children and I knew that losing custody of my kids would be – like, there would be no stopping after that if I didn't have my kids. They

were relentless keeping me anchored even though I was really fucked up. That’s what kept me sane that whole time, was trying to protect them” (Megan).

**Experiences of Learning:** As the participants discussed their experiences in post-trafficking phase, some share what they have learned. At least two-thirds discussed **learning how to function in “normal” everyday life,** learning life skills and how to cope in “normal” life.

“It’s so overwhelming to come out of that life into normal society and know how to get a job, know how to present yourself, know how to speak about things or not speak about things. How to manage money. That was like a big thing for me” (Grace).

“I think learning things to do physically. For example, like, tapping my fingers together definitely helps in times of anxiety and when I’m having a panic attack. That’s so simple and so silly but, to me, it can bring me from way up here back down to here” (Victoria).

Approximately one-third discussed **learning more about self,** such as self-care, interests, and assertiveness/self-advocacy.

“It was hard for the first couple months, just like allowing myself to be loved unconditionally and to have people and then, I was learning these things and I was learning boundaries and, I was realizing, oh, this is the first time I’m making my own money and I can keep it. And, I began to,

*“no caption needed.”*



**Figure 32 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

*“My first vision board, created recently for a mentorship program I am in”*



**Figure 34 Photovoice Participant 15**

*“Taking care one day at a time mind body and soul. Haven't cooked in a month. I see I still got it.”*



**Figure 33 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

fall in love with what I was doing. And, I was able to go and teach trainings to law enforcement. And, I was able to go and mentor girls and I was able to teach trainings to medical personnel and to high schools and middle schools and youth groups. And, I learned – I definitely learned how to fight for myself and how to advocate for my needs” (Victoria).

“And, here, in school, yeah, I was working my butt off, but I was getting A’s and I realized that I could come to my own belief system. I didn’t have to take what other people are saying, that I could formulate my own thought processes and use evidence to help me get to that point” (Participant 14).

“I needed somebody to teach me how to take care of my physical body and how to get strong physically which then releases natural endorphins and helps my depression and helps me function in my life” (Participant 14).

“And, so, my mentor started to teach me on how to use a DSLR camera and ISO and, like, all of that stuff and realized I had a 50 mil lens for my camera body and realized that if you invert it – so, you have the camera lens but if you invert the camera lens, that you can actually get macro shots without having a macro lens...It was like this really cool life came alive to me because I was seeing these little intricate details – things outside for the first time with my human eye and, so, here I was going on my hands and knees, crawling all over fields and all of that getting pictures of bugs and leaves and just twigs and, like, fun stuff. And, I was *seeing* all this fun – in an hour I would get one picture of a butterfly” (Participant 14).

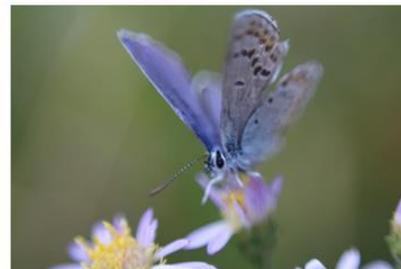
One-third mentioned learning forms of self-care

*“Learning how to bake a ‘square life’ very first pie I’ve made in my life.”*



**Figure 35 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

*“Freedom”*



**Figure 36 Photovoice Participant 14**



*“Sitting outback with the kids at work. Teaching the girls some new coping skills and what it means to turn your pain and voice into art.”*

**Figure 37 Photovoice Participant 15**

such as exercise, cooking or other hobbies as forms of coping.

“I started, like, cooking. So, I started really enjoying preparing meals. To this day, cooking is my therapy. I absolutely love it and, you know, listening – I started listening to totally different music. I started going to the gym and, just really getting back to finding who I was. But, none of it was intentional. It was like I was just going with what my body and my mind needed. So, it’s always interesting to kind of look back, oh, my body – it just kind of took over to do what it needed during that time...I love guided meditation. I had started running 5Ks. And, running has a similar effect as EMDR because it’s left-right movement. And, so, I think those two combined really just helped me process so much just garbage and make a lot of connection” (Megan).

Approximately half had **experiences of education or professional development**. One-third described learning about trauma, human trafficking and resources related to their healing process.

“I needed to be able to be in a therapeutic setting to be able to understand the trauma that I had been through for the first time in my life – understand the impact psychologically – the impact, emotionally, the impact, even on my health physically, and then start taking the steps to really be proactive and intentional to really walk in healing” (Participant 14).

**Goals and Dreams:** When the participants were asked about their goals and dreams, the majority talked about having a career, with most of them wanting jobs or wanting to start programs where they can **help other women**.

“Hopefully, open up my own practice of some sort or open up my own housing situation for women...I want to give back in every way that I can and I want to leave my mark here, however I can” (Grace).

“I’d like to – I’d like to one day see a home opened up for women and their children – survivors. That’s more of a dream, I think, and a goal but I can visualize it so I think that

*“I really connect to imagery of trees, and I love the symbolism of the heart growing out of/being fed by the roots of a tree. This is part of a 3-D puzzle project I’m working on that came out of the art therapy session at the 2018 Emerging Leaders Conference.”*



**Figure 38 Photovoice Participant 15**

*“This was the third year of the GEMS ELC conference - for survivors by survivors the only safe space we have to just be amongst ourselves to detox and recharge. I’ve attended all three years and taught financial literacy the past two. This conference makes me remember Dworkin’s quote “and each year there are more of her” because the survivors in attendance have doubled each year. This year 4 of my ladies were accepted and 2 were able to attend and that was a proud moment for me.”*



**Figure 39 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

it will happen because usually, if I can visualize something, it happens for me and I see that for women and their children. I want to be a part of that. I want to be a part of families healing and children healing and becoming whole so that generation can – and those curses – and those things can be broken. People can think, I never thought that I would have a daughter or son that’s going to be a doctor or a lawyer, and that’s what I see when I dream. I see that. I see myself caring for women and children”(Cat).

“Right now my thing is that I’m in this field. I do believe that it’s gonna be a career I do plan on enhancing because I see housing is a big barrier for young ladies rather as shelter or transitional or any type of safe place because a lot of places be full and, it’s like, where do they go? So, my long-term goal is to open up a transitional housing” (Participant 9).

*“Dreaming of Royalty”*



**Figure 40 Photovoice Participant 14**

“I would like to write books, continue to speak, continue to educate, train, and I really want to use my degree in clinical psychology to give me credibility as a trainer, as a speaker, and as an author. I want to help non-profits and organizations working with survivors – really be able to do it well. So, what does complex trauma look like within your organization and how can you respond to needs in a way that really meets just the unique and specific needs of a victim of human trafficking” (Participant 14).

“It’s very fulfilling and my wish is to be that person and to have that organization that wasn’t there. I would like to have at least one re-integration community. My goal is five across the United States, all built on, like, the cultic theory reintegration process. I would like to actually be able to deliver what pimps promise. So, really setting girls up with a tangible plan to help them get out of poverty that’s sustainable. That’s really just like my long-term vision for the organization... My career goal is to speak and write and travel” (Megan).

Their goals and dreams are related to giving back, contributing to services and providing what they wish they would have received or what they have identified as a need from their own experience. Two-thirds mentioned the **goal of education**.

“I do want to finish this Bachelor’s Degree. I want to eventually get my Masters” (Grace).

“So, I went to school and got my degree in counseling in undergrad in counseling, a B.A. and left there with a dream to eventually get my doctorate in clinical psychology... It’s given me this huge dream to like continue in these academic pursuits and it’s like, oh, my

goodness, I now do not have to believe the stupid shit I was told growing up but, I can come and create my own way of thinking and being able to come to conclusions” (Participant 14).

“I had been saving up to return to school and so I had this tiny little savings account. So, I was like, I’m going to figure this out. I don’t know what this looks like and my parents were like, holy shit, okay” (Megan).

More than one-third shared the goal of having a **relationship and/or family**.

“I feel like I know what it was like to be in love with someone but someone to love you the same way is kinda – was my goal” (Emerald).

“I would like to have a family one day with a husband that knows about my past and doesn’t judge me – and have children that I can depend on” (Participant 10).

One-third would like to buy a house and almost half gave descriptions of **living a simple or normal life**.

*“I kept thinking over and over about what I wanted my first ‘photovoice’ picture to be. I wanted it to be profound And I was thinking too much. This is profound. My own kitchen after 4 years of living without my own home. I can cook my own meals and wash and clean dishes that belong to me. That’s a success.”*



**Figure 41 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

“I picture myself buying a house. That’s like a – even though I can’t fathom what that even looks like, I know it’s something I want. I just can’t comprehend what it would even be like to have my own house. But, as of right now, I just want my own place... just having a place – a safe environment, a healing place for myself after I get home from serving others and doing other things, and to have a family – to have kids that I can raise up in God. That I can just give life to and love to and just serve others. That’s my goal... I don’t need the huge house. I don’t need that. I want a small, little place with some land that I can enjoy” (Grace).

“I do. I always set goals for myself, even if I don’t obtain – if I don’t get them but, I do, I have goals for myself and I have dreams. They’re not really big, crazy ones though, like most people. I just – my short-term goals would be to – just to continue to be healthy, to keep myself healthy mentally, spiritually, and physically and to take care of my home, my children, and to keep myself as positive as I can” (Cat).

“My goal is to be successful, honestly, like one day – this is where I came from, this is where I’m at. I’m okay with it. I don’t want like an extravagant lifestyle. I’m okay with a simple little house and a dog. My goal is to try to like live a good lifestyle. Simple, but not like extravagant...I do want to adopt a kid because I like kids. I feel like if you raise

them right, they'll be okay and they won't be like the whole world and they'll be good and they'll learn good things. And, adopting a kid especially when they're little when they don't have anything or something, I feel like it's a good start or something. It's a goal to own a house and adopt a kid and a dog" (Emerald).



*"These are the shadows of six adolescents girls I mentor about drugs and alcohol at a Juvenile Detention Center. I help to teach them to not live in the shadows of their secrets and pain anymore. Through my own healing and recovery I'm able to help bring others out of the shadows and into healing."*

**Photovoice Participant, Grace**

*"A woman who is dedicated to giving back, but it's not easy to give back. A lot of toll comes with that and you have to know when to step away. It's hard to fit back into the mainstream society and balance everything in a way that is healthy and able to make progress. Holding onto the small moments is important."*

**Figure 42 Photovoice Group Reflection**



*"Reshaping love. Today I ran a group about Love with the girls and this was a picture that captured our thoughts. Although we've all been broken, we choose to still show love."*

**Figure 43 Photovoice Participant, Grace**

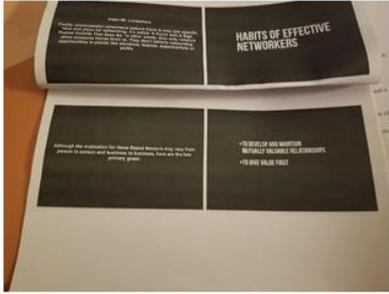
"I think that I'm going to live through this and I will get me a little one-bedroom apartment" (Participant 16).

"Right now I'm working on getting my GED so I can go back to school. I mean, so, yeah, I want to be a nurse. I want to get my own apartment, you know, stuff like that. So, yeah, my goals are to live normal. I don't know what you consider normal...what do I consider normal, just, you know, I don't know. Just living in a house and having a car and going to work every day and that's what I consider normal. Peace. I'm getting there. I have a sense of peace" (Participant 7).

**Experiences of Survivor Leadership:** 11 of the 15 participants had some level of involvement in a role of leadership or advocacy with other survivors of sex trafficking or organizations within the anti-trafficking movement and expressed descriptions of these experiences. Half of those who described their experiences described it as personally empowering, rewarding and contributed to their own healing as well as personal and professional growth.

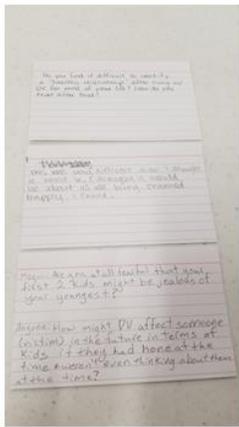
"...Their interactions, it reminds of how I was early on or things that I still need to work on... It checks me. It checks me on what I am still struggling with and what I'm not. It's given

*“Learning new skills and tools to be a better advocate to my fellow survivors.  
Network seminar”*



**Figure 44 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

*“Index cards - I sit on a domestic violence survivor impact panel, and we share our experiences with people who are currently on probation for DV related offenses. It has been a really healing and empowering thing to be a part of for many reasons, however I am finding that I am increasingly triggered and drained when I tell my story in chronological order. I came home from this panel last week and told my husband “I think I’m done sharing my story like that.” It feels good to recognize my needs, to be financially stable enough to step away from opportunities that no longer feel healthy, and to be able to pass this opportunity on to one of the women in my programs who is wanting to start sharing her story publicly, and knowing it will be a safe place for her to do so.”*



**Figure 45 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

*“The role that survivors can have on other survivors:  
Survivor leaders can impact the lives of others who have been through similar traumas.”*

**Figure 46 Photovoice Group Reflection**

me empowerment. It makes me not show ashamed of what I’ve done or where I’ve been. It’s a very unique dynamic in a sense that I know how valuable I am to them and how valuable they are to me” (Grace).

“It’s a lot of work. But, I was really – I’m very passionate about giving back because I’ve been given so much” (Participant 14).

“So, getting really plugged in with that dramatically altered where I was headed with the work that I was wanting to do and being offered educational opportunities... Professional development -- being able to go to conferences for survivors to learn more about how to be a professional... It’s very fulfilling and my wish is to be that person and to have that organization that wasn’t there” (Megan).

Four Participants discussed times their own histories of trauma were triggered while helping other survivors and how they responded with self-care and boundaries.

“Yeah, I get triggered all the time. I have to take time off and, you know, not go through what they’re going through because I have experienced the similarities. I have to kinda separate and, so, with that being, I be there for them but when they’re gone and outta my sight then I have to deal with my stuff (Participant 9).

“For me, I want to be that, but it’s also really easy for me to let my boundaries be pushed and to sacrifice too much of me because I have done that my whole life and I’m still healing and I’m still learning where my boundaries are” (Megan).

Cat discussed the value of having accountability but the pressure that comes with the expectations of others.

“I didn’t really know what my feelings were about it but the pressure of a commitment sometimes to either speak or to show up somewhere when you have to be there. Sometimes, for certain women, depending on what – because I really feel that survivors go through stages in their recovery and their healing. You can be four years and feel like, wow, I really got this together. I’ve really got myself together, you know. I’m really excited about, you know, and hopeful, and then – it doesn’t have to be any one thing.

Something can happen and you feel like you're right back down into, you know, that feeling of hopelessness, the feeling of guilt, the feeling of worthlessness, you know. It comes in stages. And, working with survivors, I think people really need to understand that, it's just like grief, you know? And, you cannot tell a survivor – even though you want to – there has to be some accountability and there has to be commitment because they're some things that we need to be taught but sometimes you don't know what she's going through and you can't say to her, you know, you committed to this and, you didn't show up or you back out at the last minute.

And, I think those kinds of things need to be, really need to be looked at and said, listen, are you going through something right now? What's going on with you right now? And, maybe dealt with in that way as opposed to making them feel like, you made a commitment and, you know, you disappointed us. That's not a good look because she's disappointed so many people and it makes her feel like – especially – it could be different ways.

But, for me – I'll speak specifically for me – for me, it made me feel horrible because I felt like these people have done so much for me and all they asked me to do is this one thing and I couldn't do it. I wasn't good enough. I couldn't – and, you know, now that I've thought about that and I understand, I have more of a healthy outlook on it, but, at that moment, I didn't. And, those are things that need to be – you need people that serve survivors and that help with services with survivors need to understand that.

They're gonna flipflop. It's gonna happen, even if they're 20 years out of the life, you know what I mean? There's gonna be a time where things like that happen and, I think that what needs to be addressed is not, well, why didn't you show up? Whereas, what's going on? Is there something going on with you that we need to talk about, you know" (Cat)?

Kristine said she eventually chose to not be involved and witnessed competition amongst survivors in survivor leadership.

"I finally came to the conclusion that I don't really want much to do with the movement even though I've been involved with like survivors all round the world and doing trainings for schools and for the police department, testifying, just outreaches and – every possible thing that I could do – jail ministries. I'm just tired of living it. I decided, I know, that whatever I've given back already – I'm just kinda done. The movement, even though there is some victories, there's a lot of, you know, competition among survivors in a weird way."

One-third mentioned the financial struggles of survivors who dedicate their life to being involved in anti-trafficking advocacy work without proper compensation.

"I think they're hoping that they would be recognized and get a payout of something but I find a lot of them are struggling and emotions are coming up for them – maybe a little stronger for them. I think a lot of them have PTSD. So, I think that it's the whole oppression, honestly, and it's causing – the same thing if you didn't get sleep or you

didn't get the things you needed, you're going to start attacking other people and, if one person is getting the spotlight – because I think there is definitely survivors that – we don't care. A lot of them are not getting – they're barely getting by and they have sacrificed their life for it" (Kristine)".

"So, a lot of these other women are saying how they don't have any money and they're just standing at a podium because the place only pays for their hotel..." (Audrey).

One-third discussed the dangers of re-exploitation within organizations.

"I think that you start getting asked to speak a lot and I think some organizations want you to be their poster child for their organization but you almost get exploited again. You'll either get used for, to raise money and maybe, again, their goals don't align with yours. When you're treated like you're for entertainment and there's no action behind it. I feel like survivors' voices are always kind of like, I'll talk for you because you're too damaged so I'm gonna talk for you. Or, it's misunderstood. I'm not quite sure why it's not really taken seriously sometimes" (Kristine).

"So, I was able to – so, who I am today, everyone knows who I am and the work that I do. I will tell you this, I will go stand on podiums, depending on the audience, I do have a powerpoint that walks through my story...But, no one can really, necessarily call me and say, could you come speak and tell your story? I am more than my story. I'm an expert in exploitation. I'm good at what I do. I created a program. I helped revise a prevention curriculum three or four times in the last 15 years" (Audrey).

"I did hit this place of, like, I wanted to speak and I wanted to share my experiences and I wanted to, like, talk about what happened to me, so, I wanted to become what a survivor leader is, not having a language around that but, then, ending up being really re-exploited because people turned it into this circus side show. Like, we have a real-life prostitute with us tonight, folks. And, I was so desperate to just be heard, that I was going to any and every speaking engagement because I was, like, I just need to tell my story to somebody that's gonna listen. And, so, I was really starting to this place of burn out" (Megan).

*"City council - I spoke at city council this week, asking the city to allocate specific human resources to trafficking investigations in our community. The county is SO close to adopting a partial decriminalization model, they've stopped arresting girls, they call me in for consulting and intervention, they refer to our org and other orgs, and they're targeting buyers. Speaking at city council was really interesting, we each got 2 minutes which is zilch to make a point. But I got sandwiched between an oboist who played a song for his 2 minutes, about 15 water rights activists, and a homeless man who poops in a bag due to cancer (his words!) and pointed out that the city's current law around human waste disposal technically makes it illegal to breathe inside city limits. It was honestly the greatest people watching hour of the past decade!"*



**Figure 47 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

One-third specifically commented that they believe organizations are more effective when including survivor leaders.

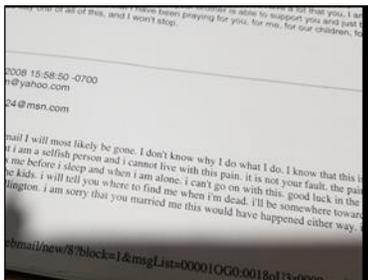
“Make sure if you’re providing services, I truly believe in survivor-led services. We are a bunch of people who think that we’re unique, even though we’re not, but, we think that. And, making sure some, that a great deal of the services you’re providing that survivors are providing that to them...Having people, not only survivors, and to do this work best, around treatment for women, you need a program that has some survivors for the hope and strong allies – people to push you and believe in you. The allies – the mentor can say – if I’ve gotten better, so can you. That’s super-duper valuable. But, the piece about the allies – is what an ally said but we need you survivors but when that survivor is weak you push them, meaning, no you’re not, your strong, go do it” (Participant 18).

“So, that’s what’s really challenging right now but they’re giving money to these start-up organizations instead of maybe if you’re gonna fund them like a survivor-led organization that’s been around for years, letting them be the key A people to show them how to do that, you know what I mean? So, that’s the biggest challenge. They’re giving the money to people who – non-survivor type organizations that don’t have a clue. They’re marketing. They’re website looks good. They’re saying what they’re gonna say but are clearly not effective in doing what they’re doing. So, those are the challenges. Instead of funding programs – they’re wasting money giving it to start-ups that don’t know what they’re doing and the other challenge is partnering with survivors” (Audrey).

### PTG Domain 3-Relating to Others

The significance of relationships has been previously mentioned, including the value of relationships to exit the trafficking experience and as a main need and benefit during reintegration. This section will highlight specifically descriptions of personal growth within the context of relationships.

**Personal Growth in Relationships:** Some of the survivors described that it is within



*“Suicide note email - This weekend was rough I am just realizing! My abusive ex husband showed up unannounced with his new wife and their children, and manipulated a situation to be able to see my children, whom he forfeited custody of 5 years ago. His wife left an incredibly nasty voicemail, and I just feel sad for her. She is stuck in the EXACT same cycle of life events - like, EXACT same storyline, and I see it and she obviously doesn't want to. Anyway, I sent her this picture and told her there was a lot her husband probably has never told her about the hell he put me through when we were married, and that was ok, and that if she ever needed out and needed someone who believed her, she had my number. She didn't like hearing that, lol, but that's OK I know I didn't want to 10 years ago either.”*

relationships where they **are developing identity and finding their personal power** to make choices and set boundaries. “...and developing that in relationships and learning I can say no to things and what consent means and all of those things” (Participant 14).

Participants described how they learn more about

**Figure 48 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

**becoming trustworthy within relationships.** "...learning to balance time in a relationship with people. I always make sure to keep in contact with people, not say I'm going to do something and not show up. That's like a thing I have to do. And, even if I don't see them for a while, stay in contact with them." Grace's description **reflects posttraumatic growth.** "I think I'm more willing to ask for help now and I'm more open-minded to taking direction from others. I think I value relationships a lot more."

### **PTG Domain 5-Appreciation for Life**

12 of 15 participants referenced their perceptions in how they view themselves, the world or their experiences as well as the process of discovery and change of perception during and after the trafficking experience. Their responses revealed themes of appreciation for life, an aspect of posttraumatic growth.

**Perceptions of Experience:** Two-thirds of participants described how their view of the trafficking experience and understanding its reality evolved as they became involved in therapy, as they interacted with other survivors, as they started participating in advocacy work and as more time passed after the exploitation. Particularly it took time for them to understand their victimization and lack of choice.

"I'd say the healing part came when I started speaking about it because I suppressed it for so long when I finally realized what happened to me and not blamed myself any more, the more I spoke about it, the more truth came out and, so, I didn't need to – I could process it a little bit more. And that probably took a good ten years" (Kristine).

"I never thought of myself as a victim. I thought of myself as I put myself in that situation. I wanted to because I wanted to keep doing drugs and all that but being surrounded by survivors that know that they are a victim and know that what they did had a name besides just prostitution was just huge. I never – working at a rehab I had met girls that had prostituted and stuff like that, but until going to my job working at the trafficking facility I never knew that it was anything besides prostitution. Knowing that

there were parts of my life, the sexual abuse – knowing that there were people that coerced me took huge weight off of my shoulders because all along I had thought I chose this. Nobody else chose this but me. But, to understand that there were other parts that came into play, it was huge. And, for any survivor to understand that, I think that’s so important because a lot of healing comes there. A lot – you can be a little more proud. You can be a little more – you can stand on your story a little better just knowing like, no, there were other things that influenced besides myself”(Grace).

**Perception of Self:** More than two-thirds described how the experience made them a stronger person or how they saw something good came from the experience, particularly they see good in now being able to help others or the strength they gained from the experience.

“What do you do now? Do you make it – use it to make you a stronger person? I take what I could out of the experience and just put it towards a positive spin” (Kristine).

“Yeah, because I struggle with – I mean, I can say how it’s changed my – how it’s impacted my life in the way that I don’t trust people. I feel – it’s, it’s, impacted me that I feel – I felt that I’m not worth anything, used up, you know. But, it’s also – I’ve also grown very strong because of it – because – I wouldn’t take back -- I could say this 100 times and I really know that it’s true. I hate – I hate what’s happened to me. I hate that I’ve been a victim. I hate that I have to identify as a victim. It’s very uncomfortable because I’ve been so strong and fearless but I would not take it back because I feel that I am ferocious, you know, and that I know that because of what has happened to me, it’s made me who I am and it’s made me to be so strong now. My mind is much stronger than it used to be.... even though I struggle with depression and these kind of things – but now I know that I’m not gonna go crazy” (Cat).

*“When life gets tough remember the sun will come out tomorrow. So keep your toes painted.”*



**Figure 50 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

*“Walking in different shoes my path don't feel the same. It's shining and bright.”*



**Figure 49 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

“As time goes on, like, every once in a while, it makes me sad thinking about the choices I’ve done and the things I did and, I’ll always have a criminal record. But, then I see it, as, I look at all the survivors who have criminal records who have been through what I’m through and how many lives they’re changing today and I just have to see it as – no matter how painful what happened to me was, if it meant that it would save one person, I’m willing to tell it to the world. I

will go to the mountaintops to find them all to bring them home, to make sure they’re okay. I’m thankful that what happened to me, happened to me, because I’m doing everything now. Every dream that I’ve ever had, I’m able to do now” (Victoria).

“Some of the ways it shaped my life have been positive. I wouldn’t be doing this work if I hadn’t been through that, you know, and I wouldn’t live where I live and I wouldn’t have the job that I have that I love and, you know, it’s not that I think it’s all bad (Participant 15).

“As far as my identity and my recovery, how I look at my life now is that good, bad, or indifferent what I’ve done what a lot of other people have not done, was that I lived two different lives in one lifetime. And, so, I’m very fortunate because I also work in the field what was meant for bad, turned out to be good” (Audrey).

**Perceptions of Life:** There was a repeated

theme emerging from the majority of the participants,

*“I’m being abstract.”*



**Figure 52 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

*“She is able to see something abstract able to see things and appreciate it: “To someone else it may seem bland, but she sees flowers she hasn’t smelled in years, a ball to play and have fun with, and she is able to think for herself and see what she wants to see and sit down on a bench if she wants to. She is outside, enjoying her freedom, mental and physical” (Grace).*

**Figure 51 Photovoice Group Reflection**

*“For me, this picture represents feeling trapped while I was in the life, and also the way that my experiences shape the lens through which I view the world now.”*



**Figure 53 Photovoice Participant 15**

## "Seen"

describing the impact on their view of life. Participant 3 stated “It opened my eyes and I realized that at times the world can be – throw you curves, but you just have to have a positive outlook.”

A profound, repetitious emerging theme was the description **that their eyes were open to see and appreciate life and beauty to a greater or different degree** as a result of the trafficking experience. Participant 10 stated “it caused me to open my eyes to the world.” Grace shared this experience after being released from sexual exploitation as well as incarceration. “It was a totally different world. Everything looked big. I saw trees and it’s like – I was just isolated for months. It seemed like years. Because, technically, it was years. I didn’t pay attention to trees for years. I didn’t pay attention to any of that and, for once, my eyes were just opened.”

Three of the participants specifically mentioned photography being something they learned or something that was helpful for them in their recovery, as a result of their ability to see and appreciate beauty.

“It was like this really cool life came alive to me because I was seeing, like, this little intricate details – things outside for the first time with my human eye and, so, here I was going on my hands and knees, crawling all over fields and all of that getting pictures of bugs and leaves and just twigs and, like, fun stuff. And, like, I was seeing all this fun – in an hour I would get, like, one picture of a butterfly... “So, all I have to say – I don’t know, it’s been part of my healing to realize that, like, I can create my own healing through a camera...So, yeah, it’s for me, very therapeutic. I love being able to -- I think for most of my



Figure 55 Photovoice Participant 14

---

---

*“The ability to heal and reflect the beauty that is being seen. Things are deep and dark but it’s possible to heal and it’s possible to reflect that beauty that you begin to see.*

*Survivors are able to see what most people do not see and have a way of portraying pain and healing.”*

Figure 54 Photovoice Group Reflection

*“The Mirror: seeing beauty has now opened the opportunity to reflect beauty through my life.”*



Figure 56 Photovoice Participant 14



*"In the winter months depression always seems to hit me the hardest. This winter I have made it a point to get out and explore no matter how cold it's or how depressed I'm feeling. This is a picture of ice between rocks. It reminds me that although the ice looks broken I still see beauty and detail in it. I see the broken parts as a chance to see the ice differently. No matter how broken I have become- I can still see beauty in my brokenness."*

**Figure 57 Photovoice Participant, Grace**

*"Spring showers, lilacs, and pines. A beautiful day out here in the rain"*



**Figure 58 Photovoice Participant 18**

*"It's possible to think about the flowers, sunshine and not all the painful things that have happened. The struggle exists, but it is possible to move into a place where they don't control you."*

**Figure 59 Photovoice Group Reflection**



**Figure 60 Photovoice Participant, Cat**

life I felt so invisible to people that I love taking pictures of, like – macro photography – taking pictures of things that nobody sees and making them visible to the seeing eye because it makes me feel like I'm seen in some way" (Participant 14).

"Photography was actually was, like, a huge piece of that.

Leaving Vegas and coming back to Colorado and kind of connecting, like, where I was from, I started seeing – like my senses started to literally come back. So, I started to see things. So, I took a lot of pictures of nature" (Megan).

"I'll go outside and some bird will fly by and I will be reminded that I am still in the present and where I'm at. I just went to park, took a little hike, sat by this waterfall, prayed and then I ended up sending a picture to the two girls on my cell phone and I was like, this is how I've learned to walk it off" (Grace).

This repeated description of an increased capacity to *see*

included their perspective, intuition and depth. Kristine explained "I think you feel like you're an old person in a young person's body. I think you've already lived a life and appreciate life a lot more and see things that people don't see. For instance, you know, I'll say, like, okay, clothing – clothing lines for kids – you don't realize how it's influencing kids and how that's influencing boys and like, the market, the sex-sells market. I think your eyes are way more open to that. I think you're just on a more deeper level than some people can comprehend or even want to."

Participant 9 described how skills she learned in her time in the life have become useful in her present life.

“I see clearer. I can kinda see and sense a lot of – my intuition is so funny how – you know, us women have that really good, but it’s funny how, like, with certain things I’m very observant. A lot of skills, to be perfectly honest, that I learned in the life, it has – it’s a good thing because you have to pay attention to your surroundings. You have to be very observant before speaking and – or just being so, like, quick to talk, so, you have to think and listen to what is being said, so, therefore, you can know how to respond. So, I think some good things from the life that I have embedded in me that laps over to me today, has helped me a lot, you know, and – to an extreme. But, I see things very clear now and, yeah.”

Participant 14 also described how she can find beauty from her experience because of the perspective she now has.

“It just makes me so excited because that’s the reason why I had to go through so much crap then, like, maybe there’s a little bit of beauty. And, I will always see things differently than most people...I see little things and it’s not like I don’t see a big picture. It’s not like I don’t have dreams and like I dream and see big pictures but I also see, like, little things and they just bring me a lot of smiles and happiness and I’ll always probably be like that.”

Grace explained that she is more in touch with emotions and has a greater appreciation for relationships.

“I guess I would say, I’m more emotional than some people, but I’m also more in tune with that. And, honestly, that’s something I wouldn’t change because I don’t want to ever walk around this world again not being in touch with that – not being in touch with my senses and not understanding how I’m feeling or being in the moment. I don’t want to ever lose that again. So, that’s kind of been a blessing...I think I value relationships a lot more. I have also learned

“Sad. This makes me so sad.”



Figure 61 Photovoice Participant, Cat

*“a different respect and empathy than most people have, she sees more deeply and does not overlook someone else’s sadness and reality”*

Figure 59 Photovoice Group Reflection

*“The Beauty of Redeeming Love”*



Figure 60 Photovoice Participant 14



*“Crocuses. The first flower to come up in Spring. I noticed these as I was leaving work. They reminded me that Winter is on the way out and Spring is coming. Spring represents for me new growth and the world coming back to life. In my life, I have gone through many seasons. My favorite season is always the times I get to see the beautiful growth that comes out of the winter storms.”*

100  
Figure 61 Photovoice Participant, Grace

that not everybody is like me. Not everybody is as deep as I go. Not everybody thinks or feels the way I feel.

I have a new perspective on a lot of things. I have gratitude that I never had. I have a humility that I never had. I have a passion that I have never had. I have an eye for beauty in the little things that I never had. And, I just have a really good way about making any situation positive. There's times that I don't, but most times I can always turn it around somehow. Yeah, and just my whole idea about what life is, it's not about the big car and all that, it's about how you feel about yourself and what you're doing to help somebody else. It's not what you're trying to gather up for yourself. It has nothing to do with that. It's how can you – how can you serve in this world to make it better? How can you help somebody not be so broken? How can you breathe life back into somebody is what keeps me going every day? And, I think a lot of people that I come in contact with see that about me."

**Perceptions of Growth/Healing:** Participants' feedback inevitably included their own perspectives on their healing or how they are growing. Many participants described healing as an ongoing process.

"So, yeah, I think that's just, like, it's always important to remember,

like, we're never done healing and I can stand up and give a presentation and then be vomiting the next day because I had a trigger. Like, I can't stop that" (Megan).

Cat provided this description of the ongoing struggle of the healing process:

"You know, I can't take it back and, like I've said, I've grown from it and it's taught me a lot but the suitcase packed with all this pain that I carry with me constantly is – it's a lot. It's a burden, you know, and I – I try as much as I can to let it – try to let it go but it's a process and it's gonna take a long time to

*"There is more positivity than negativity. Being a survivor does not mean that everything is about the traumas that we have endured. How big of a change it is to go from being in the life to being out of it. Yet, we are able to see more than survive. We can engage in the future. We can see the world around us embrace new things and new experiences."*

**Figure 63 Photovoice Group Reflection**

*"Restored Innocence"*



**Figure 62 Photovoice Participant 14**

*"There is hope and that it is possible to see beauty even in the midst of the horrific things that have happened. If we can see beauty, then we can communicate beauty because pictures are a form of communication. Then if we communicate beauty, that creates hope and hope then gives us the ability to*

**Figure 64 Photovoice Group Reflection**

---

---

*“There is new growth. Starting over and coming back after loss of self is possible. New growth includes surrounding yourself with love.*

*It takes a lot of people to help someone come back to life and to experience life again. It takes connection. It takes connection with people. It takes connection with God or your Higher Power. It takes connection with yourself. It takes a lot of reflection. Survivors are just normal people going through everyday life, and trying to make a little difference. “*

Figure 65 Photovoice Group Reflection

*“Prayers and Healing  
Native Warrior Woman”*

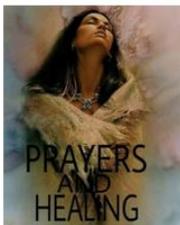


Figure 66 Photovoice Participant 18

heal from. You know, I feel that if maybe it would have happened in my older years, it might not be so difficult but because it happened at such a young age, I’m learning almost from then to – and there’s so much of it, you know, there’s so many occasions of, you know, assaults and things like that – it’s like once you know of deal with one, you know, then you remember another one and it’s just like – ugh, here we go again, you know, with this – to the point where sometimes I just put it up there and I’m just like, I’m not going – I just don’t want to deal with this right now, let’s move on to cupcakes with purple frosting and, you know, and things like that.”

They acknowledged both the challenges as well as the growth.

Participant 14 provided an example for how she has observed growth in herself:

“And, I don’t live every day with my trauma on my back or in my brain. I’m able to, like, live very normally and think about normal stuff like the dishes need to be done or, like, the work that we have to do or, I don’t know. It shows that work that I’ve been able to accomplish in therapy and will be in for the rest of my life and I’m okay with that...So, five years ago, I wasn’t as confident as I am today. I was also very triggered in the sense that, like, a lot of things triggered me five years ago. And, so, like, I was very much a hot mess, to say it nicely. Um, I think five years ago I was still cutting. I think it was six year ago I was still cutting. I feel like my language would have been different. I feel like I use some tactical language I wouldn’t have used back then. I didn’t trust people as much as I trust people now. I struggle to let people into my life and I had this wall up.”

**PTG Domain 5-Spiritual Change:** Almost all of the participants mentioned experiences of faith or religion. Half of participants credit **spirituality as a form of coping or means of survival** during the time of being trafficked.

“I had some really supernatural experiences out there and I know that I was being watched over – stuff that just doesn’t happen. And, so, I do feel like I was definitely, you know – that God was watching me, no doubt” (Kristine).

“Well, when I was in the life I prayed a lot actually. I prayed for my protection. Every time I would have a date I would always pray, God bless me and please keep me safe and even though I know I’m sinning right now. And, I think that, that came from my first – my husband – my ex-husband because I really started to feel God’s love and, now, I constantly – I battle with God sometimes, because I can be disobedient and I tend to want to do things on my own because I always have so I don’t want him to take the wheel and it’s affected me because I get myself in some sticky situations and, it just makes me realize how much more I need Him to depend on” (Cat).

“I converted to Islam while I was being trafficked and it really helped me. And, having that relationship with God is one of the things that saved my life. Like, I don’t know that I would have necessarily lived through all the things that I had gone through if I didn’t have my faith” (Participant 15).

“I’ve od’d so many time and he’s brought me back. Thank God, he was there, because I wouldn’t be alive, you know. I definitely wouldn’t be alive” (Participant 7).



*“On my way into work I stopped to admire the beauty of a snowfall. I’m constantly reminded that each day is a new day and a new beginning. I’m clothed in white and made pure by my faith.”*

**Figure 67 Photovoice Participant, Grace**

More than half described how **spiritual beliefs as a part of their healing process helped** after the trafficking experience.

“I went back to church... I think I felt like I didn’t have anybody in the world that I could trust – even my parents – anyone. I felt like God was my father and if I, like, really get into that message... probably around 22 and just really kind of – just tried to learn a different way of living, you know, whatever that was like to practice the lessons. So, I think that it has healed me. I mean, you know, those things of guilt and shame that many survivors carry, I think that has, you know, definitely subsided because of it”

(Kristine).

“God. My faith. I found God in jail or he found me. I don’t even know what. I think he chased me down. But, just, He was just so real and, honestly, I think that’s the only thing that’s really kept me...” (Grace).

“Um, I pray. I pray a lot. And, I really do a lot of self-talk. I – it’s been something – I never really realized that I did but it’s actually a coping mechanism and it’s been really good for me because I think when I hear my – when I vocally hear myself and I look at myself and I talk to myself and I look at myself in my eyes, I can see – I started to see

myself as God sees me. And, when I started to look at myself as God sees me, I started to kind of see like a sparkle in my eye, like a light in my eye” (Cat).

Approximately one-third described additional **spiritual growth because of the trafficking experience.**

*“Taking a walk to clear my head. I often have to remind myself that not every day is as easy as walking a straight line. Some days I might feel like I’m falling off course and not walking as straight as I should be. Doubt loves to creep into my mind. The yellow line symbolizes God in my life and how he lines every road I take and is always right there when I begin to walk too far off course. I always find my way back to the yellow line, my faith, my God.”*



**Figure 68 Photovoice Participant, Grace**

“So, I’d say my faith was really, really huge. I really was protected. I really was restored. That I am able to walk around like a normal person every day” (Grace).

“I’ve always been spiritual. I grew up in a spiritual family, so, it’s really been impacted it much better” (Participant 3).

“I actually have found a lot of healing despite the fact that I feel like the safe house shouldn’t have done stuff the way that they did spiritually. I have found a lot of healing in spirituality in

practicing my own faith. I use the term spiritual resiliency because I have experienced so much spiritual abuse and so much horrific stuff on a spiritual level, whether that’s supposed to be from well-intentioned people or from my experiences with my biological people...I really have found a lot of peace and being able to practice my faith, my religion. And, also, too, learning to define it my way instead of letting people define it for me. I am religious and I don’t go to church every week because I don’t like going to church and, so, yeah, I would say that I have a faith and I do have a belief system” (Participant 14).

Cat described **purpose that comes from her faith.** “...I start to clearly understand, you know, how human I really am, but I’m fortunate that He has a purpose for me and He has not let me go and I’m really excited to see what, you know, that has for others, you know, and how that’s going to shape and – other people’s lives.”

Two described how their **faith communities have been a source of support** for them after the trafficking experience.

“My church wants me to – whenever something’s due and I’m like working. Sometimes I’ll clean for the church and they’ll pay me” (Emerald).

“I identify as a form of Unitarian. I go to this church here. And, so, my faith community has been really helpful both, the Muslim community here and the church community” (Participant 15).

Two-thirds described **fluctuation, or struggles and questions related to their faith.**

Some of this is related to emotions, questions and doubts about God’s presence and purposes in their experiences.

“It’s come and gone. It’s never truly gone, I would say that. But, it’s definitely – it’s grown. It’s something I always stuck to. Any day that I am questioning what the hell I’m doing here, I always go back to that because the way I was chased down in there and sat down and talked to and ministered to – my whole mind changed, my heart changed and the way that I felt His presence in there is something I can’t deny. It’s something that was so tangible and so real that I always have to go back to that, like’s He’s there” (Grace).

“I feel that my relationship with my spirituality has grown immensely. I can come in His presence and feel no shame, no guilt, but as soon as I come out, it’s there. So, it’s something that I have to continue to bring to, to Him and I think that there’s reasons why certain things have been – certain events have unfolded and I have more of an – I have memories of things that I didn’t remember before. And, you know, I just feel that spiritually, that – He knows exactly what I need and what I don’t need and when I need it and when I don’t need it.

And, there’s been times when I’ve been angry with Him. There’s been times where I felt abandoned by God but I think that He – it’s not that He abandoned me, He was there. But, I think that sometimes, I needed to do things on my own and have that experience for whatever purpose it’s for or whatever reason, it will be – it will come out later. But, I do – I have had the blessing of knowing now that He was there and knowing that He was there to take the anger from me. And, when I pray and when I talk to God, I believe what He says to me. I know what He is saying to me is true and it just changes your ideas of things instantly. What your perspective was before and then once He allows you to fully see – maybe not fully, but allows you to see that event or that moment and you see it for what it is. It’s helped me. And, it’s helped me to work on anger and forgiveness with others, which I take back sometimes. I say, I forgive you and then I take it back because they do something and then I get it – I start to clearly understand how human I really am, but I’m fortunate that He has a purpose for me and He has not let me go and I’m really excited to see what, that has for others, and how that’s going to shape...other people’s lives” (Cat).

“We went to church since I was little. So, I believe in God. I believe in Jesus and the cross and everything that works with the Bible. At the time, sometimes until today, I’m like, why? Like, you know what I mean? Everyone’s like He wouldn’t put you through what you can’t handle kinda thing. And, I was like, all right, so, that’s all. That was a big thing. Sometimes I’m like, I don’t know, shoveling on myself. I’m like why is this – what is the reason for this – what was the plan for this? Because right now I’m still not in a good spot, you know what I mean? Because of this, I’m behind more and I feel like – I don’t know. I read my Bible and I pray but I feel like nothing’s like working. Not that He’s magical, like it’s gonna happen like that, but, it’s like – I don’t know. What was the purpose? I still don’t know why” (Emerald).

“It did a lot because I’m – if God was real, sometimes I think, why would I even go through all this but – and why would any of this even exist, like, drugs, people like that. But, everything happens for a reason because I don’t know where I would be if I didn’t do all that. I have no idea where I’d be. So, I don’t really blame Him anymore for anything. It was really big at first and that’s what I think got me through and I thank God for that because without that support system I had, the base of everything when I first got out of jail, I probably wouldn’t be here yet. So, yeah, I don’t go to church anymore but I still pray and stuff like that. I like Him and stuff, so, yeah” (Participant 7).

“It was definitely part of my conversations I have with my therapist and still working through, like, the element of, okay, what was good, what was not beneficial kind of thing. And, realizing, too, I can have my own spirituality today that doesn’t have anything to do with what they tried to make me believe and all of that. And, so, it’s been hard. It’s been really hard. A lot of mixed emotions and feelings about it” (Participant 14).

Participant 15 described her own journey of faith, which included her theory of the role faith and spirituality may have for many survivors. She sees the pattern of many survivors having a faith conversion during or shortly after the trafficking experience, calling it a life raft. She sees many leaving this faith when they no longer need it, while others continue on to mature and grow in their faith or religious practice.

“I’m kind of in that phase now where I’m defining it more for myself and I’m not always the most orthodox person but it is still an important part of my life...Because so many survivors are Evangelical Christians and because a lot of the resources out there are from a Christian perspective, I think I tend to be a lot more understanding of Christianity and, like, a lot more tolerant and maybe, like, able to see the parallels between my faith and that faith because I’ve been exposed to it so much, partly, out of my experience of being a survivor. So, in that way, it has affected me as well.

Maybe Evangelical Christianity is for them what Islam was for me. Maybe that is what grabbed them. And I think a lot of people when they are drowning or clinging onto a life raft – and when I first converted to Islam that was part of my experience of converting that I was drowning and that was the life raft, you know. And, I think, over time, I’ve matured more in my faith and, have been able to explore it more for myself and have a relationship with it that isn’t that. And, I don’t know that I would always – I don’t think that’s necessarily the ideal relationship one should have with their faith. I think a lot of trafficking survivors come to religious experiences in that we’re drowning and that’s our life raft. And, whether you stick around and continue to practice that faith and you develop a more mature relationship with it – I know some people who are survivors and they convert, once they heal, they don’t need that any more so maybe they decide they’re not religious any more” (Participant 15).

Less than one-third reported damaged or changed spiritual beliefs after the trafficking experience.

“For the first couple years, I hated God because I was always taught growing up that God knows everything that’s gonna happen in your life and I was, like, if you knew that this was gonna happen to me, how dare you. So, I really, really struggled and I’m definitely not how I was as a teenager. I don’t go to church. I pray every once in a while. I read my Bible every once in a while. That relationship was never really mended. You know, I’ve learned to accept that no matter how hard that is for me – is the matter of fact it will never be the same” (Victoria).

“I was raised very Catholic and I went to Catholic school for eight years and, just being in the life and leaving the life, at this point, I don’t believe in God. I just feel like there’s no God. I’m just – angry. I don’t think it’s a bad thing that I’m not spiritual, I just feel like my eyes were opened and I saw a lot of things” (Participant 10).

“I’ve seen this incredibly fucked up side of spirituality my entire life. I’m learning more about cultic studies and just how things like singing in a large group can impact your brain and suggestibility for hours afterward. That just scares the shit out of me now because, like, I don’t want to put myself in a position to be strongly heavily influenced psychologically” (Megan).

Approximately one-third shared specific experiences of being hurt by spiritual communities or a person of faith before, during or after the sexual exploitation. This included religious abuse prior

*"Confused"*



Figure 69 Photovoice, Participant 14

to being trafficked, which Megan attributed to increased vulnerability for being exploited:

“I grew up in a religiously abusive group. I don’t feel like my parents were ever intentionally spiritually abusive but I do feel like there was such heavy self-blaming that was just intertwined in my upbringing of you’re not praying hard enough. You’re doing something wrong. You’re being tested. And, that really just, like, that impacted me so deeply and set the stage for everything that I went through for a decade” (Megan).

Participant 14 described being recruited by someone she met at a religious community.

“...Being at a church where I was seen – past and was recruited by a woman who sat beside me and preyed upon my vulnerabilities” (Participant 14).

Some discussed how traffickers claim to have religious backgrounds or use spiritual abuse during exploitation.

“And, they used the Bible to express that children are supposed to – so, one of the things I was told was the Bible says that children are supposed to obey their parents and, if you don’t obey what we say, then you’re going against what God says and – so, there was that religious element that was just so confusing to me and so hard for me to understand how I fit into the picture” (Participant 14).

“My first trafficker was Christian. His mother would take my kids to church with her so that I could go work on Sundays. And, she would come into my trafficker’s room – he had a room at her house. And, she would put a cross with oil on the walls and pray in his room, knowing what he’s doing, knowing that he’s helping pay her bills. And, then my second trafficker was Muslim and, so, he used a lot of verses and teachings to justify his abuse and exploitation” (Megan).

Participants reported being exploited by buyers with religious backgrounds.

“Like, a lot of my clients were pastors. I went to one of the biggest churches in my city and one of the worship pastors was my client. So, I think, definitely being trafficked and being bought by people who used the Bible as an excuse for their behavior definitely affected what I believe in and, so, like, I guess I never – after I got out, I tried to go to church. I tried to get involved with that stuff again and it’s never been the same ever since then and that, like, kills me inside because I know that I was raised better than that. But, you know, you can’t force something that’s not there” (Victoria).

“I was purchased by an elder at my childhood church and he didn’t know who I was because I hadn’t seen him in, like, ten years but I knew who he was. And, so, seeing that

and then knowing how I was treated when I got divorced and kind of ostracized from the church, it was just, like, oh, okay, so the buyers are elders of the church but me, as a divorced single mother, like, I'm the one that's, you know, kind of cast out.

Megan discussed being judged by Christians:

And, when you're in the life, like, a lot of times – I wish I would have saved these. It's like the one thing I wished I would have saved. You get a lot of, emails and text messages from people that are like, 'you're a whore, you're gonna burn in hell if you don't repent' and, then these bible verses. And, so, you just see this, absolutely horrible side of what spirituality and faith should be and, so, I think so many girls have been so hurt and so turned off by churches and religion in general, that it's just really hard to go into that space. Like, it's just another layer of the wound that needs to heal but I don't feel like we should be forced to make a decision of, like, do I need to conform to this and fully throw myself into it and, say I'm gonna believe it so that I can get services? Or, can that be something that, I educate myself on in my own time and process through and come to a decision at a later point in time. So, that's my religion rant" (Megan).

Finally, a portion of the survivors shared negative experiences with receiving services from faith based organizations: "...And seeing how a lot of faith-based organizations have just continued to hurt and exclude survivors that need help. Like, we have a very – like, my organization is not faith-based and we will not be because I feel like that's so exclusive from the beginning whether it's intended to be or not" (Megan).

## Chapter 12: Recommendations from Survivors

This study sought to amplify the voices of survivors' experiences particularly to inform and advise support persons, communities and organizations. Therefore it is pertinent to devote attention to the specific recommendations given by survivors to service providers, loved ones, community members, and other survivors, which will be highlighted in the following sections.

**Recommendations for Service Providers:** From their personal experiences, survivors were invited to share their specific recommendations and feedback that may benefit service providers. The following themes came from their responses.

The majority of participants expressed the **need for additional resources**. They recommended additional services in general that are educated on human trafficking and the impact of trauma. Repetitious themes included **access to housing, health care, employment and education**. Additional recommendations included offering short-term disability for victims immediately after exiting as well as a continuum of services, so that individuals can utilize resources without entering a shelter/residential program.

**Prevention Education:** “We need more services in general. Like, all the services we have are so over-taxed and, so, more funding would be great. And, I think, also I would like to see more general education about domestic sex trafficking so that survivors wouldn't face such stigma when we get out and I would love to see more prevention education. This is something I'm working on at the organization where I'm volunteering now – geared towards kids about like how to recognize grooming behavior and stuff like that but it's something that the organization – does but it's, like, such a small impact because it's one organization. There are some other organizations that are working on that but we're not anywhere near what I'd love to see which is like in every school, like, this be a mandatory part of the curriculum” (Participant 15).

**More Services:** “...Although I had a lot of people come alongside me, there weren't as many as I would have hoped. I think that I could have gotten to this part where I'm at a

lot easier if there was a lot more resources in that sense. And, I just wish that for any survivor that they would have that and that they wouldn't have to walk that alone...A stable environment. A safe environment. Being surrounded by people that understand and are willing to walk with them. Access to getting a job without feeling re-exploited, an opportunity. Education if they wanted. Education about being trafficked but also educating themselves to be in the world. Resources to help them heal. To teach themselves that they're valued, that they're priceless and that they're so much more worthy than they have been shown. Just a way out. An option that if you want to try to do this and get out, here's everything that you need" (Grace).

**Trauma-informed and Trafficking-informed Services:** "And, that's one of the things that I look for if somebody's referring someone I know, to a domestic violence organization, are they actually trauma-informed? Are they actually survivors? Do they actually know what trafficking is, you know? Because, the organization knows that did not have any of that" (Participant 15).

"I think, also, they should have human trafficking in a separate building than domestic violence because I had a situation where this girl – I just opened up in the support group in the shelter and then the next couple days she was like, I would never prostitute to feed my kids and I would never do this and do this. First of all, I wasn't even doing it to feed my son because he wasn't with me, so, they should be separate because people that aren't in it and aren't trained in this, don't understand and they won't understand. That's why I think a lot of people don't have sympathy. Courts don't even have sympathy because they don't get it. They weren't trained in this shit" (Participant 7).

**Immediate Assistance for Stabilization:** "Housing, education, employment. And, if, when they first get out – not in the condition to work but, you know how people have disability, short-term disability, or low income... But, more important than that, the first thing is, is a place to live because that's the number one thing that drives adult women, anyway, back into the life because a lot of times, the trafficker can provide housing. And, so, housing first, employment, and education" (Audrey).

The majority of participants also wished for **someone who would have intervened** or offered choices/resources, thus recommending more **outreach, awareness, as well as protecting the needs of at-risk children and youth**. Settings for these recommendations included schools, juvenile justice systems, prisons, rehabilitation systems, social service organizations and other settings that serve children and youth.

**Early Intervention/Response for Sexual Abuse:** “Even with the kids, knowing that almost 90 some percent of the people that have been trafficked have had some sort of sexual abuse. I work with kids, adolescents, and there’s so many signs there. There’s so many – I believe that every single woman that I was on the street with at some point had been sexually assaulted, sexually abused, emotionally abused – something like that. Just to identify these risk factors that all these women have that they don’t know what it could turn into” (Grace).

**Intervention:** “Had an intervention been earlier – it shouldn’t have gone as far as it did. I look at it now, and you think like, okay, so I stayed up all night, didn’t go to school. There was nobody intervening saying, like, what’s going on... I just really wished somebody was fighting for me. I really wish that, like I said, when I started slipping in school that somebody was just like, alarms are going off, what’s going on in the home, you know. Let’s get her what she needs or have somebody -- There’s just a lot of single parents and a lot of people that cannot watch their kids 24/7 and there’s a lot of loopholes that they can fall into, so, I think that if I were to see what would save the next person, it would be that. It’s just having that protection” (Kristine).

“...If you see something’s wrong or I’m not showing up for work anymore, if I’m not myself, like, you know, kinda want to get more involved, even if people don’t want it. I know I didn’t want it. I literally pushed people away, like, I’m fine, leave me alone. I kinda just, in a healthy way, made sure they’re okay. I feel like if there was someone on the outside that was like there, then I probably would have been fine in some way” (Emerald).

“I really wish that somebody had seen the trauma that was going on and had said something and had people who knew me back then say, I knew something wasn’t right. And, I’m so sorry I didn’t say anything. And, so, I really wish that people did say something. I wish social services had gotten involved. I wish I had been told – growing up, I was told that social services were bad, that they were out there to hurt me, that they were scary people. I wish that I knew otherwise. I wish that I had known that it was okay to ask for help” (Participant 14).

“Honestly, I wish somebody would have said anything at all. I wish anybody would have called out, like, inconsistencies. I wish somebody would have made eye contact with me and just pushed for, like, a little bit more information. I wish people had known to ask certain questions and, even if they failed, I wish they would have said something but I also wish that the survivor community would have known how to get in contact with me and shown me that there is life outside of the life because I didn’t know where to reach and I tried getting out multiple times” (Megan).

**Pursuit/Care:** “I wish that when I would get picked up as a juvenile for those crimes that the police hadn’t been so rude with me and I wished somebody would have asked me, like, who’s trafficking you? Who are you working for? Can we help you? And, I wish

that, I don't know. I can't think of anything else. I wish that somebody had said that" (Participant 10).

**Offered Resources/options:** "I wish I knew about this because I didn't, not until I went to jail and that's the sad part. You don't know anything about these programs and shit until you go to jail or you're getting arrested for prostitution or something like that" (Participant 7).

The majority of participants recommended **service providers who are supportive, truthful, committed and understanding of the experiences and challenges of survivors.**

Grace described how having a passion or care for this specific work is important, but not enough. More than compassion, there is a need for education and understanding of the specific needs of trafficking survivors.

"And, I think that just every person that I've come in contact with that's been involved in the human trafficking movement has – they have a heart for it and I think that's super important for people that have been called to do this type of thing and just understanding that we're human and we're still very vulnerable and we still have triggers and we still have things that bother us but just providing some sort of support" (Grace).

Cat elaborated on this concept, expressing the fluctuation of trafficking survivors and the importance of support persons being patient and understanding of this inevitable process.

"...Sometimes...survivors go through stages in their recovery and their healing. You can be four years and feel like, wow, I really got this together. I've really got myself together. I'm really excited and hopeful, and then – it doesn't have to be any one thing. Something can happen and you feel like you're right back down into that feeling of hopelessness, the feeling of guilt, the feeling of worthlessness. It comes in stages. And, working with survivors, I think people really need to understand that, it's just like grief... I really feel that with survivors, the behavior – it doesn't have to be a substance abuse but the behaviors are almost – they're addictive – they're addictive behaviors and they need to be addressed sometimes, like that. Sometimes women need to be pulled. Sometimes you have to go alongside of a woman for a job interview. Sometimes you have to say, I'm gonna sit with you and we're gonna fill out this application, things like that. I think just in the beginning stages of coming out of the life, you need to be loved aggressively, which I know I was provided with that. I was loved aggressively. But, I think that the biggest – one of the biggest challenges that are happening are the stability portion of

having been stable, not feeling like, oh, this is a good thing. At any minute it's going to be taken away.

I just think that patience is important just to not take it personal, because sometimes when you become involved – when you start caring for survivors, you can't help but allow yourself to, become attached or feeling, or those things and sometimes it can be very frightening – worrying. But, I think that when you really care about – when a woman survivor starts to see this person's not going anywhere, they really care because most of the time they're dealing with abandonment and they're dealing with a whole variety of other things. And, they see a constant – constant person and figure, it helps to open up and trust. So, I just – I always tell people just love – just love her, don't have any expectations – don't have any expectations because, you can't. You just gotta love them where they are in that moment where they're at and just keep loving them where they're at” (Cat).

Victoria specifically mentioned the importance of setting boundaries when working with survivors, because it is an exception to the experiences of the victimization.

“I think setting boundaries is one of the most important things to do because we've spent so long having our boundaries violated and, so, having someone who's, like, this is how our relationship is going to be. I have these boundaries. I'm not going to enable you but I'm going to fight as hard for you as you are willing to fight for yourself and not just, like, enforcing boundaries but teaching boundaries. Like, this is how you do this. If this comes up” (Victoria).

She proceeded to share examples of the specific type of support that would be beneficial for a survivor.

“And, not just like coming alongside a survivor but really like carrying a survivor and walking with them. Like, showing up at court dates. Like, celebrating even the littlest, tiny things. Like, I made my first court payment and it was the biggest deal ever. Celebrating the huge things. Just showing up and just being there and being human and letting someone know, like, hey, like, it's okay if you're scared. It's okay if you can't sleep alone. It's okay if you need the light on. It's okay if you can't sit towards the back of the door. Like, saying these things are okay and acknowledging that you're human, like, you've been through something traumatic but, like, let's not necessarily replace those memories but let's make new ones and so you can see, like, yeah, this happened but, like, look what else happened to redeem that” (Victoria).

Participant 10 additionally described the importance of understanding what to expect,

specifically lack of trust, and how to respond to this.

“I would say that they have to be very patient and very – I’m looking for the word – very consistent and straightforward and just to be ready to listen and ready to face somebody that’s not going to trust you and probably on defense, or, probably like not even wanting to leave the life at all, yet.”

Participant 7 recognized the value of someone who shows genuine care.

“She helps me a lot, you know. I have her personal phone number if I ever need to contact her. Like, that night with the girl situation when I called her at like 9 o’clock at night and she answered the phone. She really cares about what she does and, that’s another thing. You have to care about what you’re doing. It can’t just be a fucking job, you know. You have to have heart for what you’re doing.”

Participant 9 described a genuine, transparent, real demeanor that is useful with trafficking survivors:

“Meet them where they are. Be open-minded to not having sympathy but empathy with their situation. You can be – I say, be very honest with them because I can’t – I don’t do no sugar coating. I give it to you in the raw because that’s what the street’s gonna do. If you continue to stay – there’s no oh, well, this, this – no, no, baby, this is the way it is. And, you know, I’m so like 100 real with these ladies and I think that’s where our connection come in because I not been – tell you -- I can’t, you know. So, I would just say just be honest with them and real. They want real in this. They don’t want someone – because they look at you like you crazy. But, they don’t want anyone that’s just gonna be – I don’t know. It’s something that they like don’t just beat around the bush with it. Just tell it them the way it is because that’s what we used to. That’s all it is. It’s just, you know, with the decision you make, it’s gonna be something to fall behind it and it’s just being 100 and being real and honest.”

A key, repetitious theme from the majority specifically recommended having **someone who will believe in the capacity of survivors.**

“I wish I had a mentor, a positive role model that believed in me. Even if I was still on the street and didn’t come out – made time, ‘come down the street, I’ll buy you dinner tonight. Don’t come on the track where you are but before you go on the track, let’s meet at McDonald’s’, you know what I mean? Just someone who believed in me and didn’t give up on me and sort it out with me”(Audrey).

“Sometimes you have to kinda give a little bit more just to show some of the ladies because that’s all they want is to be loved. They want to be – have somebody believe in

them, you know what I'm saying, and, you know, give them opportunity to make some decision themselves but then, at the same time, you know, you steppin' in, too... the place that kinda helped build me up mentally, you know. You know, like, just giving me encouragement and trying to motivate me and just, like I said the unconditional where they wasn't judging, you know. It was a lot. I can't really explain what I was going through at the time because, whatever it was, it felt good. So, I just knew I wanted more of that, you know" (Participant 9).

"To me that's like an organization that's doing it well because they're going, how can we really meet those needs on a long-haul approach and really help you be the best person that you can be and be the person that you want to achieve. And, so, I really believe I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for that program. I really believe that I wouldn't be able to be successful if it wasn't for people believing in me" (Participant 14).

They warned about the **dangers of re-exploitation or re-traumatization** and advocated for **listening to survivors and offering choice**. Examples of re-exploitation included posting their picture, utilizing them as speakers without proper compensation, or not assessing for their readiness in involvement with leadership and public speaking opportunities.

"Don't re-exploit them by posting their picture or doing anything like that. Like, allow them to have the honor and dignity that their story deserves...I think sometimes in like a speaker situation, when you're trying to get somebody to speak, I think a lot of times the woman – the survivor is wanting to do it, one, because they might need the financial part from it because it's not easy to make a living out here but they also want to do it because they want to share their story and want to share their hope, but I think sometimes it needs to be looked into a little more before you go ahead and say, let's do this kinda thing because – yeah, they're excited they want to do it but do it in a way that's not going to re-exploit them and be like, oh, here's our survivor and then not kinda follow through on the part that you said" (Grace).

"I guess I get concerned about re-exploitation and I definitely was re-exploited and I feel like, right now, human trafficking is this hot social justice topic issue and it is easy for victims to have been victimized, to be re-exploited in whatever means – it might be financial means. It might be being the poster child of the organization but not receiving compensation for what they're being asked to do or the story that they're being asked to share or they could be re-exploited in the sense of them not being treated like a human being should be treated and them not being given the resources that they actually need" (Participant 14).

“My community specifically, is struggling with understanding what it looks like to empower survivors and to welcome us at the table, so, my community, specifically, have not been welcomed with open arms, necessarily, on the task force...what that looks like to re-exploit versus empower... That’s what you see as not being welcomed in unless you’re telling your story. And, it’s slowly – there will be a professional at an agency that will, like, can I pick your brain, like as another service provider but also as a survivor. Like, how can we do this? But then not wanting to pay for that either. They just want me to do good work because I should care about doing good work. But, I also care about feeding the kids” (Megan).

Examples of re-traumatization included lack of choice within residential settings or programs, coercion to testify, and lack of acknowledgement of the survivor’s opinions and desires. Their examples revealed a lack of understanding about trauma or trafficking can lead to re-traumatization. A continued summarized expression of several participants was:

***Listen to Survivors.*** This included listening to survivors and what they wanted and needed in terms of goals and services, giving testimony, and organizational development and policies.

Megan shares an example, based on her current experience working with other survivors.

“I worked with this one client who was basically being, like, bullied into applying for jobs in order to qualify for services. And, the service provider was, like, how many jobs have you applied for this week? And, she was, like, none. I’m homeless. It’s 4 o’clock. I don’t know where I’m going to sleep tonight. And, they were like, okay, so, how many jobs do you think you can apply for by the end of this week. And, she was like – I’m sitting there, like, gripping the chair and I was, like, they’re not even listening. She was, like, I don’t know where I’m going to sleep tonight, like, I can’t even have this conversation about applying for jobs right now.”

Cat described her own experience with lack of choice, recommending the importance of listening and considering the individual needs of each survivor:

“The only time I didn’t feel that way was when I was in a residential home. That was the only time that I felt like I didn’t have choices, you know, and that’s not a really good place to be with a survivor because she didn’t have choices before she came – before she got out of the life. She had no choices. So, yeah. I felt that way. But, for the majority -- that was probably in the beginning. And, I think, you know, that it wasn’t intentional – I don’t feel that it was intentional, I just feel like sometimes people don’t know what to do, you know, and they want to protect you and they want you to be safe and they feel like

almost – they’re keeping you safe from yourself and it’s such a complex – there are so many – it’s so complex, you know. It’s you keeping her safe from herself. It’s keeping her safe from her trafficker. It’s keeping, you know, the community safe. There’s so many levels to it that it’s just like, how do you break it down and what is the right thing? And, I really don’t think that, as much as we can probably do, there’s really gonna ever be a right way. I think it depends on the individual and what their needs are and just listening to their voice, you know. It really is an individual process.”

Participant 10 recommended not pressuring girls to testify.

“Pressuring girls to testify is not helpful ever because it’s not helpful for our safety and just the triggering, like, me being triggered, started me on a rampage using drugs to where I ended up going to jail and being in jail in six months away from my kid and having to go to rehab because I had a drug problem now. That has not been helpful. I just think that if a girl doesn’t want to testify, like, unless a girl comes to you and says I’m ready to testify, I don’t think anybody should be trying to get a girl to testify. I think if they ask the survivor and don’t lie to them and be straight forward and telling them if you talk to the police and gave them a statement, you’re going to be subpoenaed. I think that would have been nice – just not lying about the process.”

Participant 14 highlighted the importance of choice in all programming for survivors, and as a crucial aspect of trauma-informed care.

“I’m under the impression, right now, that unless that it is something a client requests, then as part of their journey and part of the journey that they want to take, that it should not be made a requirement of a program...So, really, like, just meeting the needs where the needs were at. Listen to the survivor. If you’re trauma-informed, you’re gonna listen to the voices of survivors. You cannot be survivor-informed without listening to the voices of survivors.

...I would love to encourage service providers – organizations for human survivors to sit down and get feedback from the individuals that they’re providing services to, because the way that I see things might be very different than the way that they see things. I’ve experienced some very horrific experiences with service providers that has actually deeply wounded me and has made it even harder to trust -- organizations that might actually be very well-intentioned and actually really be able to help me -- and, so, I think like really listening. I guess I would love to encourage continuing education because they like to think that they know everything and, typically, they don’t know shit. That’s really hard because it’s like, you won’t listen to me, won’t listen to my voice and you refuse to go out and get education to make you better.”

Megan elaborated on the importance of offering choice within social services:

“A lot of service providers are not providing social services. They’re providing social control. And, they are creating so many barriers to be able to access services so, for example, we want to open up affordable housing or HUD housing, to people that have been chronically homeless but it’s a requirement that you have your driver’s license, your birth certificate, your social security card. You don’t have any felonies, you don’t have any substance abuse in the past six months. And, I’m, like, most people are homeless because of one or more of those reasons. So, like, you can’t create all these barriers because what’s gonna end up happening is, like, you’re searching out the ideal people to look good for your numbers. You’re not actually doing the work that you say you are doing. You need to be going after those, like, difficult cases and helping people get all those things because, if they have all those things, then they can’t get into housing. And, so, looking at, like, all of those just creating barriers to entry or exit and then shifting from this, like, service-provider-directed services – so, like, the service providers are at the top and the clients are at the bottom and, they’re mandating, like, you need to be following these exact six steps on this timeline or you’re the failure, versus, recognizing that everybody is on a journey and, as service providers, it’s our job to come alongside them and walk with them on that journey....shifting that to how can I walk with you? What are your needs today? And, that’s one of my favorite things to say. What’s your top three needs today? And, maybe I can’t meet all of them myself or as our agency but I can get you connected with other providers in our community that can help meet one of those needs, too. And, when those three needs – if you’re focused on those three needs, whether I think they are important or not, is fucking irrelevant. That’s what that person needs. So, help them meet those needs.”

Some specific services are recommended such as **intervention in the prison system and substance use rehabilitation system**. Grace was particularly passionate about this based on her own experience, seeing the relationship between trafficking and women who are substance dependent as well as women in the prison system.

“I think somehow incorporating it in the rehab system because, yeah, there’s a lot of women that have been trafficked that haven’t used drugs and alcohol and that hasn’t been a part of their story, but, for the women that are affected with the drug and alcohol piece, having the therapist understand that, that is two different entities. Like, the prostitution – that’s just a symptom of the drug and alcohol and to treat it as that, not just treat the drug and alcohol cause there’s a lot more to it. ...Meeting them in jail system because you’re not – you can try to reach them on the street and stuff like that but jail is the only time you get to sit down and to have some kind of education group or some questionnaire that says, have these things happened to you? Or, if they have, it has a name. There’s something that you can do about it kind of

thing. Just a way to like remove that – like I said, it’s like a known thing, like out of everybody in jail – if you’re a drug addict, everybody knows that you suck dick for your drugs.”

Additional specific recommendations for services included **life skills training, family resources, and education opportunities.**

“It’s okay – I’m coming into this job where I’m making \$8.00 an hour and it’s taking forever to make this amount of money when I could have made that money in 20 minutes. And, so, like somebody to – to teach me like how to budget that small amount of money that I was getting...Job interviews. I went through a couple of great programs. This one guy taught me how to write a resume, how to explain my story in an interview in a way that wouldn’t be degrading cause I was like, how am I supposed to explain these prostitution charges” (Grace).

“Opportunities for educational grants and work. Education and work can go in any order for some. Housing is always number one but for some, it’s housing and work, especially to learn how to work. And, if you have the – if you have Section 8 or whatever – what’s that program that houses women in the life – the process. This other woman was suggesting, when women are in that place and maybe a year after if they’re still working, maybe introduce them – you know, because college isn’t for everyone. Maybe starting them off with a class. See if there’s something. Because even a class for a semester or two, they’re gonna make up their own mind if this is for me, I want to further my education or, you know this school thing ain’t working. If that’s not working, I think a really good training program” (Audrey).

A small group of participants recommended **coordination of services and insuring service providers do not work in isolation.**

“I feel like there are so many organizations and you’re all trying to get grants and – it’s almost like you’re spinning the wheel whereas, if the government had, you know, one central place in each state where they had protocol on how to handle cases and the resources were all there, I think that would be more ideal and it would be under the government umbrella. Because I feel like there are so many organizations. They’re just always getting like maybe – whatever money they get, they’re spinning wheels because they’re doing what somebody else has already done. They’re doing it their own way” (Kristine).

“Savior complexes really didn’t help anybody and, so, that actually turns me off of organizations when they think that they’re all that I need and through that, promote isolation. So, that’s another thing. I don’t know, be inclusive. Do they get upset or do they feel hurt? Do they feel kind of like a butt – like they’ve been bitten in the gut if a survivor expresses to them that they also receive services in another area. Somebody

with a savior complex will think they can provide everything and that nothing else is needed” (Participant 14).

### **Recommendations for Medical Professionals:**

Participant 14 focused on her positive experience with medical professionals, highlighting her belief in the value of trauma-informed care.

“I had an amazing anesthesiologist who, even to this day, I smile when I think about her. She understood trauma and she actually called me the night before my first surgery and she talked for a whole hour. She was like, I need you to be familiar with my voice. I’m just going to read you a story so that you know what you’re going to be waking up to. It’s going to be okay. I will be talking to you throughout the whole procedure. I just want you to start to know what’s going on and, when I got to the hospital – she actually came an hour early. So, this is incredible. She would do this on her own time – so, she created her schedule so she wouldn’t have any surgeries that morning and came to the hospital a whole hour early to come into my room to meet me face-to-face, to have a conversation with me.

And, she’s like, okay, I want to help you. I’m going to do your hair for you. So, she actually braided my hair which was like, just helped me feel so safe just because she was going out of her way to make sure that I was going to be okay...Once again, I’m having medical services that understand trauma is a resource that I don’t think a lot of victims get that I’ve been very much grateful to have and have had some incredible doctors who, in a very trauma-informed way, have met my health needs to actually get me to a place where today I am able to engage in a very healthy manner. And, compared to where I’ve been, I’m very healthy today...So, there are some of the services I received but there is a medical program here where I live that’s specifically for victims of human trafficking now.”

### **Recommendations for Clinicians:**

Two-thirds of the participants have participated in counseling. Emerging from the data, they provide useful feedback for clinicians. The majority mentioned it being helpful when they felt comfortable with the clinician. For example, if the clinician did not avoid asking about the history of exploitation and gave an impression that they were willing to hear about it.

“Even sitting down in a counseling session, like early on, I’m not gonna touch that subject because it’s taboo. It’s not something somebody wants to hear about but it’s something that needs to be talked about...to be a little more open to letting somebody talk about it. It’s not something a girl is really gonna share unless somebody kinda pries

at it. I don't think someone's gonna be like, oh, by the way – so, I mean, to kinda open that gate but also don't pry it open too quick” (Grace)

“Therapy. Lots and lots and lots of therapy and talking. Just talking about it and acknowledging it and not letting it be the elephant in the room” (Victoria).

“I wish that I had met my therapist sooner. I wish that – there's something that she would ask me that kind of jarred me and made me realize that what was going on was really not a good thing and was that what you really want your life to look like” (Participant 15).

Characteristics of clinicians that were mentioned included demonstrating **teachability, patience, understanding and the long-term commitment** the clinician made.

“She's a student... I took about five years in the safety and stability stage before I moved into trauma processing. And, my therapist was so patient and is so patient with me. I was really grateful for her to be able to walk into what she knew was going to be a long-term relationship and knowing that I have a very severe trauma history and knowing that – she doesn't make money off of me. She is fully committed to see me be the person I want to be and walking that journey with me no matter what it looks like and, so, she also inspires me because she gives me a lot of hope that someday I can – when things are really hard – she gives me the hope that, yeah, this is just right now but I can move beyond this and, I really truly can become an incredible professional in the field. She's been through a lot with me but I'm really grateful for her commitment” (Participant 14).

The majority also mentioned the **importance of trauma-informed care** or someone willing to be educated on trauma and the specific nuances of trauma in the trafficking experience.

“Recently, I went through a few different therapists here trying to find a new therapist because I go to someone and they'd be like, oh, I know what trafficking is but, the vision they had in their head was the person kidnapped from overseas and chained up in a basement and, they had no understanding of domestic sex trafficking and weren't really willing to learn. I am willing to teach people if they're willing to learn. But, running into that, kind of – misconceptions about trafficking and people just not being very educated about it has been a really – a tough thing just in accessing health care in general and, particularly mental health care and primary care physicians and, for a while there before I found my current psychiatrist, I went through hell with that psychiatrist who didn't know what they were doing with trafficking. And, so, that's probably one of the biggest barriers as well. I think if more service providers were really self-educated about chronic trauma and about all the nuances of domestic sex trafficking, it would be profoundly helpful. Having access to educated service providers is such a huge thing” (Participant 15).

Specific recommended topics to address with trafficking survivors included **womanhood, sexuality, the relationship with drug and alcohol use and women in the commercial sex industry.**

“Get educated on it, to have that understanding...And the whole idea of just what it means to be a woman. That needs to be addressed. There’s so many things about – that, that lifestyle takes away from you” (Grace).

“I think somehow incorporating it in the rehab system, because there’s a lot of women that have been trafficked that haven’t used drugs and alcohol and that hasn’t been a part of their story, but, for the women that are affected with the drug and alcohol piece, having the therapist understand that, that is two different entities. Like, the prostitution – that’s just a symptom of the drug and alcohol and to treat it as that, not just treat the drug and alcohol cause there’s a lot more to it” (Grace).

“One of the things that I would definitely suggest wherever this goes and people that are working with women or are coming out, to really work on – find out what’s up with their sexual health. And, when I say, their sexual health, not STDs, that kind of thing – is their sex life healthy? What is their sex life like now” (Audrey)?

A small portion also mentioned the benefit of learning specific **techniques for coping with trauma.**

“She was very calm which was very nice and she taught me a lot of, like, grounding techniques. She did a ton of that to literally regulate my systems. And, then, establishing that trust over, like, six months before we did EMDR. And, I always felt like she could read when I needed to be pushed a little bit further. So, recognizing that, yes, talk therapy would be great. We could do this for another three years but, like, let’s try EMDR.

That was another thing my therapist did really good. She always explained to me, like, I needed to know why my body was doing things. So, she would explain to me actually what happens when you have a panic attack. Your breathing is short and part of your brain shuts off and you shift into, like, panic survival mode. And, so, being able to understand why my body was responding the way it was, helped me become more mindful of when I started doing that.

So, that’s what my brain felt like. I would go to an EMDR session and I would come home and barely, like, eat, walk, function. And, I would just sleep for twelve hours and the next day I would feel really foggy but then the next day, that silt had started to settle differently. And, so, I would do, like, these little mental checks of, like, okay, we processed this trauma. I think through it now – how do I feel? And, I wouldn’t feel, like, my chest tightening – my breathing. I would just feel, like, no, I recognize that happened to me but it’s in the past. And, so, all of a sudden, it started to feel less and less. Like, I

was just carrying all this trauma on me. It started to feel like it was something back there that absolutely has an impact on where I'm at but I wasn't still living in the midst of it"(Megan).

A small portion experienced with a clinician receiving **practical support for exiting the trafficking situation.**

"She helped me as far as getting my phone number changed and my name changed and everything and stuff like that and services are so much more needed beyond the basics of just this is how you deal with, like, the father -- thirteen years of financial abuse" (Participant 15).

Another small portion valued **the freedom of not discussing the trauma of childhood or the trafficking exploitation.**

"I never really touched in on the deep stuff and the childhood stuff, but it was just like present stuff I was dealing with so that was helpful. Just to show up and have to be accountable was huge, too. And, realizing if I just showed up today, I could show up tomorrow" (Grace).

### **Recommendations for the Criminal Justice System:**

Two-thirds of participants shared their experiences with the criminal justice system. A few of them provided feedback for consideration. The common theme of feedback was having **training and awareness** about the victimization of those in sex trafficking and sexual exploitation so that this will then inform their response of offering resources, showing understanding, using proper terminology and not responding punitively towards women who are indeed victims.

"It just baffles me that every time I got arrested for street prostitution, that there wasn't a woman in the back of the car saying, hey, you're better than this. There's options out there...And, any support from the system – the prison system that didn't make me feel like I was this horrible number and just this person that is drug addicted and a nobody. There was no contact in that sense that – even for a judge to give you a prostitution charge and – like why didn't anybody say, hey, I know you don't want to live like this" (Grace).

"The prosecuting attorney, the DA, when I went in for sentencing, she told me I'm not offering her a lesser deal even through all the trauma that she's been through because she

could have left the trafficking and she chose not to. So, her words will forever haunt me. I repeat them over in my head sometimes. So, I have a felony. So, I pled guilty to that while my traffickers were sitting in the back of the courtroom. And, I knew better than to say anything about it.

So, it was definitely, like, a heavy process. And, I kind of like felt like the justice system had failed me. All the cops had failed me. Like, I hated cops. I hated anyone that had to do with law enforcement. And, so, I just felt like the world had screwed me over and that I really wasn't going to get anywhere ever again. And, so, they're still running free.

They still have not been caught...But, everyone just kind of gave up investigating it because I was over the age of 20. Like, I wasn't a kid. The city that I lived in and was trafficked in, they have so many organizations for minors being trafficked. There's none within like 100-mile radius for adults. They don't see – they see adults as prostitutes...I'm not a huge fan of law enforcement. I'm not a huge fan of lawyers or judges or anything like that because the justice system has completely failed me. But, at this point, I'm, like, okay, let's teach them so there's not another repeat of what mine was like. More help in the judicial system. 110 percent.

I definitely think there needs to be more empathetic lawyers and judges and prosecutors who keep the word prostitute out of their mouths and who definitely are more trained on this whole subject...I am trying to train all these people on knowing better and using the right language and speaking better and, so, that's definitely something that I hope that this world comes to, is that eventually, there's a change in the system where there's more stuff in place to offer services and offer programs and help someone else so that they can get out" (Victoria).

A small portion gave feedback **on providing more options of resources:**

"I think court-order sometimes and, even probation, can be very good in some people lives...Today it's so many help and services out there today that even a lot of young ladies that I run into do not know nothing about them and I get that. It's like, I said, have you ever heard of this? Have you ever heard of this? Matter of fact, have you ever even heard of being trafficked? Do you know what that means and so forth and so forth? So, it's a lot of unknown knowledge out there for some of these ladies and, with the laws sometimes, they don't make you know better because they just stick 'em somewhere, compared to sticking them in the places that is more beneficial for them in their situation that they're going through" (Participant 9).

"Because the program is completely cut off your life or, like, there's jail. I don't know what jail is like but I'm pretty sure that's another form of cutting off your life. But, like, I don't know. I feel like there should be more options" (Emerald).

One participant expressed how helpful it was to have someone offer **pro bono legal resources.**

"I needed legal help. I received legal help so that's one of the services I did receive. And, still my attorney is an amazing person who is very highly invested in me. I'm completely pro bono, and I would never have been able to receive the representation that

she has given me. If it wasn't for her, going I'm going to make a difference and I'm going to use my skillset to make a difference in this area. And, so, I really believe that we need more attorneys to step up and say, hey, you know what? There's people out there who are very vulnerable and they need legal assistance and they need representation to protect them from the system. And, so, I'm very grateful for my attorneys. I've had multiple attorneys for different areas. So, definitely, that has been a huge resource that has been provided that has changed my life and *I believe attorneys can change a victim's life*" (Participant 14).

Another mentioned the benefit in her state of having her **charges during the time of exploitation expunged** and receiving free legal services to assist her in this process. Grace gave credit to a judge who believed in her and chose an alternative program for her rather than incarceration. "That judge was like the first person to believe in me and to see something in me that I did not see."

Grace also recommended **intervention for women in the prison system**.

"Meeting them in jail system because you're not – you can try to reach them on the street and stuff like that but jail is the only time you get to sit down and to have some kind of education group or some questionnaire that says, have these things happened to you? Or, if they have, it has a name. There's something that you can do about it kind of thing. Just a way to like remove that – like I said, it's like a known thing, like out of everybody in jail – if you're a drug addict, everybody knows that you suck dick for your drugs."

**Recommendations for Community Members:** Research participants were asked what advice they have for community members who have a desire to help trafficking survivors. Among their responses, the majority commented on people who are **willing to intervene in the lives of young people and inquire when observing concerns or changes**.

"Had an intervention been earlier – it shouldn't have gone as far as it did. I look at it now, and you think like, okay, so I stayed up all night, didn't go to school. There was nobody intervening saying, like, what's going on... I just really wished somebody was fighting for me. I really wish that, like I said, when I started slipping in school that somebody was just like, alarms are going off, what's going on in the home, you know. Let's get here what she needs or have somebody -- There's just a lot of single parents and a lot of people that cannot watch their kids 24/7 and there's a lot of loopholes that they can fall into, so, I think that if I were to see what would save the next person, it would be that. It's just having that protection" (Kristine)?

“If you see something’s wrong or I’m not showing up for work anymore, if I’m not myself, like, you know, kinda want to get more involved, even if people don’t want it. I know I didn’t want it. I literally pushed people away, like, I’m fine, leave me alone. I kinda just, in a healthy way, made sure they’re okay. I feel like if there was someone on the outside that was like there, then I probably would have been fine in some way (Emerald).

“I wish people would have taken the time to notice. I, as a kid, just because of everything I had gone through I pushed away a lot of people and I just wish that there would have been people who would have stayed and who would have wanted to see what I made out of my life because after the trafficking, I had no friends left” (Victoria).

Half of the participants also mentioned ways that individuals can offer **useful and understanding support of the needs of survivors**. They highlight the importance of understanding the impact of trauma and showing respect and listening versus making assumptions.

“Because I know a lot of people get excited about helping others and somebody who hasn’t been through it kinda tries to overwhelm you with stuff and just kinda bombard you and not really listen to what you need. So, I guess, have a clear understanding of what they’re looking for, where they’re trying to go, not just assuming. Giving them the respect and the voice that they have now to advocate for themselves in that way...And, I think that just every person that I’ve come in contact with that’s been involved in the human trafficking movement has – they have a heart for it and I think that’s super important for people that have been called to do this type of thing and just understanding that we’re human and we’re still very vulnerable and we still have triggers and we still have things that bother us but just providing some sort of support” (Grace).

“Be understanding with the situation. You know, you have to have a certain kind of personality to deal with this. Like, you have to not judge anybody on where they come from because, you know, people that are in this come from all different places, even if they never were on drugs, but, you know, if you have something against people that are on drugs, don’t do it. Don’t do it” (Participant 7).

Many survivors discussed the need for **tangible, daily support**. “And, not just like coming alongside a survivor but really like carrying a survivor and walking with them. Like, showing up at court dates. Like, celebrating even the littlest, tiny things. Like, I made my first court payment and it was the biggest deal ever. Celebrating the huge things. Don’t walk away. Listen. Ask questions. Don’t just turn the other ear you know, and act like nothing’s going on. If you suspect something is happening, something

is happening... Coming alongside people who are willing to sit with me in that and willing to talk about it. That's the only way that I've been able to deal with it" (Victoria).

Survivors described **family-like acknowledgement**. "Some of the gaps that we saw were all the years that I went through birthdays – the years that I went through not only birthdays but Christmases and holidays and I had nobody acknowledge that I was even there. And, I went through many years growing up without having any gifts or without having an acknowledgement. And, also, too, in recovery I went through many years without receiving any acknowledgement of those days. And, so, we came up with a program that I'd provide survivors of human trafficking with holiday gifts, with acknowledgement of birthdays, with acknowledgement of happy days. So, I sent out a lot of cards" (Participant 14).

Finally, they expressed ways to **raise awareness** to impact the greater system in which trafficking occurs.

**System Change:** "Trying to train all these people on knowing better and using the right language and speaking better and, so, that's

definitely something that I hope that this world comes to, is that eventually, there's a change in the system where there's more stuff in place to offer services and offer programs and help someone else so that they can get out (Victoria).

**Prevention Education:** "Awareness. They have awareness for everything else, drug awareness, shit like that. It's the same shit. Schools. I don't know what else you would do. You would just have to start at school before any of that shit would even come up because, I mean, how else are you gonna reach people... Don't think that you're untouchable because I thought I was untouchable. I really thought I would never do this shit and I ended up right here. Anybody is touchable" (Participant 7).

**Identification:** "Communities are getting an education. We're talking about human trafficking on a global level, on a global platform. And, so, as we do more of that I believe that people are now starting to have the ability to see things that are seen as red flags and people are now learning what to do in those situations. So, I'm hoping that the tides are changing. I hope that with every recovery that's made, that it is making a difference because I believe that one person whose, like, husband helps has made a

*"I've watched Cardi B below up from a 'stripper' on social media to reality tv to her musical career. I have mixed feelings because I think it's awesome she has been able to exit the sex industry and break down societal stereotypes but I also see younger girls thinking that this truly can be a path to success for everyone. This sign was at a coffee shop here in rural CO and I found it interesting that her music and culture have really hit mainstream."*



**Figure 70 Photovoice Participant, Megan**

difference. So, yeah. I wish, I can't wish for something that people wouldn't have known how to do. So, but I can wish for that" (Participant 14).

### **Recommendations for Loved Ones:**

All participants shared feedback of what was helpful or not helpful from family members and loved ones. The majority of participants expressed either desire or appreciation for family and loved ones **who intervened, showed support and did not give up on them.**

"I think that having the parental support was good. Do whatever possible it is to intervene. You cannot give up on them. It isn't what it appears. I think that you really have to look for the help and do whatever is necessary – law enforcement...It's just having that support and not having people give up on you" (Kristine).

"Just loving them, listening. If they need a ride to an appointment, take them. If they're saying they need this, listen to them. They're not just saying it. Look up different ways that you can help. Really, just love and support them where they're at is really what it is" (Grace).

"Friends and family usually check up on each other and in that long time, I didn't. No one reached out to me and I didn't reach out to anyone else...I just wish some of them did stay around" (Emerald).

"They always told me to never give up and they always supported me even when I did wrong decisions. They still supported me and they never gave up...Just stay encouraged and never give up" (Participant 3).

"My sister was my biggest cheerleader and was the first person I told and was super – it devastated her but she was very supportive. She never blamed me in any way for anything related to it" (Participant 15).

Approximately one-third recommended that family members **not talk about the past with judgment.**

"...To not like always get so stuck on the past with them because there's times we'd be sitting at the dinner table and my mom would bring up something I did in my addiction or when I wasn't home – oh, remember that, kind of thing. And, I'd already have enough guilt on my plate. I'm already trying to like save my life here and you just gotta keep knocking me down. So, just kind of like during the healing process, try their best not to throw in daggers if you don't have to" (Grace).

"To be very consistent and very patient and also to be very non-judgmental and not to make comments, like my grandmother. She will say a lot of the time, I came to this

country with nothing and I was never a prostitute. Things like that are just uncalled for and I would highly advise nobody -- families giving comments like that” (Participant 10).

“Just be real supportive and continue to encourage and just be there because, for the survivors, they still – life still goes on. Challenges still come across. And just be there with the open arm. I do have one that wants to keep me like – always mention that something with the past – I remember – I don’t want to hear that. It’s a negativity, so, with those types right there and especially if it’s family members. You love them but you keep them at a distance” (Participant 9).

Approximately one-third expressed the need for family members to **become educated** so that they can understand the experiences and needs of survivors.

“I think education for them, also. There’s times I remember having conversations with my mom and like talking about this happened to me and this happened to me and she would just sit there like – and have nothing to say because, I mean, there’s really not much you can say. So, just learning how you can support the person” (Grace)

“Understanding your partner’s triggers. There are sexual triggers that could bring somebody back in that sense. And, just being sensitive to how they’re feeling or how they’re acting. Even social settings. There are certain things that might make her a certain way and just taking the time to understand and hear what could possibly put her in that kind of situation and also that it’s not you. It has nothing to do with how much that woman loves you or doesn’t love you. It has to do with her and that, if she is triggered during a sexual experience or something like that, it’s not you, it’s her” (Grace).

“Love them unconditionally and don’t stigmatize them that they’ve been through that. Don’t ever victim-blame. Don’t call women bitches and whores and – and if men talk that way or anybody talks that way, don’t go along with it. Anti-bullying from childhood, I mean, don’t accept it. Stand up for each other. Love each other and understand that a lot of times the victim is gonna shut down and they can’t even speak because it’s so horrible. They don’t want to relive every minute. I didn’t speak. I was actually almost – I can’t think of the word – catatonic, I think it’s called. You can’t even talk to anybody because you don’t know who you can trust” (Participant 18).

“For loved ones, I would say, be a student of the survivor because what you see today is not going to be the person that you see tomorrow or in five years. And, the people who stuck it out in my life and who have truly – I see as being major people in my life, are the people who have been the people who are able to grow with me. People who love me very deeply will say to me is how much I have grown and how much I’ve matured and be able to walk that life with somebody...And, so, keep on being a student. Don’t give up. You truly are able to impact individuals deeply” (Participant 14).

One survivor shared the specific ways her sister and father offered support, by

encouraging what they wanted to see more of in her and her life.

“I asked her how did you go through that process and she said ‘I supported the things I wanted to see more of from you’. And, she was, like, ‘that was initially from my own healthy boundaries, not getting caught up in your drama and your bullshit but also recognizing that positive reinforcement piece’. So, she was, like, for example, ‘I don’t want to go party with you and, your girlfriends. That’s not a healthy thing for me to do but I also don’t want to see you doing that’. So, she was, like, so ‘I just wouldn’t go do those things with you but she said but when your daughter’s birthday party – you had the birthday party, I’m gonna show up for my niece’s birthday party and enjoy that time with you guys’. My dad does that, too. Like, he will support wholeheartedly, anything that he sees as being a positive empowering thing. He’s all in and anything that he doesn’t, he doesn’t feel the need to, like, lecture or disapprove of verbally. He just doesn’t engage in it. And, so, I think it’s been really good to see that modeled and it also creates – like, when I do have good memories, like, I think back to certain things, I’m like, my sister, my mom, my dad, were all at that good thing. So, I have those good memories (Megan).

### **Recommendations from Survivors for Survivors:**

Research participants were asked to share specific advice to other survivors of sex trafficking.

### **Preparing to Leave:**

**Assess risk and evaluate options:** “I think that she has to evaluate the situation, evaluate how much danger she would be in, evaluate if she has the finances and the ability to relocate if she has to, and if she is able to financially support herself if she has to relocate” (Participant 10).

**Importance of readiness to leave:** “You really have to want it in order to get out of, any of it, drugs, trafficking. You have to want to get out. If you can, get out” (Participant 7).

### **There are choices and resources:**

“Today it’s so many help and services out there today that a lot of – even a lot of young ladies that I run into do not know nothing about them and I get that. It’s like, I said, have you ever heard of this? Have you ever heard of this? Matter of fact, have you ever even heard of being trafficked? Do you know what that means and so forth and so forth? So, it’s a lot of unknown knowledge out there for some of these ladies and, you know, with the laws sometimes, they don’t make you know better because they just stick ‘em somewhere, compared to sticking ‘em in the places that is more beneficial for them in their situation that they’re going through” (Participant 9).

“A stable environment. A safe environment. Being surrounded by people that understand and are willing to walk with them. Access to getting a job without feeling re-

exploited, an opportunity. Education if they wanted. Education about being trafficked but also educating themselves to be in the world. Resources to help them heal. To teach themselves that they're valued, that they're priceless and that they're so much more worthy than they have been shown. Just a way out. An option that if you want to try to do this and get out, here's everything that you need" (Grace).

### **Be cautious when seeking help:**

"New survivors, I think, are very vulnerable to organizations like I was saying. I think you just have to be very, very cautious because when you think you're in a world of people actually helping you, it's not always for your benefit" (Kristine).

### **Reach out to other survivors:**

"Maybe look for survivor mentor, you know, and get to know that community" (Kristine).

### **Resources for trauma healing:**

"I recommend that they get a very knowledgeable – someone who is equipped to handle trauma – a therapist, counselor, someone who they can trust because it's – I think that's one of the major – that's essential to staying out of the life – finding someone that you can trust and confide in. I also would recommend that journaling helped me a lot, even though a lot of times after I journaled, I'd rip them up. But, it really did help me because it helped me to see and even connect feelings with words and memories"(Cat).

### **Themes for trauma healing process:**

"I would say that they should give themselves a break and not to be so hard on themselves, you know. They weren't – they didn't decide that they were going to grow up and be a prostitute, you know. I think the sooner that a woman identifies with being a victim, her healing begins because, for me, when I kept – like, I'm not a victim – caused me to not see things for what they really were and to go through those painful moments and process them because I didn't identify. So, I think that – giving a voice to what happened to her and seeing, you know, this is really horrible what happened to me and it shouldn't have happened. And, to grieve – and to grieve, you know. To grieve and feel those things because when you don't grieve, you don't process anything and you just stay kind of like in that moment. To learn to love yourself. Work on self-love, work on self-care, you know" (Cat).

### **Receiving help:**

"There were many opportunities that were given to me and I chose to not – I wish that I would have taken opportunities that were extended to me" (Cat).

“Just keeping your mind – it’s hard, but just keeping your mind the same as possible, just realizing that you’re not there and you’re okay and you’re living, you know what I mean? And, not a lot of people can say that, so, it’s kinda like, keeping your head up, not like always giving in... Once you get out of it, try to stay out of it... find what you want to do and try to do it and make it happen” (Emerald).

“After, maybe seek counseling and during, try to leave. Just try to leave. Do something as soon as possible” (Participant 3).

“Allow your friends and family and co-workers to understand what you’re going through. Reach out to others who can help navigate your experience” (Participant 16).

“Coming from me, everybody has a different story but we almost went through the same thing. So, with that being, it’s like you do have a chance if you allow the services and the people to help you through this. It’s not gonna be easy and you gonna have some challenges and hard times and maybe even wanna go back but the more you stay out of the life, the more scared you be to get back in the life” (Participant 9).

“To stay humble. To stay open-minded. To utilize your support system. To – I mean whatever you see fit that got them this far, to just continue with that. What else? I think that’s pretty much it” (Participant 9).

### **There is Hope:**

“Tell every survivor out there, never give up and never give up” (Participant 16).

“I would just recommend for other women like me to just take things one day at a time and just like keep fighting” (Participant 10).

“I would recommend not giving up. I would encourage them to find beautiful things to be able to kind of see. I think sometimes in the midst of trauma recovery it’s easy to just see all of the dark, painful stuff. And, so, what does beauty look like for you, right now in this moment? So, let’s try and create that beauty around you” (Participant 14).

“I believe that there is so much empowerment out there but, yet, sometimes, while in the midst of our situations, in the midst of oppression, it’s really hard to find that empowerment and, so, I want also to encourage women to keep seeking out opportunities to be empowered and also to see hope. There is hope” (Participant 14).

## **Recommendations for Faith Communities and Faith-based Organizations:**

Survivors shared experiences they had with faith communities and faith-based organizations, providing feedback for consideration. Approximately one-third of the participants discussed **experiences of re-exploitation or re-traumatization.**

“Even my church doing that is, taking these survivors and putting them up on the stage and I feel like it’s exploiting them, yet again. So, where, you know, they’re kind of being told, you have to just let it all out, you know, let the truth come out and lead and this is your story. This is your testimony. I feel like at the same time, let them be the ones that want to do that – to be kind of asked. I think it puts them in a position they may not be ready for” (Kristine).

Their perspective of faith-based organizations recommended choice for participation in faith-related activities. Their perspective addressed the vulnerability of survivors after being trafficked and how this vulnerability intersects with spirituality.

“...Church. I don’t know. I liked it but it wasn’t an option for girls. Not everyone’s Christian where you come from. So, it’s like – there’s no other option and you have to go to church on Sundays. Yeah, this is one girl I know...She goes to church on Saturdays but she couldn’t go to church on Saturdays. She had to go to church on Sundays with us. I was like, well, that’s – like, you know what I mean? Kind of taking away her religion. Yeah, it’s just the little things” (Emerald)

“Seeing how a lot of faith-based organizations have just continued to hurt and exclude survivors that need help. Like, my organization is not faith-based and we will not be because I feel like that’s so exclusive from the beginning whether it’s intended to be or not...Say that you’re Muslim and the only residential program in your area is Christian, that – even if it’s not – so there’s a difference between faith-demanding and faith-based. But, if you don’t practice that religion, it feels exclusive from the beginning. It doesn’t feel like, I’m gonna fit in there. I don’t feel like, I’m going to be accepted so, therefore, a lot of times, victims won’t even pursue that. They won’t even look into it. I feel like some places are faith-based but we’re not faith demanding but they have scripture on every wall and a lot of language around, I’m going to pray for you and that’s great. I don’t feel like we have to push our beliefs down other people’s throats to be kind to them and welcome them in. I have no problem – a lot of our volunteers are – have like this very strong faith foundation behind why they’re involved in our work but that does not

mean that they need to bombard our clients with their beliefs, whatever they may be” (Megan).

In addition, At least three participants had traffickers who claimed to be Christians and one was recruited by someone she met at a church service. A portion had church leaders as buyers, including from their own former faith communities. They express recommendation for **education and training for faith communities** who want to help. Many give credit to faith communities for offering support or growth during the post-trafficking experience, yet acknowledging the importance of training in order to be helpful and not hurtful.

“The thing about rescuing and saving people, it doesn’t matter how much money you have, unless you give them the things they need and, maybe they don’t need Jesus at that time – maybe they just need the home and the food and the support and I just feel like – it becomes a little bit inhumane, honestly. Just to be a little more gentle on them and – but not say, like I was telling you earlier about, like, I’ll speak for you -- I have a voice. My voice was hushed for a very long time and I lived on the streets and I can handle just about anything. So, I think there is just some stigmas that people don’t understand” (Kristine).

## Chapter 13: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to amplify the voices of domestic sex trafficking survivors to gain increased understanding of the impact of victimization in sex trafficking, the challenges that they encounter, as well as their perspective of the most helpful components of recovery and reintegration after they were separated from the trafficker.

Complex trauma (Spinazzola, J, Blaustein, M, Kisiel, C, Van der Kolk, B., 2001), posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi, R.G, et al., 2004) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner,1986) provided a framework for delving deeper into the nuanced impact of a trafficking survivor, also contributing to the research for each of these respective theories.

Gaps in literature have included the need to test effectiveness of current service interventions (US Department Health and Human Services, 2009) and to understand the factors that make treatment successful (Countryman-Roswurm, et al., 2016). The findings of this study speak to what survivors have found useful. In addition, they inform our understanding about contributing factors to long-term, sustainable healing and how service providers and the general community may understand their role in that process. This section will further discuss implications for theory, practice, and education governed by the research study questions:

1. What are the experiences of adult female domestic sex trafficking survivors?
2. How do women view these experiences as influencing identity, sexuality, relationships, and seeking services after separation from trafficker?
3. What factors do survivors believe contribute to community reintegration?

### **1. What are the experiences of adult female domestic sex trafficking survivors?**

**Power:** Power was an emergent theme rising in the narrative of every participant. The findings in this study compare to other studies that revealed histories of adverse childhood experiences prior to being trafficked (Choi, et al., 2009; Smith, et al. 2009, Wilson, et al., 2014).

In this study, *every* participant described how experiences of early loss of power heightened vulnerability to the deception involved in the recruitment of a trafficker. This implies continued need for addressing prevention of human sex trafficking, through awareness education and protecting the vulnerabilities of children and youth, including intervention for children and youth who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. While Reid (2014) and the Field Center for Children's Policy (2017) discuss the role of education and supportive relationships for protecting the vulnerability of young people, few studies that address pre-trafficking experiences of trauma discuss recommendations for early intervention and prevention efforts (Wilson, et al., 2014; Pierce, 2012; Mayfield-Schwartz, 2006).

As participants shared about their trafficking experiences, an additional emerging theme was that almost everyone described an initial perception of power, believing they had a *choice* in what they were doing or that they were free to leave anytime. The majority described a gradual process of eventually recognizing the loss of power in every aspect of their lived experience, describing the feeling as trapped or stuck. A repeated emerging theme from *all* participants was seeing a lack of options, perpetuating the victimization. Almost all of the interviewed survivors expressed how they wished there was someone who would have intervened to tell them they do indeed have options and offering existing resources.

This repeated theme of lack of options and loss of power contradict the common perception that women in the commercial sex industry have chosen this lifestyle (Leidholdt, 2003; Butcher, 2003). No one in this study spoke positively about their experience in the commercial sex industry. Those who at one time believed they had chosen it eventually recognized their loss of power and choice. This is important for education about the realities of women in the commercial sex industry, particularly those under the control of a trafficker and is significant for

any service provider who is seeking to help during the reintegration process. According to these findings, many survivors will have confusion about their experience, and will need time and educational and relational support in acknowledging loss of power and lack of choice, and in learning to find and navigate use of power during the reintegration process. Most significantly, these will be effective if provided within a relational and environmental context that embodies and exemplifies empowerment. This aligns with recommendations for trauma-informed practice (Macy et al., 2013) models and services that address trauma and empowerment in the context of a supportive relationship (Schmidt, 2014; Hardy, et al., 2013). This contradicts with punitive responses to women in prostitution or those that never address these critical themes of choice and power.

In addition, the overwhelming repetition in discussing their wish that someone would have intervened and told them about existing options, presents a challenge and opportunity for all community members, family members, and service providers to offer options and resources for women to exit the commercial sex industry.

## **2. How do women view these experiences as influencing identity, sexuality, relationships, and seeking services after separation from trafficker?**

### **Complex Trauma**

Complex trauma emphasizes alterations in six areas: regulation of affect and impulses, attention or consciousness, self-perception, relations with others, somatization, and systems of meaning (Spinazzola, et al., 2001). The findings of this study revealed the value of considering the impact of commercial sexual exploitation through the lens of complex trauma as participants articulated each of these core alterations in their narratives. This has implications for the

clinical intervention and service provision with this population. The following key themes will be addressed: dissociation; self-perception; relations with others; and systems of meaning.

**Dissociation:** Two-thirds of the participants reported symptoms of dissociation, particularly crediting dissociation as a form of coping or survival both during and after being trafficked. In fact, descriptions of dissociation were the number one given response for how participants survived the trafficking experience. There was a connection between dissociation and substance use as half of participants also used drugs or alcohol as a way to numb their minds during the exploitation.

**Self-Perception:** Findings from this study contribute to our understanding of identity perception and formation for a sex trafficking survivor. The few studies that addressed this topic in the literature discussed the idea of loss of identity, while this study gives words coming directly from survivors about their experience (Herman, 1992; Farley, 2003; Smith, L, et al., 2009). The findings revealed a correlation of experiences of shame and their impact on identity formation. When survivors were asked how their experiences impacted their identity, the majority hesitated or expressed they did not even know how to answer this question. Their hesitation revealed a significant opportunity for anyone involved with survivors during the reintegration process, to acknowledge both loss of and perceptions of identity, as well as gently assisting with identity formation.

In addition, according to these findings, clinicians and service providers must be aware of the presence of shame, something that may not always be named, but is experienced and described by survivors of sex trafficking, and contributes to their identity. For those who expressed growth in their identity formation, it was within the context of supportive

relationships after trafficking, specifically with key support persons or service providers who were on a journey with them of naming and helping them to discover their beliefs, values, skills, interests, and preferences. These individuals also had confidence in them and verbalized what they saw in them. This provided a mirror for which the participants could begin to see and further develop themselves.

Finally, a significant contribution to identify formation after trafficking was finding purpose and discovering identity in helping others. According to the high involvement these participants already had with helping others, participating in anti-trafficking advocacy or service provision, as well as the goals and dreams to do more, it is evident that this is something that is a common response from many survivors. Consequently, a core part of recovery may include opportunities for education, training, development and assessment of readiness for involvement with these skills and passions.

**Systems of Meaning:** As previously mentioned, grief, shame, depression, and hopelessness are indicators of a disruption of systems of meaning (Spinazzola, J, et al., 2001; TC-JRI, 2014; Freed, 2003; Herman, 1992) This study highlighted participant stories of loss, shame, hope and despair, thus confirming these aspects of complex trauma in the aftermath of sex trafficking. Meaning-making, about the experiences of early vulnerability, of trafficking, and of survival are critical components of recovery. This contributes to the limited research when considering how a sex trafficking victim's systems of meaning have been impacted, thus critical themes to address in clinical intervention.

**Relationships:** As a core component of complex trauma and posttraumatic growth, this study explored the relationships of domestic sex trafficking survivors and the impact of relationships before during and after the trafficking victimization. *What was found is how*

*integral relationships were throughout their experiences as well as in the healing process.*

Participant narratives revealed how traffickers created dependencies through relationship, using relationships as a tool of deception, manipulation, and isolation from relationship, leaving long-term challenges with trust. Yet, participants recognized that healing happens in the context of relationships where survivors can learn trust, boundaries, and safety. **The experience of trust within relationship was continually attributed as the greatest need of the post-trafficking experience as well as the primary source of healing and growth** from almost all of the participants. When expressing what they wish they had during the trafficking experience, they recurrently described someone to intervene or someone to offer options and resources. As participants described what was helpful about their experiences with support persons in the post-trafficking phase, *almost everyone* described it helpful **when someone believed in them**, including judges, probation officers, mentors, therapists or other service providers. They credit relationships as a primary source of hope and help.

These findings are significant for anyone working with survivors. Findings support the importance of providing ample opportunities for relationships that model mutuality, shared power, authenticity, and trust through services and communities. These findings suggest the importance of training families, faith communities and organizations about the needs of trafficking victims, and the importance of providing supportive relationships for survivors. Service providers should address aspects of healthy relationships when working with survivors. Finally, what seems most important is that services are provided within the context of a safe relationship.

In the midst of establishing optimal services, participant narratives suggest we must consider creative ideas for connecting survivors to supportive relationships in settings where they can

have models, envision who they want to be in relationship, and consider the relationships they want to have. Non-traditional services for survivors, such as placing survivors in living situations within families, could be further explored in both program development and future research. This could not only address the major need of housing, but could provide a context for relational elements of trust, communication, boundaries, and mutuality to be modeled, practiced and developed.

In addition, when we consider their description of needs and what they found helpful, we must consider the barriers of traditional social services that are time-limited, often with rigid boundaries in the access and interaction with service providers. If the majority of trafficking survivors struggle with trust, how does it impact them when they are expected to initiate receiving services? What is the impact on developing trust if services are cut off after a period of time? Is it realistic to expect them to schedule and maintain appointments and find the resources to transport and attend services?

In summary, it is recommended to explore nontraditional service models that provide trafficking survivors with a relational context that includes survivors, professionals and community members who are committed to a long-term, empowering, trauma-informed approach. These services should meet the primary needs for physical and mental stabilization, but within a context that is fostering relational development. Key aspects include models of intimacy, teaching and practicing communication and boundaries, and building trust in a mutual relationship. These things must not only be taught in theory, but must be modeled and practiced in the context of long-term committed supportive relationships. The coalition model provides a framework that can facilitate connecting a survivor with a variety of formal and informal relationships and resources (Busch-Armendariz, N et al., 2014; Walsh, 2016). Yet, we must

further explore through program development and research how to maximize the relational benefit from coalitions, such as include, train and utilize individuals from faith communities or interested community groups within the coalition model. If supportive relationships are attributed as key needs and factors of healing of trafficking survivors, traditional social services are not sufficient.

**Sexuality:** This study contributes to the limited literature that discusses the impact on sexuality experienced by a survivor of sex trafficking (Farley, 2003; Perez, 2015). Previous literature suggests that survivors will continue to feel objectified as a result of the trafficking experience (Wilson, et al., 2014; Perez, 2015; Farley, 2003) and that dissociation is a coping mechanism and consequence of the exploitation (Hedin, U, et al., 2003).

Particularly significant in this study was the overwhelming majority who reported a history of **childhood sexual abuse**. This affirms previous research (Farley, 2003), and encourages attention on prevention education and activities, early intervention for victims of childhood sexual abuse, and finally an understanding of the layers of trauma that will impact clinical work with survivors of sex trafficking. Prevention education and activities can prepare young people for boundary setting, understanding healthy relationships, assertiveness, the realities and warning signs of human trafficking recruiters and the impact of pornography. Young men can be taught the equality and value of young women and how to treat with respect rather than objectify. Young women can be taught about their value and how to use their voice and power in the context of mutual, respected relationships.

Early intervention of sexual abuse can include believing, supporting and protecting the victim rather than protecting the abuser. Victims can be connected with resources for trauma

healing, which may help to reduce impact of long-term consequences on identity that these participants have attributed to increased vulnerability. Victims of sexual abuse can learn to protect their vulnerability which has the potential to prevent future exploitation.

Furthermore, service providers who work with trafficking survivors in a clinical setting should consider the necessity of addressing both the trauma of the trafficking experience, and early childhood experiences of trauma. Survivors should always be given choice on what they prefer to address first. Gradually, connections can be made between the impact of childhood adverse experiences and the trauma within the trafficking experience.

In addition, as survivors are further educated about healthy relationships, this can include a connection to healthy sexuality. Almost every participant expressed absence of desire or no interest in sexual experiences, including those who exited the sex industry many years before their interview. This aversion to sex seemed most related to associating sexuality with being objectified and mistreated and having difficulty seeing men and sex as anything more than a monetary transaction for someone else's pleasure and their own experience of maltreatment and objectification.

Participants discussed trauma symptoms, sexual confusion, and continued experiences of dissociation during current sexual experiences. This affirms and adds to what has previously been mentioned in literature (Wilson, et al., 2014; Perez, 2015; Farley, 2003; Hedin, U. et al. 2003). Participants indicated that recovery services rarely attended to sexuality, if at all, and some recommended that the topic of sexuality be more fully addressed. The implications for practice include directly addressing and discussing sexuality in service programming and clinical intervention. Participants who shared aspects of healing within their sexual experiences

described this growth in the context of long-term committed relationships. Consequently, education and growth around sexuality may be most effectively addressed in ways that promote autonomy, exploration, care, trust, mutuality and emotional intimacy within the context of healthy, loving relationships. In conclusion, addressing healthy sexuality is another area of further exploration for service programming and future research.

### **Posttraumatic Growth**

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) has been defined as positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G., 2004). PTG does not mean a return to “normal” or baseline after experiencing trauma, but an experience of growth beyond the pre-trauma state, that for some may be deeply profound (Tedeschi, R. G., et al., 2004). The five domains of PTG include: **personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation of life, and spiritual change** (Calhoun, et al., 2006).

There are only two known studies that have begun to explore the presence of posttraumatic growth in sex trafficking survivors (Schultz et al., 2018; Perry, 2015). In this study, themes from interviews and Photovoice captions provided salient findings of all five domains of posttraumatic growth. Therefore, this study adds to literature about *both* posttraumatic growth and sex trafficking survivors. Most significant was increased **appreciation for life**, particularly **the capacity to see and feel beauty**. Implications for this include identifying creative/expressive means to foster a survivor seeing and appreciating beauty, including in provided services. Similar therapeutic means have been used with populations in treatment for PTSD, including veterans (Ezparza, J., 2015; Sornborger, J et al., 2017) and survivors of sexual abuse, and other forms of trauma (Meston, C. et al., 2013; Hass-Cohen, N. et

al., 2018). These studies have found creative and expressive arts reduced symptoms of depression and PTSD (Meston, C. et al., 2013; Ezparza, J., 2015; Sornborger, J. et al., 2017) and increase indicators of PTG (Hass-Cohen, N. et al., 2018). Examples with trafficking survivors include but are not limited to activities that incorporate art, music, cooking, photography, nature, fashion, and interior design.

Another domain of posttraumatic growth discussed by participants included **discovering new possibilities** (Calhoun, et al., 2006), particularly the overwhelming emphasis on finding purpose when helping others and having goals and dreams to continue to help more women. In fact, this study inadvertently contributes to literature on survivor leaders (Schmidt, 2014; Hardy, 2013), as almost every participant discussed helping others and 11 of 15 Participants are currently serving and/or receiving training to serve in some role as a survivor leader. Their feedback emphasized the value of survivor-led services, both for the healing and development of the survivor leader as well as the benefit of program participants. According to the findings, survivor leadership must be accompanied by preliminary training, ongoing mentoring, and practice of self-care.

Additional aspects of discovering new possibilities included learning new things and having goals/dreams related to living a “normal life.” Any program or individual involved with serving trafficking survivors must teach and facilitate the necessary foundational life skills towards achieving sustainable independent living. According to their feedback, this is most effectively done in the context of a supportive relationship. Busch et al. (2014) and Walsh (2016) recommended life skill development, yet it cannot be underestimated that survivors discovery of new possibilities seems to happen most powerfully within a long-term committed

relationship with a supportive person/s. Hence, this highlights **relating to others**, another domain of posttraumatic growth as prominent in the findings.

The final domain of posttraumatic growth to be discussed is **spiritual change** (Calhoun, et al., 2006). Findings indicated the presence of faith as a form of coping during and after the trafficking experience. While some had questions and doubts as a result of their victimization, the majority expressed that spiritual belief was present or grew as a result of the experience. Therefore, it is recommended that programs and interventions include emphasis on spiritual activities and beliefs. Faith communities and faith-based organizations must be trained to understand the needs of trafficking survivors. This will further be explored in the section that addresses re-traumatization.

The presence of posttraumatic growth does not imply the absence of continual distress or impact of trauma (Calhoun, L. et al., 2006). Research participants' stories and photos reflected long-term ongoing challenges related to mental and physical stabilization as well as significant struggle with identity and relationships. Yet, these expressions of continual need and challenges are accompanied by stories and photos that remarkably express posttraumatic growth.

Calhoun and Tedeschi, (2006), who looked at PTG through the lens of ecological systems theory, recommended additional research to examine the effects of supportive and unsupportive responses on evidence of PTG in trauma survivors. This study has considered the supportive and unsupportive responses of the various systems involved in a sex trafficking victim's survivorship, including their basic support systems, including friends, families, other survivors, as well as service providing agencies, the legal system and the greater community and cultural

responses. The following sections of this chapter will further explore the findings of what was helpful and not helpful and the implications, promoting posttraumatic growth.

### **3. What factors do survivors believe contribute to community reintegration?**

**Experiences of Need:** All of the participants discussed their needs, challenges, and complications experienced in the post-trafficking phase. While descriptions of initial needs reflected primary physical stabilization, the struggle for financial and physical stability was a continual theme after varying lengths of time after exit, even though the majority of participants had some level of employment at the time of being interviewed.

Their expression of immediate and long-term needs affirm previous studies that addressed the priority of basic necessities, job and life skills training, substance abuse services, health care, legal advocacy and mental health care (Busch-Armendariz, et al.2014; Rajaram, S. et al. 2018; (Macy et al., 2011; Williamson et al. 2009). The findings affirm that the survivors' needs are vast and multi-faced, necessitating coordination for effective care.

Previous studies from Schmidt (2014) and Hardy et al. (2013) focused on aftercare of survivors, mentioned types of treatment and therapeutic modalities that may be relevant for sex trafficking survivors, but needed deeper exploration and evaluation: survivor-led services that include a mentoring program, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, and therapeutic goals that included addressing trauma, establishing positive, supportive relationships and empowerment. Finally, they emphasize prioritizing the provision of specialized treatment facilities and interventions.

The findings from this study contribute additional information from the perspective of survivors about each of these areas. The majority of participants had involvement with survivor-

led services as participants or as survivor leaders and spoke positively about its value. In fact, the consensus is that more survivor-led services are needed and preferred.

In addition, the findings reveal the most significant aspect of the reintegration process is relationship: relationship with mentors, clinicians, service providers, family members, community members, etc. The majority also speak about the value of having education on trauma, on their experience and the importance of trauma-informed care from law enforcement, health care, and service providers.

Corbett (2017) is one of few former studies that positioned the voices of survivors as experts, gaining their insight on experiences after exiting the commercial sex industry. The research participants in Corbett's study recommended greater coordination and communication among victims and providers to insure that victims are receiving services. In addition, the research participants highlighted the importance of family connections. None of the 13 participants mentioned any programming or therapeutic modality that assisted with their successful exit. Family connections are the most powerful and impactful and create the biggest motivators for change. They gave recommendations to those supporting survivors: Active listening, encouragement, non-judgment and "don't leave when we push" (p.91).

The present research study affirms and further contributes to the findings in Corbett's study. In addition, while previous research promotes trauma-informed, victim-centered services (Gillece, 2012), the participants' descriptions in this study affirm why such services are indeed beneficial. Participants in the present study repeatedly commented on the importance of providers offering choice and listening deeply, key aspects of victim-centered and trauma-informed care. Participants here articulated preferences for providers who appeared to have had

training and experience with trauma and trafficking victims compared to those who had no knowledge.

More than one-third of the survivors shared experiences of receiving *services which perpetuated rather than restored a loss of power*. A significant finding from the participants' feedback was the prevalence of re-traumatization and re-exploitation from services received, of which there is no known previous studies. Participant feedback has contributed to the following operational definitions and descriptions, which serve as a guide for service provision, policy creation, and relational interaction.

**Re-exploitation:** In this context, re-exploitation is when the involvement of a service organization and the exchange of roles and power with a survivor mirrors the exploitation experience. Every interaction, policy and program element of a service organization should be the antithesis of the trauma and exploitation involved with the commercial sex industry.

Consider how a woman is *used, sold, and bought* in the commercial sex industry as an *object* and *commodity*. If involvement includes using a person's

face, skills, productivity, story or any other aspect of her personhood for the service provider or agency's

reputation or monetary gain, there is tremendous

danger of re-exploitation. This danger must be

considered as organizations consider fundraising

efforts, or incorporating survivors' testimonies or feedback into any awareness event, planning

meeting or activity that does not include proper compensation and proper protection of the

individual's identity. The following image serves as a comparison based on direct feedback

### The Danger of Re-exploitation

#### The Exploitation in Sex Trafficking

- Traffickers demand a nightly quota (ie. \$500-1000) but rarely give any money to the victim.
- Traffickers exploit victims through online posting, pornography and making her/him a commodity.
- Victims are stripped of their identity and treated as objects.

#### Avoiding Re-exploitation in Service Provision

- Provide compensation for survivor leaders (consultation, speaking engagements)
- Guard against a survivor becoming the face of your organization/fundraisers
- Guard against tokenism: survivor leaders are subject matter expert professionals

**Figure 71 The Danger of Re-Exploitation**

from participants, describing their exploitation experience alongside recommendations to avoid re-exploitation.

**Re-traumatization:** In this context, re-traumatization occurs when the care or involvement of a service organization to the survivor mirrors the trauma experience. Every interaction, policy and program element of a service organization should be the antithesis of the trauma involved with the commercial sex industry. Providers may consider how a woman loses her voice, identity, power and experience of trust and safety, while isolated from support while she is exploited in the commercial sex industry. Providers may consider the power dynamic of being bought and/or sold by those with more money, given rules that must

be obeyed to avoid punishment, and the loss of hope because of perceived lack of options and a way of escape. If any aspect of the policies, guidelines, interactions and process of receiving services mirrors

this loss of power and voice, there is tremendous

danger for re-traumatization. This image has been created to compare the expressed experiences of being traumatized in the commercial sex industry, and specific recommendations to avoid re-traumatization.

Creating programs that avoid these dynamics can be complicated, requiring deliberate, thoughtful conversations as well as additional research to consider how programs may provide the necessary policies and guidelines that promote safety, structure and efficacy for the individual and the program environment, but how to do so in a way that does not promote additional injury by experiencing lack of choice and voice.

### The Danger of Re-traumatization

| The Trauma in Sex Trafficking   | Avoiding Re-traumatization within Service Provision   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Silences voice</li><li>• Takes away power/abuses power</li><li>• Exploiting vulnerability/empty promises</li><li>• Isolates from support system</li><li>• Exposes and strips identity</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to Survivors</li><li>• Give choice to Survivors</li><li>• Be consistent and follow-through with promises given to Survivors</li><li>• Be collaborative with other organizations</li><li>• Protects and rebuilds identity</li></ul> |

Figure 72 The Danger of Re-Traumatization

For example, this study included participants who had previously experienced some type of court-ordered service (i.e. Their options including joining a program or going to jail). The consensus of this portion of the sampling was that these types of services proved beneficial, as they offered useful, necessary services they may not have otherwise chosen. Yet, another participant warned against coercing survivors into testimony. In addition, several commented on the rules in residential programs, as being too restrictive and reminders of the rules within the trafficking experience. Finally, there was mixed feedback from participants who participated in faith-based organizations. While the participants who attended faith-based services commented on it being beneficial for them, they have concern for how individuals may be denied access to resources if they do not share the same spiritual background, or that participants of these programs are forced into spiritual activities or hindered from participation in their own religious practices if different than those of the program. These findings must be considered in program development, and further research is recommended for effective ways to approach faith-based services for sex trafficking survivors.

The recommendations of participants for service providers, clinicians, law enforcement, health care providers, family members and faith-based communities gives rich material that can be utilized in education as well as program development and relational enrichment. The following images provide a visual summary of their recommendations.

**Recommendations for Service Providers from Survivors**

- | General   | Characteristics  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional Resources for survivors</li> <li>• Trafficking-informed &amp; Trauma-informed services</li> <li>• Continuum of services</li> <li>• Prevention/Education</li> <li>• Immediate assistance for survivors</li> <li>• Outreach</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Protecting at-risk youth</li> <li>• Early intervention for sexual abuse victims</li> <li>• Pursuit/care</li> <li>• Offering options</li> <li>• Life skills, family resources, education</li> <li>• Coordinating services</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truthful</li> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Committed</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Believe in the survivor</li> <li>• Listen to survivors</li> </ul> |

**Figure 74 Recommendations for Service Providers**

**Recommendations for Clinicians from Survivors**

- | General  | Characteristics   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trauma-informed care</li> <li>• Psychoeducation</li> <li>• Techniques for trauma symptoms</li> <li>• Topics: Sexuality, addiction, trauma, loss, perception of trafficking experience (ie. choice)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachability</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Offer choice in discussing trauma</li> <li>• Long-term commitment</li> <li>• Intentional (asking questions)</li> </ul> |

**Figure 73 Recommendations for Clinicians**

### **Recommendations for Medical Professionals from Survivors**

- Trauma-informed practice
- Take time to establish rapport and build safety
- Preparation before medical procedures, such as acclimation to the voice of the surgeon, or step-by-step explanation of what will take place
- Communication before, during and after procedures

**Figure 75 Recommendations for Medical Professionals**

### **Recommendations for Criminal Justice System from Survivors**

- Receive training on trauma and trafficking
- Understand appropriate terminology
- Offer pro bono legal services
- Offering choice vs. punitive approach
- Providing options/resources
- Outreach within the prison system

**Figure 76 Recommendations for Criminal Justice System**

### **Recommendations for Community Members from Survivors**

- Intervene/ask questions if you have concerns
- Understand the specific needs of trafficking survivors
- Offer family-like support
- Systemic change (address the demand for the commercial sex industry)
- Prevention/education
- Identification

**Figure 78 Recommendations for Community Members**

### **Recommendations for Loved Ones from Survivors**

- Be supportive.
- Don't give up on the survivor.
- Don't talk about the past with judgment.
- Become educated about the experiences and impact of trafficking.
- Encourage what you want to see more of from the survivor.

**Figure 77 Recommendations for Loved Ones**

### **Recommendations for Survivors From Survivors**

- When preparing to leave, assess the risk and evaluate your options.
- There are choices and resources.
- Be cautious when seeking help.
- Reach out to other survivors.
- Find resources that understand trauma and human trafficking.
- Don't be too hard on yourself.
- Grieve what you have lost.
- Learn self-love and self-care.
- Reach out to others and help them understand what you're going through.
- It won't be easy. You will have challenges. Allow services and people to help you get through.
- Stay humble and open-minded.
- There is hope.

**Figure 79 Recommendations for Survivors**

**Research Implications:** The researcher's goal for this study was to address the trauma impact on trafficking survivors, in a participant-centered, trauma-informed approach. This included having an advisory committee of survivors who were consulted during study design. Participants were offered choice throughout all aspects of interview, Photovoice project and Photovoice conference call. In addition, participants were given the choice on which name they wanted to utilize throughout research publication. The researcher maximized use of direct quotes in order to amplify their specific words, which are extraordinary, wise, insightful and extremely important contributions to the research as well as service provision. Finally, Photovoice was specifically chosen as an additional form of expression for survivors to share their expertise and insight into their experience. For a population who has lost power and voice, using images is a format that restores these aspects of humanity, and provides an alternative form of expression.

Providing research with vulnerable populations should be done in a way that restores voice and power, avoiding the potential of re-traumatization or re-exploitation. Recommendations for further research include additional use of creative expressive tools such as Photovoice. Longitudinal designs or additional focus on survivors after exiting more than 10 years may optimally explore complex trauma and posttraumatic growth and change over time.

**Limitations:** This research did not include minors, males or international trafficking survivors, whose stories are also critical to understanding trafficking survivor and support needs. In addition, mainly utilizing service providing organizations to recruit participants may have limited the research by not having access to survivors who have not received or pursued services. Therefore, it is difficult to know if these experiences, particularly of posttraumatic growth, are generalizable for all sex trafficking survivors.

Many participants served as survivor leaders or were active in anti-trafficking advocacy or service provision. This may represent a recruitment or participation bias. While this data contributes to the research on survivor leaders, yet again may not provide generalizable data for all trafficking survivors. In addition, this study did not distinguish differences in impact and experiences based on differing types of trafficking or geographic location which could also impact clarity of data.

This study also provided a broad range of age as well as time after exiting the trafficking experience. While this diversity can be perceived as an asset, this study did not specifically parse feedback based on length of time after exit. Additional research, such as a longitudinal study, could explore the range of experiences with complex trauma and posttraumatic growth based on differing ages or times of exit, nontraditional services for trafficking survivors that capitalize on the significant value of relationships, and further research to explore effective ways to address sexuality and healthy relationships.

### **Conclusion:**

The participants of this study provided rich feedback that deepens our understanding of their experiences and what is helpful during reintegration. They affirm the need for comprehensive, coordinated resources that address immediate and long-term physical needs of survivors. Understanding and intervention of human sex trafficking benefit from an ecological perspective that considers all systems of involvement, and approaches intervention through a trauma-informed, victim-centered lens. While the impact of trauma is complex and multifaceted, there is great evidence of posttraumatic growth, particularly seen in individuals' deep appreciation for life, ability to see beauty and perceive deeply and finding greater meaning in experiences of life, particularly helping others. Furthermore, while relationships are most

significantly impacted from the trafficking experience, they are also considered the greatest instrument of healing, through offering long-term commitment and belief in the individual. Finally, while there is significant loss in the trafficking experience, including trust, voice, power, identity and relationships, these participants exhibited extraordinary evidence of finding and utilizing their voice and power in significant ways, including their contribution to this study.

## Appendix A: Glossary

**Commercial Sexual Exploitation:** a practice by which a person achieves sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of a person's sexuality by abrogating that person's human right to dignity, equality, autonomy, and physical and mental well-being, i.e. trafficking, prostitution, prostitution tourism, mail-order-bride trade, pornography, stripping, battering, incest, rape and sexual harassment (Hughes, D, Roche, C, 1999).

**Human Trafficker:** a person who commits the act of human trafficking (the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery) for pay, benefit, or favor. For ease of reading, this paper will refer to a human sex trafficker as a trafficker.

**Human Trafficking:** The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2016).

**Pimp:** a common cultural term to describe an individual who controls women in prostitution, managing and arranging their activity and their finances. A more accurate term for a pimp is trafficker. However, many women in prostitution, including those who are victims of human sex trafficking, will initially refer to their trafficker as a pimp. Additionally, they may recognize their trafficker as a boyfriend, partner, or protective father, not a pimp or trafficker. While there are both male and female traffickers, for ease of reading throughout this paper, male pronouns will be used since the majority of traffickers are males.

**Prostitution:** The engagement in sexual activity with another person for exchange of goods, services, or money.

**Reintegration:** The time period and process after a victim has been separated from the trafficker, depicting how an individual is again entering into facets of the community.

**Survivor of Human Trafficking:** A person who remains alive and persists after the victimization of human trafficking. Throughout this paper, both terms 'victim' and 'survivor' will be utilized interchangeably. While the term 'victim' accurately describes the experience of one who has been trafficked and therefore is a necessary term to use, the word 'survivor' conveys the strengths, capacities, resiliencies and accomplishments of those who were at one time victimized.

**The Life:** A phrase used to describe the experience of being in the commercial sex industry.

**Turn-out:** A pimp/trafficker who is the first one to initiate, orient and exploit an individual in the commercial sex industry.

**Victim of Human Trafficking:** A person who has been inducted into the sex or labor industry by use of force, fraud or coercion. While there are both male and female victims of sex trafficking, female pronouns will be used since the majority of victims are female and this study focuses on female victims.

**Wife-in-Law:** a name used to identify by a trafficking survivor for another woman who has the same trafficker.

## **Appendix B: Timeline for Dissertation Study:**

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Sept 2017           | Survivor Advisory Board Consultation             |
| Oct 2017            | IRB application/approval                         |
| Dec 2017-Jan 2018   | Connect with Referral Sources to introduce study |
| January-June 2018   | Recruitment of Participants                      |
| January-June 2018   | Interviews of Participants                       |
| January-June 2018   | Photovoice Project                               |
| August 2018         | Photovoice final group process meeting           |
| Sept 2017-Jan 2019  | Data Analysis                                    |
| Jan 2019-April 2019 | Write Report                                     |

## **Appendix C: Sample Interview Guide**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location:**

**Name of Interviewer:**

**Name of Participant:**

**Introduction to Study:**

Thanks so much for agreeing to being interviewed. I am interviewing survivors of domestic sex trafficking as part of a dissertation research study. My hope is to learn about your experiences of sex trafficking, and of surviving, particularly after leaving your trafficker, so that those who are providing services or offering help to survivors can learn from you and be most effective in helping survivors. I expect this interview will take approximately one hour. I will be asking you about your experiences. I am interested in anything you are willing to share. You may choose not to answer any questions I ask, and we can stop the interview at any time. Are you still OK with being interviewed? Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

**Interview:**

First, would you be willing to share more about yourself and your background?

What was happening in your life when you were trafficked?

How did you meet your trafficker and get into the life?

Tell me your story of your time in the life.

What helped you to get through your time of being trafficked?

How did you come to leave your trafficker?

What were the circumstances that contributed to you leaving?

Did you make the choice to leave? If so, what led to this choice?

Who was involved with helping you to leave?

What emotions did you experience during the leaving process?

Tell me about your life after you left the life and your trafficker?

What has surprised you the most? What was the hardest part about leaving and getting settled?

What challenges have you faced?

What have you needed?

What emotions have you experienced after leaving?

How have you been dealing with those emotions?

Has there been a time that you returned to your trafficker or returned to the life? What led to this? If not, what has kept you from returning to the life?

How are you supporting yourself or caring for yourself financially?

Can you tell me about your experiences with resources and services?

Have you utilized any services (i.e. Financial support, legal support, counseling, drug and alcohol services, shelter, etc.)?

How did you find these services? Were they given to you, offered to you or did you seek them out?

What choices and freedoms have been given in receiving those services?

What services were most helpful?

Was there anything that you found not helpful?

What barriers have you experienced in receiving services?

What advice do you have for those who want to provide services and offer help to sex trafficking survivors?

Who has been involved in your life since you left your trafficker?

What people are important in your life right now?

Are you in contact with people from your life before being trafficked?

Who or what is missing?

What advice do you have for family and friends of sex trafficking survivors?

How have your experiences during the time of being trafficked impacted you?

How have they impacted you mentally and emotionally?

How have they impacted you physically?

How have they impacted the way you think about yourself?

How have they impacted your relationships?

How have they impacted your sexuality?

How have they impacted your experience with physical intimacy? Emotional intimacy?

Have you been able to enjoy sexual intimacy and feel safe? Is there anything you wish were different about your sexuality/sexual experiences after your time of being trafficked?

How have they impacted spiritual or religious beliefs?

How have they impacted your overall perspective or ways of seeing things?

Did you have any experiences earlier in life that were similar to the experiences of being trafficked?

What is next for you?

Do you have any dreams or goals for the future?

What do you hope to see in your future?

Closing Questions:

What do you recommend for other women like you?

What do you hope others like you will have access to when they get out of trafficking?

What is important about your experience that I haven't asked you and you haven't had the chance to tell me?

That is the end of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

## Appendix D      Introductory Letter to Agencies

Date

Director Name

Agency Name

Agency Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a Doctor of Social Work candidate in the School of Social Policy and Practice at University of Pennsylvania. I am conducting a study of the experiences of survivors of domestic sex trafficking. I am writing to tell you about the study and ask for your support in reaching women who may be interested in participating. The study aims to share the voices and experiences of sex trafficking survivors, particularly after separation from the trafficker, to further define, recommend and test effective interventions and support systems.

I have a personal interest in this topic due to my experience working with sex trafficking survivors for the last eight years and co-founding an organization devoted to prevention, awareness and aftercare for survivors of human sex trafficking. As I am sure you are aware, there is a lack of empirical research that addresses the unique needs, services and effective intervention for this population. I am devoted to making every effort to make a contribution for the benefit of serving agencies, policymakers and most of all the survivors of human sex trafficking that we encounter.

This qualitative retrospective study includes interviews to highlight their experiences of survivorship to determine what impacts the reintegration process. Photovoice methodology will be incorporated into the interview process as an additional means for survivors to express their experiences. Specifically this research aims to explore the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of adult female domestic sex trafficking survivors?
  2. How do women view these experiences as influencing identity, sexuality, relationships, and seeking services after separation from trafficker?
  3. What factors do survivors believe contribute to community reintegration?
- This study will focus on adult female survivors of domestic human sex trafficking who are within one-ten years of being separated from human trafficking and leaving the commercial sex industry.
  - Participants will participate in an interview, which will be 1-2 hours in length.
  - They are also invited to participate in a photovoice project, where they will be given cameras to document visual aspects of their lived experiences. Photographs will not show identifying information of the survivor, their care team, or identifying information of agencies. Participants will share their photographs and captions with the research team and will have the opportunity for a video/conference call meeting with other participants to share comments and discussions surrounding the themes of the photographs.
  - Each research participant will receive a \$25 gift card plus a bus pass for their time. They will also be given a digital camera for the photovoice project.

Would you be willing to distribute information to your network of survivors? Attached is a flyer with more information for you to post or distribute.

I am available to answer any questions that you or potential participants may have. My desire is for this to be an empowering opportunity for the participants and a valuable learning experience for the allies who support survivors.

Thank you for your consideration. I will be in contact with you for further discussion.

Heather Evans, LCSW

## Appendix E Recruitment Flyer (without graphics)

# Recruiting Participants for a Research Study

**Title** The Voices of Domestic Sex Trafficking Survivors: Experiences of Survivorship to Inform Effective Aftercare Services

### Study Goals:

- To learn about the experiences of women who have left prostitution or the sex trade
- To improve services to help survivors of the sex trade, sexual exploitation or sex trafficking.

### Women are invited to participate in this study if:

- You were in prostitution, the sex trade or experienced sexual exploitation
- Your experiences happened in the USA
- You are over the age of 18
- You have been out of the sex trade 1-10 years
- You speak English

### Your participation will include:

- Completing an interview (lasting 1-2 hours)
- Optional photography project

### Your participation will be confidential.

### If you participate and complete the interview:

You will receive a \$25 gift card plus bus pass for transportation  
Photography participants will receive a digital camera

### If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact:

Heather Evans

484-226-7151

heevans@sp2.upenn.edu

This research is approved by the Institutional Review Board.

## **Appendix F Organizations who will receive information about Study:**

- Villanova Institute for Commercial Sexual Exploitation
- Valley Against Sex Trafficking (VAST)
- YWCA, York County
- PAATH (Pennsylvania against Trafficking of Humans) Victim Services Committee
- Truth Home
- The Well
- The Samaritan Woman Home
- Salvation Army Dayspring program-Philadelphia, PA
- Children's Home of Easton
- Survivors for Solutions, Colorado

## **Appendix G: Consent Form for Research Participants**

### **Title of the Research Study: The Voices of Domestic Sex Trafficking Survivors: Experiences of Survivorship to Inform Effective Aftercare Services**

#### **Principal Investigator:**

Allison Werner-Lin  
University of Pennsylvania-School of Social Work  
Caster Building  
3701 Locust Walk  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
914-924-9637

#### **Primary Researcher:**

Heather Evans, LCSW  
550 E. Station Avenue Coopersburg, PA 18036  
484-226-7151  
[heevans@sp2.upenn.edu](mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu)

---

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This is not a form of treatment or therapy. It is not supposed to detect a disease or find something wrong. Your participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate or not to participate there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Before you make a decision you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study and what you will have to do if you decide to participate. The researcher is going to talk with you about the study and give you this consent document to read. You do not have to make a decision now. You can take the consent document home and share it with friends, family doctor or family.

If you do not understand what you are reading, do not sign it. Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you. Keep this form, in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study. You may ask to have this form read to you.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

This research is a part of the student researcher's dissertation study. The purpose of the study is to learn about the experiences of women who exited systems of the sex trade, including prostitution, sexual exploitation or sex trafficking. This study will consider how your experiences have impacted you, including your experiences after you left. We want to hear directly from you what is important when a survivor is moving back into the community after the trafficking experience. Ultimately, the goal is for knowledge gained from this study to directly influence support services for survivors of human sex trafficking. We believe those who have experienced trafficking have much to teach us.

#### **Why was I asked to participate in the study?**

This study is seeking individuals who are over the age of 18, have exited systems of the sex trade for over one year and less than 10 years, and this has taken place within the United States. Your enrollment in this study will be confirmed after you complete an eligibility questionnaire.

### **What are the expectations if I participate in this study?**

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interviewer will ask questions about your experience. It will be held in a comfortable, private setting you agree to and should take 1-2 hours. The interview will be audio recorded. There is a second portion of the study where participants will take pictures that show important aspects of their daily lives. This is another way to show parts of your experience for which it may be harder to find words. If you choose to participate in this portion of the study, you will be given a camera. You will be given a short introductory training. You will then be given 30 days to take pictures. You will post your pictures on a secure website, only seen by the research facilitator and participants. Participants will be able to share feedback and comments about the posted photos. You will then be invited to participate in an optional video conference meeting for all participants for further discussion of this experience and also to decide together if there are ways you together want to use your pictures to raise awareness about trafficking.

You will have the option to participate in the interview part of the study or both the interview and Photovoice.

### **How many other people will be in the study?**

Our aim is to recruit approximately 15 women in this study.

### **Where will the study take place?**

If you choose to participate in this study, you and the researcher will find a preferred place for the interview.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be given a questionnaire to complete. This will help us to learn basic information about you. While your name and other identifying information will be kept confidential, the questionnaire will help us to get to know you. You will then participate in the interview of 1-2 hours. You will have the option to also participate in the photography project. There are more details about the photography project that are provided on a separate consent form.

### **What are the risks?**

One possible risk is that you will feel pressure to participate in the study. We can assure you that you are free to participate or not participate.

Another potential risk is that your privacy and confidentiality will not be protected if someone is able to connect the data with your identity, which could result in social, financial or other possible harm. We will explain more below what steps we will take to protect your privacy.

Another risk is that answering the questions may remind you of painful experiences. You will have the freedom to stop the interview at any time. The researcher can provide you with information about services to support you, insure that you have a safety plan, or contact a current member of your support system to help you.

### **How will I benefit from the study?**

There is no benefit to you. However, your participation could help us understand how services are effective for women who have exited the sex trade and survivors of sex trafficking survivors and what factors may contribute to helping them find physical and mental stability. Therefore, this study may benefit you indirectly. This research may influence how to make services available and useful for other women. We also hope that sharing your experiences through words and/or photography will be empowering for you.

### **What other choices do I have?**

Your alternative to being in the study is to not be in the study.

### **What happens if I do not choose to join the research study?**

You may choose to join the study or you may choose not to join the study. Your participation is voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to join the research study. You will lose no benefits or advantages that are now coming to you, or would come to you in the future.

### **When is the study over?**

While our study will continue until approximately 15 individuals complete interviewed, your role will end after your interview or after completion of the photography project. The study may be stopped without your consent if the Primary Investigator feels it is best for your safety and/or health. If this happens, you will be told the reasons why.

You have the right to drop out of the research study at any time during your participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide to do so.

### **How will confidentiality be maintained and my privacy protected?**

We will do our best to make sure that the personal information obtained during the course of this research study will be kept private. You will be assigned a case number. All of your data will not include your identifying information (i.e. Name, phone number). This information will only be given to the Main Researcher and will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer. Any written information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the private business office of the researcher.

You will be given the choice to select which name you would like to be used throughout publication. You may use your real name and at no point will it be revealed if you have chosen your real name or a pseudonym. While using your real name is your choice and one that may be reclaiming and empowering, it is important to consider the possibility that someone may connect details from your story to your name. If you choose to use your real name, you will have the opportunity to review and retract anything that you wish.

Your interviews will be recorded but will include your case number and no identifying information. Your audio recordings and the typed transcriptions of these recordings will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer. They will be destroyed after the research. The research team may not use or disclose information collected in this study for a purpose besides this study without your written authorization.

The location of the interview will be in a private location of your choice. If at any point during the interview you do not feel comfortable, we can move the location or reschedule.

We also want to insure that if someone from the research study contacts you related to the research, he/she will not leave any information about the research on a voicemail or text to insure your participation is kept private.

**Will there be a cost to participate in this study?**

There is no cost to participate.

**Will I be paid for being in this study?**

To express appreciation for your time and commitment, you will be given a \$25 gift card at the completion of your time in the study. You will also be given a bus pass for transportation to the interview meeting.

**Who can I call with questions, complaints or if I'm concerned about my rights as a research subject?**

If you have questions or complaints regarding your participation in this research study or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you should speak with the Principal Investigator listed on page one of this form. If a member of the research team cannot be reached or you want to talk to someone other than those working on the study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

---

If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask Heather Evans (484) 226-7151.

## Appendix H Consent Form for Photovoice Project

Principal Investigator:  
Allison Werner-Lin  
University of Pennsylvania-School of Social Work  
Caster Building  
3701 Locust Walk  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
914-924-9637

Primary Researcher:  
Heather Evans, LCSW  
550 E. Station Avenue Coopersburg, PA 18036  
484-226-7151  
[heevans@sp2.upenn.edu](mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu)

**What is this project about?** Photovoice is a unique form of research that allows people to share their experiences through photography and to use these images to take action on a community concern.

**What will I be asked to do?** You will be given a camera and will participate in taking pictures of your life experiences as a survivor. You may also choose to use your own camera or cell phone camera. You will be asked to view an introductory video to learn about Photovoice. This training will include safety issues, basic instructions about taking photos, how the project will work, and guidelines for posting and commenting. You will be asked to take photographs that speak to your life experiences. You will then post these photographs on a secure online account and share comments about your photos.

All research participants will be encouraged to participate in a video conference meeting to end our Photovoice project. This will include a time for participants to decide whether you may want to find a way to use or display your photos. The research facilitator will use the photos as a part of the entire study. It will also be the decision of the participants to use their own photographs beyond the purposes of this study.

**What will you do with the photographs?** At the end of the project, you will receive a copy of all of your photographs. The main facilitator will keep all of the photographs which will be included in the research data. When you upload your photos on the website, you are giving your expressed permission for the researcher to use the photos. These photos will be used without identifying information as a part of the publication of this research or at educational presentations of the research data. After the study is concluded, the interview recordings and photos will be destroyed. Together the group may decide to display the photographs as a way to raise awareness. You always have the option to keep your photographs private. You may choose not to participate in the group's decision to display the photographs. You may withdraw some or all of your pictures at any time prior to publication of the research data. Please contact the Main Researcher to make this request.

**What will I get out of being in this project?** You will not be paid to participate in this part of the project, but you will receive copies of every photograph you take for the project. You will also be able to keep the digital camera. A benefit of participating in this research study is the opportunity to creatively engage with other women like you who have had similar experiences.

### **Will I be at risk for being in this project?**

There will be an initial training to discuss safety issues when taking photographs. This study is designed to have little risk to you and to provide precautions to insure safety. For safety reasons and to protect your identity, no identifying information of you or any other person will be used in the pictures. You will be asked to turn off the location on your cell phone or digital camera to also protect this identifying information.

Also, the research facilitator will protect your identity by assigning you an identification number. All of the information you provide will be stored with your identification number and not your name. You will decide what you want to photograph and what you want to share during the group meeting.

There are limits of the degree that we can insure confidentiality, such as information that is shared during group discussion if you choose to participate in the video conference call. The recordings and written transcripts of the group discussion will be destroyed after the study. The pictures will be removed from the secure web-based site after the study. In addition, the video conference call is optional. You may also join audio only without the camera. Your identifying information will be kept private during this video call. You are free to stop participating in the Photovoice project at any time, for any reason, with the exception of after the research has already been published. You may choose whether to withdraw from the interview study separately.

As a participant in Photovoice, you have the following rights and responsibilities:

#### **Rights:**

- You have the right to express your views during the group sessions.
- You have the right to be supported by Photovoice group members and the facilitator.
- You have the right to choose the photographs you would like to display in public.
- You have the right to change your mind about displaying any of your photographs prior to the publication of the research.
- You have the right to say no to participating in the video conference call OR participate with audio only.

#### **Responsibilities:**

- Support other group participants. Please avoid criticism or hurtful comments.
- If you choose to participate in the video conference meeting, please allow one person to speak at a time.

Do you agree to the above rights and responsibilities as a participant of the Photovoice program?

Yes

No

Will you support the goals and values of the Photovoice program during your involvement?

Yes

No

Do you agree to let online discussions be recorded? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

Consent to Recontact

Do you agree to have someone from the Research team contact you in the future about aspects of this research study? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

Do you have any questions about the project? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

(If yes, please write your questions at the bottom of this page or contact the main Project facilitator, Heather Evans 484-226-7151.)

You will provide verbal agreement that you wish to participate in this study. ***If you change your mind at any time, please contact your Photovoice group facilitator.***

## **Appendix I**

### **Consent Form: PhotoVoice Participant Consent to Use Photography for Display**

I give permission for my photographs to be used in this Voices of Survivors PhotoVoice Project. I understand that when I upload my photos on the website, I am giving my permission for the researcher to use, copyright, publish, republish and distribute the photos for the purposes of this study without any additional compensation to me. These photos will be used without identifying information as a part of the publication of this research or at educational presentations of the research data. I understand my participation in this research project is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation and/or some or all of my photographs from this project at any time prior to the research publication, no questions asked. I further acknowledge that the researchers will use their best efforts to keep my identity anonymous and I may choose to identify my participation in this project, remain anonymous, or use a pseudonym.

You will provide verbal agreement that you authorize the Primary Researcher, Heather Evans, to use and publish my photographs in print, video, and/or electronically.

## Appendix J

### Voices of Survivors-Photovoice Project: Introductory Training Outline

#### Main Goals of Photovoice:

- To use photography as a medium to capture the experiences, strengths and concerns of a specific community
- To collectively raise awareness that can promote change (i.e. Policy changes)

#### Examples of other Photovoice projects

- A group of women from South Sudan who were resettled refugees in Canada took photos of their daily life to reflect resilience in spite of their experiences in civil war and as refugees. (2016)
- A group of individuals from New York City at increased risk for heart disease, took photos of .... focused on their health and ways to implement health care. (2012)
- A group of African-American breast cancer survivors took pictures of things in their daily life that were expressions of survivorship and positive/negative impact on quality of life. (2005)

#### Purpose of Voice of Survivors-Photovoice Project

- To learn about the experiences of women who exited the sex trade, including prostitution, sexual exploitation, or sex trafficking.
- To use photography as a way to share experiences since you left the sex trade or trafficking experience.
- To learn how to best support and provide services for other women with similar experiences.

#### Photovoice Guidelines:

- Take pictures of the specific assignments related to the experiences and impact on a survivor of human sex trafficking or someone who has left the sex trade.
- Take pictures in areas you feel are safe.
- Take pictures that will not put you at risk or harm or reveal your identity.
- Take pictures that will not reveal the identity of any other person (no faces).

#### Expressing Yourself through Photography:

- Allows you to share your ideas about yourself, your community, and your experiences by taking pictures of important places, settings, items, experiences, and other parts of your life.
- The researcher will give you a photo assignment. Think about the topic, then, use your emotions as a cue. Consider where you live and how you live... what gives you a strong emotional response (excited, angry, afraid, sad...)? Tell the story.
- Spend some time really looking around you. Take a walk or drive. Take pictures of what you see, or may not have seen before related to your topic.

## **Photo Safety & Ethics**

- Always ask before taking a photo of someone or someone's personal property (ex. Someone's house), even if this means missing the perfect shot.
- Take pictures without revealing faces or identifying marks.
- Take pictures with consideration. (Ask yourself, "Would I mind if someone took a picture of me in this situation?")
- It is acceptable if people are too small to be recognizable.
- Take photos that do not show someone doing something risky or incriminating.
- Take a friend, especially when going to places you are not familiar with.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- If confronted by someone aggressively (i.e. address the possibility of being mugged or robbed), stay calm, do not resist and give up the camera).

## **Using a Camera**

- If using camera on cell phone, please go to camera settings and turn off location. For iPhone users, this can be found in privacy, location services, camera, off. For Android users, go to camera app, settings, switch off the setting entitled "Save location". Photos or screen shots taken from now on will not include the location they were taken.
- If using a digital camera, please go to camera settings and turn off location. (The primary researcher will assist you with this further and make sure that you have done it successfully)
- Please keep location settings off during the course of time that you are taking pictures for this Photovoice project.

## **Sharing Photos**

- You may share any number of photos during the course of our 30-day project. A recommendation is for you to share at least 5-10. Please share a brief caption or sentence with your photos to explain to the viewer what part of your experience they are seeing.
- All posts will be reviewed by the researcher after being uploaded to the private web-based account.

## **Video Conference Call**

- At the end of the 30-day project, you are invited to join a conference call with the other research participants by video or audio. It is optional, and you are encouraged to attend to use this time to end our project.
- The main purpose of this call is together to talk about this experience of sharing photos, key themes and data from the photos and discussion.
- We may also decide as a group if we want to display your photos.

## **Expectations for Photovoice Online Discussion:**

Step 1: Use the acronym SHOWED to think about and then respond to the posted photos:

- What do you See happening here?
- What is really Happening here?
- How does this relate to Our lives?
- Why does this situation concern or strength Exist?
- What can we Do about it?

Step 2: VOICE: (Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience)

- Describe individual meaning of photographs along with what it might mean for the larger community of human trafficking survivors.

Step 3: Create Themes

- Participants may identify themes, issues or theories that arise from the dialogue process.
- This data will become a part of the research study, and might also be utilized to target a community action plan.
- Remember there is no right or wrong answer. We want this to be an enjoyable experience.

## Appendix K: Video Conference Photovoice Group Guide

### Introduction to Photovoice Group:

Thanks so much for participating in our video conference. As we get started, I just want to give a few instructions. First of all, thank you for participating in this Photovoice project! I know that I have learned a lot from seeing your pictures and reading your posts. It is helpful for the overall goal of this project: to learn more about the experiences of individuals who are survivors of sex trafficking or who experienced time in the life of prostitution or the sex trade. Your pictures have expressed your voice. These voices are important so that those who are providing services or offering help to ladies with similar experiences can learn from what you have shared.

This group discussion will take no more than two hours. Remember that this research study has done everything possible to protect your privacy and confidentiality. As you participate today, please use the research identification number that you have used throughout the project. If you are sharing about someone else, please talk generally saying he or she or their role in your life, rather than revealing their name. Does anyone have questions about that?

Next, you have the option to participate without video. You can participate just with voice by turning the video off. When you are not speaking, please leave your microphone muted to avoid background noise. It is totally your choice how much you participate in this meeting. You have the choice to only listen or to participate by giving your ideas. You are also free to stop participating at any time by leaving the call. No explanation is needed.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Our purpose of our time today:

1. Use SHOWED to talk together about the main themes of each other's photography:
  - What do you SEE here?
  - What is really HAPPENING here?
  - How does this relate to OUR lives?
  - WHY does this situation concern or strength exist?
  - What can we DO about it?
2. What do you think are important messages being communicated through your pictures?
  - What consistent themes did you see and hear in the photos, photo subjects?
  - What do the pictures have in common?
  - What stood out to you about the body of work as a whole?
  - What spoke to you about the body of shared work as a whole?
3. Who do you want to hear these messages? What do you wish to be conveyed in the research outcomes?
4. Any additional thoughts or feedback on your experience in this Photovoice project?
5. Is there anything you wish to do individually or as a group to share your photos with the community?

## **Appendix L: Research Participant Screening Form**

1. What is your gender identity?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male to female transgender
  - c. Female to male transgender
  - d. Male
  - e. Other:\_\_\_\_\_
2. This study is for adults ages 18 and older. Are you at least 18 years of age?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. Are you a resident of the United States?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. Have you been (or does an organization consider you to have been) a survivor of sex trafficking or have you had involvement in the sex trade?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. Have you had an experience of being trafficked within the last one-ten years?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

### **Research Participant Demographic form**

1. What is your age in years?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
  - a. White or Caucasian
  - b. Black or African American
  - c. Hispanic or Latino
  - d. American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - e. Asian or Asian American
  - f. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - g. Other race (please specify)
3. On which continent were you born?
  - a. Africa
  - b. Antarctica
  - c. Asia
  - d. Australia
  - e. Europe
  - f. North America
  - g. South America

4. Have you received services from a post-trafficking organization now or in the past?
  - a. Yes, currently
  - b. Not now but in the past
  - c. No, never
  - d. Unsure/I don't know
5. How many post-trafficking organizations have you received services from?
  - a. Three or more
  - b. Two
  - c. One
  - d. None
  - e. I don't know
6. Are any of the post-trafficking organizations you received services from faith-based?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I don't know
  - d. Not applicable
7. What types of services have you received (or) are you receiving from any post-trafficking organizations? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Shelter/Residential program
  - b. Emergency physical assistance (food, clothing, financial or material assistance)
  - c. Legal support
  - d. Victim Advocacy/court accompaniment
  - e. Individual counseling
  - f. Support group
  - g. Mentor/support person
  - h. Peer support
  - i. Case management
  - j. Group therapy
  - k. Referrals to other organizations (specify-ie. Drug/alcohol treatment, medical care, psychiatrist, etc)
  - k. Other (please specify)

## Appendix M: Research Contact Card

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> |
| <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> |
| <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> |
| <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> |
| <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> |
| <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> |
| <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Heather Evans</b><br/>484-226-7151<br/><a href="mailto:heevans@sp2.upenn.edu">heevans@sp2.upenn.edu</a></p> |

## Appendix N: Photovoice Project

### Participant: Cat

*"I kept thinking over and over about what I wanted my first 'photovoice' picture to be. I wanted it to be profound And I was thinking too much. This is profound. My own kitchen after 4 years of living without my own home. I can cook my own meals and wash and clean dishes that belong to me. That's a success."*



*"The demolition of the past.  
Club Ave. Hanover Ave."*



*"Learning how to bake a 'square life'  
very first pie I've made in my life."*



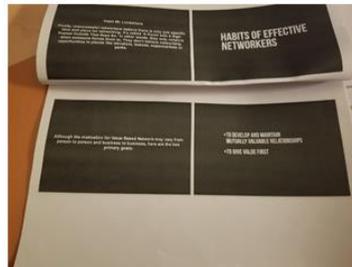
*"Walking in different shoes my path don't  
feel the same. It's shining and bright."*



*"Taking care one day at a time mind body and  
soul. Haven't cooked in a month.  
I see I still got it."*



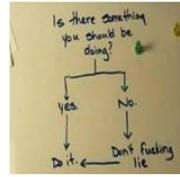
*"Learning new skills and tools to be a better  
advocate to my fellow survivors.  
Network seminar"*



*"Just because the ugly acts are over doesn't mean I'm completely over it. I lay in my bed and images flash like snap shots. Will I ever be able to close my eyes and sleep peacefully?"*



*"no caption needed."*



*"This is almost what my life has felt like."*



*"Sad. This makes me so sad."*



*"I'm being abstract."*



*"When life gets tough remember the sun will come out tomorrow. So keep your toes painted."*



## Participant: Grace

*"Today I went for a hike to clear my head. Whenever I'm feeling lost or anxious I go into the woods to clear my mind. Today was one of those days where I was reminded of some of the darkness from my old life. While walking, I came across these thorns. They reminded me of all the trials I have undergone and how still to this day, the abuse and trauma still feels like thorns in my skin. Yet I saw something on the thorns. There were raindrops. The rain drops symbolized me being cleansed from that life and reminded me that I am a new person. I have been washed by the water. The rain has come and renewed my beauty."*



*"In the winter months depression always seems to hit me the hardest. This winter I have made it a point to get out and explore no matter how cold it's or how depressed I'm feeling. This is a picture of ice between rocks. It reminds me that although the ice looks broken I still see beauty and detail in it. I see the broken parts as a chance to see the ice differently. No matter how broken I have become- I can still see beauty in my brokenness."*



*"These are the shadows of six adolescents girls I mentor about drugs and alcohol at a Juvenile Detention Center. I help to teach them to not live in the shadows of their secrets and pain anymore. Through my own healing and recovery I'm able to help bring others out of the shadows and into healing."*



*"Although our bodies have been abused, bruised, neglected, and mistreated...today we can use our bodies to spell out the word LOVE. In this moment, we choose to love and honor our bodies."*



*"Reshaping love. Today I ran a group about Love with the girls and this was a picture that captured our thoughts. Although we've all been broken, we choose to still show love."*



*"Sitting outback with the kids at work. Teaching the girls some new coping skills and what it means to turn your pain and voice into art."*

"Taking a walk to clear my head. I often have to remind myself that not every day is as easy as walking a straight line. Some days I might feel like I'm falling off course and not walking as straight as I should be. Doubt loves to creep into my mind. The yellow line symbolizes God in my life and how he lines every road I take and is always right there when I begin to walk too far off course. I always find my way back to the yellow line, my faith, my God."



"On my way into work I stopped to admire the beauty of a snowfall. I'm constantly reminded that each day is a new day and a new beginning. I'm clothed in white and made pure by my faith."



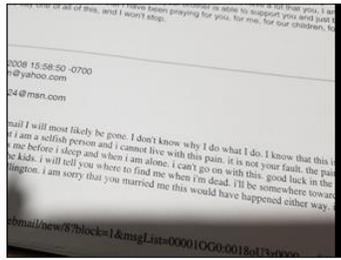
"This is a picture of me holding my niece's hand. Or her holding mine. I will be taking her by the hand in life but at the same time she's guiding me too. Her birth 5 months ago opened my eyes to the innocence of a new life. It was like nothing I had ever experienced before. Being an aunt is my favorite role in life. She's a daily reminder of purity and innocence. Although my innocence may have been stolen from me at a young age, my niece has a blank white page in life. For this I am grateful for. I promise to protect her, guide her, and walk along beside her through life. She is a beautiful gift that I feel honored to receive."



"Crocuses. The first flower to come up in Spring. I noticed these as I was leaving work. They reminded me that Winter is on the way out and Spring is coming. Spring represents for me new growth and the world coming back to life. In my life, I have gone through many seasons. My favorite season is always the times I get to see the beautiful growth that comes out of the winter storms."

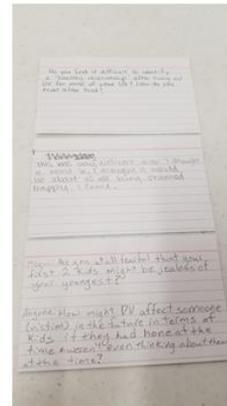


# Participant: Megan



"Suicide note email - This weekend was rough I am just realizing! My abusive ex husband showed up unannounced with his new wife and their children, and manipulated a situation to be able to see my children, whom he forfeited custody of 5 years ago. His wife left an incredibly nasty voicemail, and I just feel sad for her. She is stuck in the EXACT same cycle of life events - like, EXACT same storyline, and I see it and she obviously doesn't want to. Anyway, I sent her this picture and told her there was a lot her husband probably has never told her about the hell he put me through when we were married, and that was ok, and that if she ever needed out and needed someone who believed her, she had my number. She didn't like hearing that, lol, but that's OK I know I didn't want to 10 years ago either."

"Index cards - I sit on a domestic violence survivor impact panel, and we share our experiences with people who are currently on probation for DV related offenses. It has been a really healing and empowering thing to be a part of for many reasons, however I am finding that I am increasingly triggered and drained when I tell my story in chronological order. I came home from this panel last week and told my husband "I think I'm done sharing my story like that." It feels good to recognize my needs, to be financially stable enough to step away from opportunities that no longer feel healthy, and to be able to pass this opportunity on to one of the women in my programs who is wanting to start sharing her story publicly, and knowing it will be a safe place for her to do so."



"City council - I spoke at city council this week, asking the city to allocate specific human resources to trafficking investigations in our community. The county is SO close to adopting a partial decriminalization model, they've stopped arresting girls, they call me in for consulting and intervention, they refer to our org and other orgs, and they're targeting buyers. Speaking at city council was really interesting, we each got 2 minutes which is zilch to make a point. But I got sandwiched between an abolitionist who played a song for his 2 minutes, about 15 water rights activists, and a homeless man who poops in a bag due to cancer (his words!) and pointed out that the city's current law around human waste disposal technically makes it illegal to breathe inside city limits. It was honestly the greatest people watching hour of the past decade!"



"Planned Parenthood tag - This weekend my family was in a bad car accident - my husband and three children were t-boned by a fully loaded uhaul. Thankfully everyone is alright, but it was the scariest thing ever getting that call and arriving on the scene. That happened about an hour before I was supposed to speak at the PPRM regional conference, which my husband assured me they were fine once we got everyone home (it happened about 5 minutes from our house), and so I went and did my presentation and it was wonderful. I am really excited to have an ongoing partnership with PPRM because I went there regularly while I was being trafficked, and just pulled my full 5 years of medical records and analyzed them to further educate medical professionals"



"Flowers and Chicks - these were taken on Easter at my aunt's house. Her home is so beautiful, her and her husband are extremely successful entrepreneurs, and were the first people to leave the cult my family grew up in. I respect and admire them very much. Family events are also very important to me and I love holidays getting to spend that time together. I am also a huge foodie and my family is full of incredible cooks!"



"At lunch one day this past week with a lady in our job program. When it happened, I expected her to become incredibly upset, however we all shared a good laugh - proof that as chaos in our lives begins to become a thing of the past, the little things aren't as big".

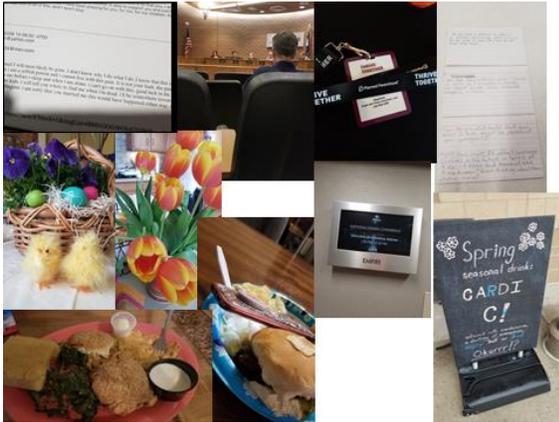


"I've watched Cardi B below up from a "stripper" on social media to reality tv to her musical career. I have mixed feelings because I think it's awesome she has been able to exit the sex industry and break down societal stereotypes but I also see younger girls thinking that this truly can be a path to success for everyone. This sign was at a coffee shop here in rural CO and I found it interesting that her music and culture have really hit mainstream."



"Oakland CA vegan place was the best food I've ever eaten in my life! But it was also a meal shared with two ladies in my program while we had an amazing discussion about relationships, boundaries, and improving our support services to survivors."





**Participant 14**

*"All Alone and Completely Dead"*



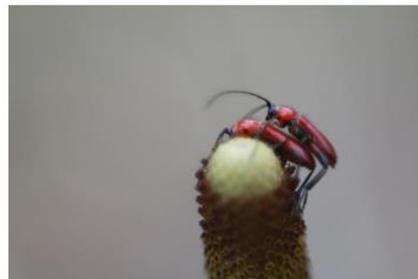
*"Confused"*



*"No Last Inning"*



*"Is Sex is More than Animalistic Instincts?"*



*"Tears: Always Silent Never Finished"*



*"Seen"*



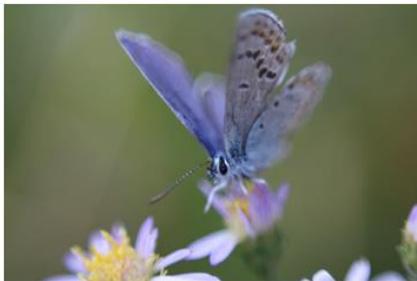
*"The Beauty of Redeeming Love"*



*"Restored Innocence"*



*"Freedom"*



*"Dreaming of Royalty"*



*"Beyond Green: my worth is more than money"*



*"The Mirror: seeing beauty has now opened the opportunity to reflect beauty through my life."*





**Participant 15**

*"For me, this picture represents feeling trapped while I was in the life, and also the way that my experiences shape the lens through which I view the world now."*



*"I really connect to imagery of trees, and I love the symbolism of the heart growing out of/being fed by the roots of a tree. This is part of a 3-D puzzle project I'm working on that came out of the art therapy session at the 2018 Emerging Leaders Conference."*



*"My first vision board, created recently for a mentorship program I am in"*

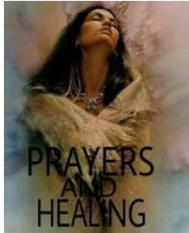


*"Reminding myself I have power and agency now, and can use it to do amazing things, is a daily struggle and practice."*

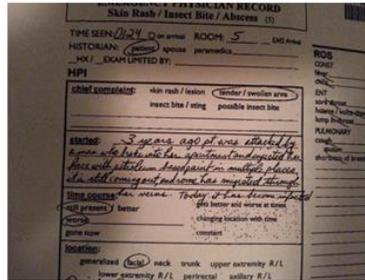


**Participant 18**

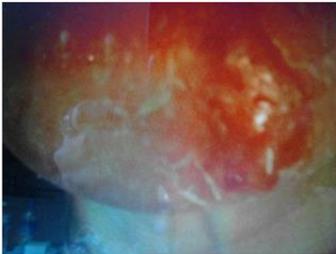
*“Prayers and Healing  
Native Warrior Woman”*



*“Petroleum based gloss paint was injected into  
the muscles of my face and body, during yet  
another home invasion.”*



*“paint draining from my chin”*



*“awoke after being set up and drugged in my front yard  
then brutally raped by several men when I arrived home  
from work on Feb 1 2014”*



*“after being brutally raped for #pornharms film feb 1 2014 you  
can see where they dapped their penis on the front of my  
underwear after putting them back on my body”*



*“Liberty protecting me after she saw them drug me  
and they locked her in the bathroom as they brutally  
raped me for a porn video without my consent.”*



*“Cab involved in the incident of  
trafficking me. February 1, 2014”*



*“We all have an unexpected reserve of strength  
inside us that emerges when life  
puts us to the test.”*



*“Liberty  
We are wonder women super heroes!”*



*“Just in out of the rain, my pretty  
purple flower umbrella”*



*"pretty tall pine trees. It's so lovely to be free from slavery and out here in the rain."*



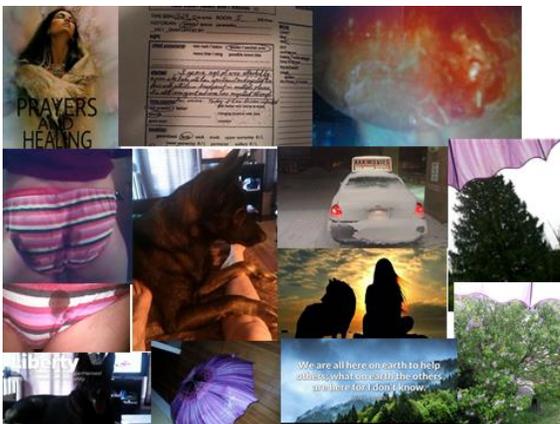
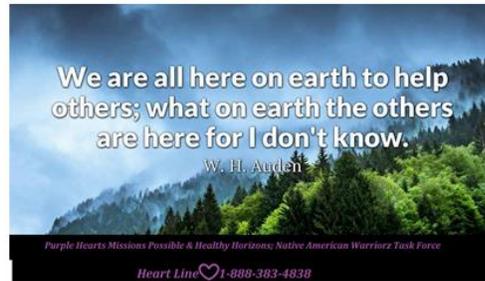
*"Spring showers and lilacs in our back yard"*



*"Spring showers, lilacs, and pines. A beautiful day out here in the rain"*



*"We are here to help others."*



## **Group Analysis:**

An integral aspect of Photovoice is the opportunity for participants to view each other's photos and share their observations and feedback. The following includes a summary of their comments for each participant.

### **Cat:**

#### **1. General Themes: What do you see?**

Perseverance, new life and new beginnings, self-care, little moments and little achievements, learning to find beauty in the little victories, security, independence, a visual picture of difficulty engaging in the "square" world, new experiences, trying and learning new things; survivors giving back and having passion to help others, visual picture of the realities, empowerment; able to be present in the moment, but engaging in the future, a different respect and empathy than most people have, she sees more deeply and does not overlook someone else's sadness and reality, able to see something abstract, able to see things and appreciate it: "To someone else it may seem bland, but she sees flowers she hasn't smelled in years, a ball to play and have fun with, and she is able to think for herself and see what she wants to see and sit down on a bench if she wants to. She is outside, enjoying her freedom, mental and physical" (Grace).

#### **2. General Message: What is the message from these pictures that is important for others to hear?**

There is more positivity than negativity. Being a survivor does not mean that everything is about the traumas that we have endured. How big of a change it is to go from being in the life to being out of it. Yet, we are able to see more than survive. We can engage in the future. We can see the world around us embrace new things and new experiences.

### **Grace:**

#### **1. General Themes: What do you see?**

Freedom, resilience, hope, someone who gives back and through giving back, is finding her own healing; Deep; working with kids as a form of healing and learning to trust; someone who has taken the chance to trust and seeing the power that love can have on a person; protecting our youth and teaching them to step out of their shadows; having the mental capacity and freedom to pay attention to simple things in nature (first snowfall; a leaf on the ground), overcoming and empowering; beauty coming after winter; ability to see beauty; connected with the present; aware of her surroundings; able to interpret and take lessons from what she is seeing.

**2. General Message: What is the message from these pictures that is important for others to hear?**

There is new growth. Starting over and coming back after loss of self is possible. New growth includes surrounding yourself with love.

It takes a lot of people to help someone come back to life and to experience life again. It takes connection. It takes connection with people. It takes connection with God or your Higher Power. It takes connection with yourself. It takes a lot of reflection. Survivors are just normal people going through everyday life, and trying to make a little difference.

The role that survivors can have on other survivors: Survivor leaders can impact the lives of others who have been through similar traumas.

**Megan**

**1. General Themes: What do you see?**

The ability to make choices, someone who is able to live beyond her past experiences and the freedom to choose; resiliency (finding humor); the choice of being public (not all survivors make this choice, including for reasons of fear and threat); taking care of her needs; ongoing struggles: still able to be triggered; food, holidays and family-small victory of something that is appreciated by survivors; gratitude; commitment; glamorization of sex industry; value of women relationships formed on journey; leadership is important

She is highly empowered and now empowering others; a woman who believes in something and is involved in giving back and being an advocate for those still in the life

**2. General Message: What is the message from these pictures that is important for others to hear?**

The power of a survivor: survivors are very powerful.

Those who are out of the life still have abuse that happens.

What it takes to get to a point where she can speak out to help others. It takes courage.

It takes both survivors and allies to make changes.

A woman who is dedicated to giving back, but it's not easy to give back. A lot of toll comes with that and you have to know when to step away. It's hard to fit back into the mainstream society and balance everything in a way that is healthy and able to make progress. Holding onto the small moments is important.

**Participant 14**

**1. General Themes: What do you see?**

14.1 “What it feels like; standing and the wind is knocking everything you have off and the life is stripping you of everything that you once were. Although she is completely dead, there’s still that one piece of part of the dandelion that is hanging on and that one piece is where she built from to get to where she is today. From that one little piece that hung on, she’s now not dead, but she is alive and moving forward” (Grace).

14.2 Confusion; shames; lies; judgement.

14.3 “It is a game, that’s for sure. It is a game and so many people play it and so many people don’t come out of it. So many people get stuck. The baseball glove to me represents like it is a game and also, it’s a men’s game. It is a men’s game. When will the last inning be? When will enough be enough and when will it change into something that’s not – a woman isn’t looked at as a game, as a commodity that’s for sale, but a person of value” (Grace).

14.4 “I know, for myself, sex became nothing. It was a way to survive. It was a way to get money for the things that I needed. It was just – there was no emotional connection. There were no feelings behind it. It was just an act and from childhood, it was just never anything that was enjoyable and nowadays, it seems like society endorses it just to be an animalistic instinct. It’s just like. You’re treated like an animal, especially in that life, like, you are just – you are there for one reason and one reason only and it’s – it makes me sad. It says what it needs to say but it’s like – the caption on top – it makes you think, it really does. But, to me, it shows that this person is still struggling with that maybe. That sex still is that. It’s crazy that even the bunch of red – that represents, like, evil to me. It’s just demonic. But, through the healing journey, you realize that, that is not what it’s supposed to be and there is purpose behind it” (Grace).

14.5 tears in silence and isolation; “Sometimes there are not words for expressing the pain you felt or the fear that you have or the entrapment that you felt and sometimes your own tears speak your words for you and they heal you with the silence” (Grace).

14.6 There is beauty in tears. Tears have formed this picture and this person into the beauty that she is today. Without them I don’t feel like this picture or this person would be who they are today.

14.7 New person, new creation, innocent.

14.8 Freedom: the best gift that you can ever receive.

14.9 Dreaming of the what ifs and what could be; hope

## **2. General Message: What is the message from these pictures that is important for others to hear?**

These pictures show the confusion from people in power and the reality of how the exploitation is and feels.

These tell the story of being broken, lost, confused and questioning and a shift to new hope and beauty in the process.

These pictures show what it does to you and the brokenness that you feel but that it can improve as you think outside of the lifestyle.

The ability to heal and reflect the beauty that is being seen. Things are deep and dark but it's possible to heal and it's possible to reflect that beauty that you begin to see.

Survivors are able to see what most people do not see and have a way of portraying pain and healing.

These pictures also represent the uncertainty that survivors have, going back and forth between positive and negative, guilt and shame and trying to love at the same time.

### **Participant 10**

#### **1. General Themes: What do you see?**

A story of entrapment but she is beginning to dream again. That dreaming leads to the ability to grow and find meaning in life (first picture: death; then the opposite of death.); She has the means to change people's lives; She is currently healing, trying to find her way where she fits in after the life; She is still caught by the past but trying her best to push forward. She is grounded in the present

#### **2. General Message: What is the message from these pictures that is important for others to hear?**

It entraps girls. There is no way out. Sometimes trying to go for help does not work.

### **Participant 18**

#### **1. General Themes: What do you see?**

Heaviness, a lot of pain, In the midst of pain there is someone who is trying to see the sun beyond it; Resiliency and someone who is really strong.

#### **2. General Message: What is the message from these pictures that is important for others to hear?**

The full reality of things survivors have experienced and the sadistic things that humans are capable of. To be able to fully understand good, we have to fully be able to understand evil.

It's possible to think about the flowers, sunshine and not all the painful things that have happened. The struggle exists, but it is possible to move into a place where they don't control you.

There is a story that needs to be told. She has a lot of pain and her life was severely impacted because of trafficking and still is severely impacted.

### **Overall Themes: What is the Collective message of these pictures as a whole?**

As the participants discussed the consistent themes and collective message of the photos, they saw the following themes:

Faith, spirituality, choices, hope, resiliency, nature, future, love, expressing pain, the ability to embrace freedom.

These themes were further developed into key messages about the survivorship of victims of human sex trafficking:

### **Synchronicity:**

“There are similar themes in experiences of being trafficked, but so many different ways it can happen. It can happen to anyone at any time and we need to stay connected with trusted people.”

### **Emphasis on healing in the midst of struggle:**

“The pictures are an expression of ourselves and where we are at today. It is more focused on the healing part rather than the actual trauma.”

“Everyone’s fit together: constantly processing past experiences and still trying to make sense of things; being thankful for where you are now and recognizing how much hard work it takes to get where we are; still having difficult moments and days of it all not making sense yet.”

### **Capacity for Seeing Beauty and Hope:**

“There is hope and that it is possible to see beauty even in the midst of the horrific things that have happened. If we can see beauty, then we can communicate beauty because pictures are a form of communication. Then if we communicate beauty, that creates hope and hope then gives us the ability to take another step into the future” (Grace).

### **Expressed Impact of Photovoice on the survivors:**

All of the participants expressed the positive impact of participating in taking the photos and seeing each other’s photos. Themes of their feedback included it being powerful to see their photos in a collective story with other survivors. They saw the individualized stories and

perspectives, but the unifying themes, that gave them validation and connection to others. They expressed feeling empowered, and how the creativity of expressing voice can be more powerful than words: “Deep complex thoughts around simple beautiful images” (Megan).

“The power of being able to use pictures to share stories and being able to communicate depth of pain and depth of hope through pictures. It hit something deeply emotional and powerful inside of me and does communicate something deeper than sharing narrative with just words...I did not think I would be so profoundly touched...Seeing my own photos gave me a sense of empowerment. This has been a really amazing experience...Part of my story was heard for the first time tonight that’s never been heard before“ (Grace).

“There’s a powerful very impactful statement being made. There is synchronicity” (Participant 18).

“It reminds me that I am not alone with the experience of trying to fit back into society after you have been so branded and broken. Everyone finds their way differently but we are also searching for the same thing. Survivors take different avenues, but everyone can still see beauty. Out of all that darkness you can still see something that’s beautiful. That to me just shows a spirit of complete power and such strength...Pictures are a lot more powerful than words sometimes and it comes from such a creative...it makes people think” (Grace)

“It is helping to normalize my experiences. We talk about one another’s experiences but we don’t actually see one another’s experiences. Seeing them helps you to realize others have those similar thoughts or moments...“I’m shocked how every single person is so unique but all together, it all fit together” (Megan).

Participant 14 provided a salient summary of this project:

“I hope others see the power of Photovoice and the ways that it can be utilized to give expression to an individual, and as a survivor, the ways that I have found healing in the midst of it and the ways that it can really share that narrative and not just share the narrative but also share the future as well. **It doesn’t just tell the past narrative, it can also share the creation of a future narrative.** This is what I am leaving this experience with, which has been so powerful for me.”

### **Action after Photovoice:**

Participants were asked who they want to hear the messages of Photovoice and what ideas they have for displaying their collective project as a way to take action. Participants discussed how this can and should be shared nationwide and worldwide and used to show a broad comprehensive audience the realities of human trafficking. It is again important to note that these realities expressed in photovoice are “not only the past narrative of the experience, but the creation of a future narrative” (Participant 14). Grace mentioned this could be used at various events and made available as a better way to not re-exploit someone by exposing their pictures rather than their faces (as in having a survivor come to an event to share her story). She stated it is a way that survivors can voice themselves while being protected, but still having the courage to say what they want to say. Suggested platforms for events and display included:

- Social media
- Combining with other awareness events
- Educational training for service providers
- Support group curriculum for survivors that could include sharing with other groups across the country.
- Museum
- A published picture book

## **Appendix O: Sample Case Study Analysis: Participant 006**

### **Demographics:**

21 year-old black female. First age of trafficking experience was 17 years old. Duration: approximately 2 years; left trafficking experience approximately 1-2 years ago.

### **Pre-trafficking:**

006 was in different foster homes in early childhood. She does not know her birth parents. She was adopted by her current mother at age 7. She states that she grew up with her mother as an alcoholic and she would often drink with her, at the age of 13. She recalls her mother would only be happy when she was drinking so the only time they got alone is if they drank together. Her mother was a foster mother and therefore she had many foster brothers and sisters, but considers herself closest to the last four. She moved out of the house at age 15 into her own apartment and took her sister with her and generally raised her. She says she was focused on school and work and was not looking for trouble. She worked various jobs, but also sold drugs in her community “when she was little.”

### **Recruitment:**

At age 17 or 18, 006 saw a person she previously went to church with as a child. He was four years older than her. He came to a party at her house and they began talking. They eventually started to date and she describes it as becoming controlling, saying he needed to know where she was and who she was seeing and was “attached and clingy.” He began to be abusive towards her and her sister. His cousin was also a trafficker and he started his own “business” after learning from his cousin.

### **Peri-trafficking:**

He threatened her life and used her sister as a form of threat. She didn’t see what was happening as horrible or illegal. She only didn’t want people to know she was getting hit by a man. So, she complied so that he would not hit her. Slowly she stopped interacting with other people and working at other jobs because he did not want her to work and slowly he started taking control of all money and bills. This created a dependence on him because she needed to support herself and her sister. This continued for two years.

This trafficker had three other females. They would travel to different cities, averaging 10-15 buyers/one night.

### **Leaving:**

006 was caught in a prostitution sting. They spoke with her but let them go after a few hours. One week later they went to a job. When she arrived, she realized it was a police officer. She reports when she entered the hotel room, a female officer was yelling at her and telling her she was going to jail or going into a program. She remembers feeling confused and uncertain who to trust. She blacked out and woke up two days later in a residential program for women with histories of sexual exploitation.

### **Post-trafficking:**

006 stayed at the home for women for a year and two months. Since that time, she has had various jobs, stating she often feels paranoid, causing her to change jobs frequently. She has also changed her living situation. She remains connected to the church she attended during time at the home, two staff members she met from the home and a counselor. Her trafficker was to fulfill a two year sentence but was released in 3-4 months. She lives in fear of seeing him.

**Themes:**

**Pre-Trafficking:**

Foster care, adoption, alcohol dependence in mother; left home at age 15 to live independently; sexual abuse by family member and a foster family member.

**Recruitment:**

Started out as a dating relationship, slowly became more controlling

**Peri-trafficking:**

- “No one believed me when I said it was happening.”
- Used threats against sister as a form of control
- Didn’t think it was a horrible thing or illegal. She kept following what he would say because she didn’t want him to hit her. “I just didn’t want people to know a man was hitting me”
- Buyers included people you know and people that you would never suspect. They hid me from their wives. “They were lonely people and weird people. They liked weird things...”
- “I didn’t wear a lot of clothes and I was always cold.
- It was always scary, because you never know if you go into their house, if you’re gonna come out.”

**Rules:**

He told her what to wear and what to do.

She could not cross over to someone else and leave him. She witnessed another victim who tried to leave and he left her on the side of the highway naked with no cell phone and no money, taking all the money she had made.

She averaged 10 buyers in one night, but this often changed. It could become a minimum of 15 buyers in one evening. If the guy did not pay her the agreed amount, she would get punished. They traveled to different cities. She averaged \$1000-2000/night.

There were times she would tell him she could not do it anymore. “There were limits. Like, I can’t make money if I can’t even stand up.”

**Relationship with Trafficker:**

She liked him at one point and did it to make him happy.

**Fear/Survival:**

Some violent experiences

Some would find ways not to pay, but if she didn't get paid, she would get hurt.

### **Coping:**

She attributes her sister for helping her get through it. Her goal was taking care of her and helping her get through school.

Drinking

### **Leaving:**

She was offered the choice between jail and residential program. This was a fearful choice for her because law enforcement had been involved with her trafficker and she did not know who she could trust. She also didn't understand how what she was doing was illegal. "No one explained to me, what you are doing is illegal. This is not supposed to happen, why are you doing this kind of thing...I wish the cop would have identified who she was. I didn't know anything about her...and...you should probably hear my side before you assume something is going on, because I don't want to be here." She says that night she was taking sleeping pills and drinking so she was not coherent by the time she was interacting with law enforcement. When she wasn't answering the questions, the officer was becoming "meaner."

### **Post-trafficking challenges:**

- Difficulty not drinking.
- Was used to a routine and body took time to adjust to something different.
- Lost apartment and all of her belongings because landlord didn't know where she was. car was repossessed because she wasn't working during time at the home and couldn't pay for it.
- Had to catch up on everything (i.e. Bills, etc.) from one year of being in the residential program
- Does not have friends like before; only one friend.
- Living paycheck to paycheck
- Trying to control emotions without drinking
- Fear of seeing her trafficker
- Fear of being in public and who she interacts with (i.e. What friends she accepts on facebook and what she presents publicly on social media)
- After she left the home, there were many things she had not learned to do and things that were done for her during time in the home.

### **Post-trafficking emotions:**

- Worried for sister; uncertain
- "I went from doing almost 10 guys a night to nobody."
- Had nightmares, difficulty sleeping
- Paranoid and scared at jobs, which led her to change jobs frequently as well as leave a living arrangement
- Drinks alcohol and isolates in room.
- Fear (her trafficker was supposed to be in prison for two years but was only there 3-4 months) "I'm scared to stay in one place for too long...I feel like a pinpoint."
- Doesn't trust law enforcement because she had some as customers and also saw the way he did not receive consequences if they were caught
- Feels like a bother to people

### **Relapse/Return to trafficker:**

006 stated she doesn't want to go back, but there was one time she considered it. "It was like if I'm with him, he can't really haunt me...I won't be as paranoid because I know where he's at. I know what he's doing...and he'd always pay for things. I never saw the money, but now it's like really, really hard to work...and I feel like it's just paycheck to paycheck and I'm trying to get caught up...I'm like, it wasn't really that hard as long as I was like listening and stuff, I was fine...I feel like a bother to people if they're trying to help me or like I can't keep a job or a place...It was a time, kinda just suck it up or go back. I thought about doing it myself, but I can't. I don't know how to do that stuff. It wasn't fun. So, I was like, nah, I'll just wait it out."

### **Post-trafficking needs:**

- life skills (financial management)
- counseling
- clothing

### **Post trafficking Services:**

- Was offered the option of jail or going into the residential program. She describes this choice as scary because she was not sure who she could trust. There was law enforcement involved with her trafficker. "So, if I'm going to jail, am I coming right back to him?"
- Was in the home for 9 months.
- Went back to school.
- Counseling in residential program as well as current counseling in outpatient (same counselor)

#### **Residential program:**

- She appreciated the therapy, and appreciated having a choice that she didn't have to answer or do what she didn't feel comfortable doing;
- She did not think having women come together in the same house, saying and hearing the stories of others was causing her to think about her own story; the different personalities and different levels of trauma.
- She thought some of the rules were "absurd"-not being able to have a cell phone, couldn't have a television in our room (There was only one TV, sometimes I don't want to be with them, and sometimes I want to watch TV on my own). She thought there should be a choice on whether or not you go to church or what kind of church you go to or what day they go to church.
- She also was not able to make calls in first 21 days of being there. But this hindered her from talking to her sister to make sure she was safe and to taking care of stopping bills. This time of not being able to talk made her restless. She also says she was not doing much, and it made her to think a lot, "which is not a safe place to be for me..."
- Was given choice to not testify; detective testified on her behalf and remained involved in communicating with her.
- Food stamps
- Is connected to a church. She cleans for them if she needs help with bills.

### **Coping with emotions:**

- Drinking

- Stays in contact with one of the women who worked at the home, they talk frequently and sometimes meet.
- Has one friend from school who continues to stay in contact.

### **Needs/Recommendations:**

- Tell the survivor who you are/expect fear and mistrust (law enforcement, service providers)
- Giving more options for services (more than just jail or this program. “Is this something in between? The program is completely cutting off your life or there’s jail. I don’t know what jail is like, but I’m pretty sure that’s another form of cutting off your life...”)
- Residential programs: offer choices for participation in faith community; consider policies on phone use; teach life skills (i.e. Paying bills, managing budget, etc)
- A go-to person. Someone you can call when you need help or don’t know what’s next.
- Safe places to stay without too many restrictions.

### **Advice for friends/family:**

- If you see something’s wrong, get more involved and make sure they are okay. “I feel like if there was someone on the outside that was there, then I probably would have been fine in some way.”

### **Emotions:**

- Fear, paranoid, vigilant
- “I can’t be by myself for too long because then I just like blank out or can’t think about where I was.”
- Flashbacks
- Difficulty sleeping “I’d rather be up watching some other show than go to sleep because I don’t really want to have bad dreams.”
- I don’t trust anybody.
- “Some girls just went back to their boyfriends. Some girls are like really hitting hard rock bottom. So, I’m trying to stay in between there and not go back that way.”

### **Relationships:**

- Lost some friends who didn’t understand what happened; some had boyfriends or husbands that “used her services” so they are angry with her for that.
- Loss of trust/”being careful who you talk to”
- Not interested in dating. “I don’t see myself in a relationship or marriage or expect a lot.”

### **Sexuality:**

- It was an adjustment going from having sex with 10 guys a night to nothing. The experience made her more sexual.
- Describes a time of having two weeks with drinking and a sexual relationship with a guy from work, then “snapped out of it” and ended it with him.
- She never had sex while being sober. “I don’t think I want to be sober, because it’s easier to not be than it is to be sober. Yeah, no thanks.”

### **Physical Impact:**

- Bruises, but you can't see them anymore

**Faith/Spiritual Beliefs:**

- She grew up as a Christian, believing in God and Jesus and going to church. She still asks herself the purpose/reason for the trafficking experience.
- "I read my bible and I pray but I feel like nothing's working...I have faith that something will change, but..."

**Perspective:**

- Not every friendly face is very friendly. You really can't trust everybody. (i.e. Having one of your best friend's dads calling me...that kinda just changes everything..")

**Dreams/Goals for Future:**

- To be successful, "like one day, this is where I came from, this is where I'm at. I'm OK with it. I don't want like an extravagant lifestyle. I'm OK with a simple little house and a dog...I just want to be okay and to know what the future looks like. Right now, I kinda don't"
- Live a good, simple, non-extravagant lifestyle
- Be successful in whatever I do
- Adopt a kid

**Impressions:**

Her experiences cause us to evaluate the tactics, perspectives and interventions of law enforcement during prostitution stings, the need for a variety of services (non-residential alternatives), and the considerations for guidelines in residential programs

Reinforces the need for a safety support system that becomes family and the embedded mistrust we can expect.

## Appendix P: Codebook

\*sensitizing concept  
 \*\*\*a priori codes

| Themes                         | Codes  | Definitions   | Quotes  |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>Pre-trafficking Factors</b> | Factors of Vulnerability                     | Includes predisposing factors that add risk or susceptibility of harm for an individual. These include both static and dynamic variables that may be associated with environment, experiences, personality, or various factors from each system with which the individual interacts as well as the individual's expressed description of the experience of these factors. | <i>"So I just got caught up in that and always trying to be with him because I didn't want to be at home and dealing with my parents drinking and all that chaos."</i>  |
|                                | Factors of Recruitment                       | Captures methods and experiences a woman was forced, coerced or deceived into entry of the commercial sex industry as well as the expressed description of the individual's experience of this recruitment  | <i>"There was a series of events that happened....and during that time I met this guy at a gas station, what was like this charming, really outgoing, charismatic guy who made me feel really special for the first time ever...He wanted to know what my dreams were, what my interests were...and that felt really good to just not feel lonely. He ended up being my turn out-my first trafficker."</i>  |
| <b>Trafficking Experience</b>  | Characterization of Trafficking Experience   | Includes gut-level descriptions of emotional language that convey the research participant's perceptions and reflections on the trafficking experience.   | <i>"I would say it was the most broken, I think, humanly possible anyone can be. The most vulnerable anybody can be. Just the evil in this world, to come in contact with everyday..."</i>  |
|                                | Relationship with trafficker                 | Captures aspects of the dynamics and interaction between the research participant and the trafficker/s.   | <i>"He always found me and very much like that domestic violence, like I'm sorry, it will be better this time or threats to kill me and my children."</i>   |
|                                | Form of Exit                                 | Captures the circumstances or contributions for a woman leaving the trafficker and commercial sex industry.   | <i>"So this woman actually helped me create an escape plan, and previously, my escape plans had not worked, but over a series of weeks and months, I was able to create something that actually did work which I wasn't expecting it to work but it did."</i>   |
|                                | Experiences with the criminal justice system | Includes details or descriptions of any exchange with the criminal justice system during time in the commercial sex industry, such as arrests for prostitution or other-related charges.  | <i>"They'd search you and handcuff you and throw you in the back of the van and you'd be in there for a couple hours. You drive along and wait for the other women. Probably be six of you in the back of the van. You sit back there and no one talks to you. It's just, you know the deal. It is what it is. Then they transport you into the round house and still nobody talks to you—thrown into a cell. It's 29 other women, freezing cold, sick, crying...They knew who the girls were. They knew what you were in there for..."</i> |
| <b>*Identity</b>               |  | Captures aspects of identity across the trafficking experience from pre, during and post, as well as the transitions of contributing factors and how this shifts from one space to another.   |   |
|                                | Identity formation                           | Captures the aspects of whom and what contributors have formed the identity of the individual or the  | <i>"Growing up I had been told that I was so stupid, that I was only good for sex, that I was just a prostitute."</i>   |

|                            |  |   |  |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
|                            |  | perception and beliefs about self.  |  |
|                            | Perception of self/identity                                    | Captures how a participant views or describes her sense of self, her value and her roles and how this identity has shifted as they have moved in and out of the trafficking experience. It may include the benefits, growth or challenge of how she views her identity. | <i>"So I guess I just want people to know, yeah, I've come out and that I've gone back to school and I'm doing all these things, but it wasn't easy. Was it worth it? Yes. Do I struggle on a daily basis? Yes. But I'm not defined by that. I'm a daughter. I'm an aunt. I'm a girlfriend. I'm a daughter of a doctor. Daughter of a nurse. I'm a granddaughter. This can happen to anybody. It doesn't matter where you come from, who your parents are or what upbringing you had..."</i>   |
|                            | Identity in relation to the outside world                      | Includes perception of self in relationship to others in community based on experiences of communication or attitudes from others   | <i>"...when I would reach out for help, I got a lot of judgment. And that was a rude awakening going from this counterculture that completely embraced and supported what you were doing to the greater community, to like, you're disgusting. You make really bad choices."</i>   |
| <b>Experiences of Loss</b> |  | The fact or process of being deprived of or losing someone or something of value  |  |
|                            | Loss of identity   | Includes experiences that contributed to the process of losing identity and/or the experience of having no identity.  | <i>"I honestly did not know who I was for a very long time and I did not know what my likes and dislikes were."</i>  |
|                            | Loss of power  | Describes ways an individual was denied personal freedom or agency  | <i>"At first it was so difficult to accept that, because that meant that I had been hurt. That meant that I hadn't chosen to do this. That choice was not a choice....realizing my victimization was something very difficult for me to process."</i>  |
|                            | Loss of relationship   | Experiences where relationship was impacted, injured or removed as well as the loss of trust or the loss of capacity for relationship.  | <i>"To have this woman who had built this friendship with me and then exploit that friendship and those vulnerabilities almost seemed to be a deeper layer of betrayal because I trusted her to help me and she took that trust and she exploited it."</i>   |
|                            | Loss of voice  | Captures the process and expressed experience of how a person was silenced or her voice was ignored or not permitted.   | <i>"Even when I like tried to like tell him it hurts and stop and something like he would just continue."</i>  |
| <b>Power</b>               |  | The ability to do something, to act, or to have influence   |  |
|                            | Mechanisms for managing abuse of power                         | Captures how a person is deprived of their personal influence to act or choose and their individual response, as well as ways someone misuses their power against another   | <i>"I didn't want people to know a man was hitting me, so I just followed what he said and he wouldn't hit me anymore."</i>  |
|                            | Use of personal power or personal strength to reclaim control. | Includes how an individual identifies and/or reclaims her personal agency for choice and influence throughout her lifetime, including before, during and after the trafficking experience.  | <i>"there was a particularly like bad encounter with him, but as soon as he left -- this was, like, maybe a couple months into maybe the six months I had planned of transitioning to get out, and so a couple months in, I had this really bad experience and he lashed and I was like, I can't do this anymore after -- I just cant. This has got to be it. Like, I better change my phone number. I've gotta like, you know, make it work because it was like, once I had it in my head that I could leave it made everything that much more unbearable."</i> |

|                               |                                   |  |   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
|                               |                                   |  | <i>And, so that's how I ended up getting out."</i>  |
| <b>*Sexuality</b>             | Attitudes about sexuality         | Captures personal descriptions of an individual's view of her own sexual experiences or identity over time.  | <i>"It was really difficult for me to be sexually intimate with him and that was an area of my life that I just wanted to cut off and say, this is no longer gonna be a part of who I am..."</i>  |
|                               | Experiences with sexual activity  | Includes a participant's involvement and responses to sexual activity throughout her lifetime, including before, during, and after the trafficking experience                                      | <i>"Sex was just sex. It still had that price tag...it was just a thing that you do. Until I got into a serious relationship is when that changed. The first person that actually respected me and that there was more than just sex. It was an actual emotional exchange and there was value to it and there was feelings with it...."</i> |
| <b>*Relationships</b>         | Experiences of Trust and Distrust | Captures descriptions of a person's experiences of reliance, confidence and interaction between her and another, including the challenges, obstacles and benefits of trust and within relationship | <i>"I didn't trust people as much as I trust people now. I struggle to let people into my life and I had this wall up."</i>   |
|                               | Relationship Development          | Includes aspects of how a participant describes building relationship with another, perspectives and experiences of a survivor, as well as building relationships                                  | <i>"I would say if it wasn't for the adopted dad in my life I would have never been in a place to open myself up to the possibility of being in a relationship with a man or woman. Like, I was not wanting to be in a relationship with anybody."</i>  |
|                               | Role of Relationship              | Captures descriptions of the purpose relationship serves in the life and experiences of a survivor, as well as a participant's role in relationships with important others                         | <i>"I believe that just as trauma takes place in relationships, I believe that healing takes place in relationships as well...those people are very much a part of my life on a daily basis and I know I can call them at any moment"</i>   |
|                               | Relationship with partner         | Captures experiences within a love/romantic relationship with a partner  | <i>"Then my husband, he is a cheerleader and that's been pretty incredible. It hasn't been easy, but I am so grateful for him walking into my life, and being okay with just the messiness of my story...it's not easy, but it took a lot for me to trust him, too."</i>  |
|                               | Relationship with support persons | Includes descriptions of the interaction and role of support persons in the life of a survivor before during and after trafficking experience  | <i>"I really believe that I wouldn't be able to be successful if it wasn't for people believing in me."</i>   |
|                               | Relationship with family          | Includes how a participant relates to her family throughout her lifetime, including before, during and after the trafficking experience.   | <i>"I was trafficked by my family. So what that means is that people who are supposed to take care of me, they are the ones who perpetrated the evil and human trafficking."</i>  |
|                               | <b>*Service Utilization</b>       | Level of satisfaction with care  | Captures a participant's description of her experiences when utilizing services, such as health, legal, social services or anything related to an individual accessing support for her given needs, before, during or after the trafficking experience.   |
| Accessing care                |                                   | Includes the process and factors by which a survivor utilized services   | <i>"I think the hardest part was being in a rural area and there just wasn't services."</i>   |
| Purpose/Role of Care          |                                   | Includes the function and value of service utilization   | <i>"...It's so overwhelming to come out of that life into normal society and know how to get a job, how to present yourself, how to speak about things or not speaking about things, how to manage money..."</i>  |
| Experiences with peer support |                                   | Captures the specific services that include interaction with peers who have shared experience of sexual  | <i>"...immediately it takes away the judgment that so many other people give you...it's an understanding...You've all been victimized."</i>   |

|                                  |                                      |  |   |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
|                                  |                                      | exploitation   | <i>You've all been humiliated and you've all been used for your body and it's just a common understanding and you're not so quick...you don't have to explain yourself...and work closer to get to healing faster than having all those barriers in the beginning."</i>                                 |
| <b>Reintegration Experiences</b> | Experiences of Emotion               | Includes the named and expressed emotions that a survivor has after exiting the trafficking situation  | <i>"The shame and the guilt. That's a big one. Just having flashbacks of where I've been, what men have done to me, situations I've been in..."</i>   |
|                                  | Experiences of Need                  | Captures the named needs of a participant during her time of post-trafficking reintegration  | <i>"I needed medical care. I needed attorneys. I need physical help...I needed somebody to teach me how to take care of my physical body and how to get strong physically..."</i>   |
|                                  | Experiences of Learning              | Captures descriptions of the types and role of learning during the reintegration process.  | <i>"She always explained to me why my body was doing things...so being able to understand why my body was responding the way it was, helped me become more mindful of when I started doing that."</i>   |
|                                  | ***Experiences of Trauma Symptoms    | Includes descriptions that align with aspects of complex trauma that include: regulation of affect and impulses, attention or consciousness, self-perception, relations with others, somatization, and systems of meaning.   | <i>"Just having flashbacks of where I've been, what men have done to me, situations I've been in. Not really knowing where to put that."</i>  |
| <b>*Systems of meaning</b>       | Seeking purpose                      | A participant's description of challenges, process and source of meaning and purpose as well as the value this provides.   | <i>"...school...became the way that I was able to survive and stay safe...It's given me this huge dream to continue in these academic pursuits..."</i>  |
|                                  | Experiences of hope and despair      | A participant describes what gives her motivation to keep living and to have confidence, the challenges and process of finding, lacking or losing hope.  | <i>"Here I was working my butt off, but I was getting A's...it gave me a reason to live because it gave me something to work towards."</i>  |
|                                  | Goals and Dreams                     | Captures specific things that a participant would like to achieve or have in the future, fears or hindrances to her goals and dreams and the process of identifying goals and dreams.  | <i>"definitely getting my PhD, and I would like to write books, continue to speak, continue to educate, train and use my degree to give me credibility as a trainer, as a speaker and as an author."</i>  |
|                                  | ***Perceptions                       | Captures how a participant sees others, the world and her experiences. This also captures the process of changes, loss and discoveries with perception before, during and after trafficking experience.  | <i>"I have a new perspective on a lot of things. I have gratitude I never had. I have a humility that I never had. I have a passion that I have never had. I have an eye for beauty in the little things that I never had. And, I just have a really good way about making any situation positive."</i> |
|                                  | Experiences of Shame                 | Captures how a survivor of sex trafficking interacts and experiences shame before, during and after the trafficking experience and the impact of this shame. Shame includes the belief or experience of seeing oneself as different, bad, flawed or lacking value. | <i>"You're ashamed because you can't believe what you've become, but at the same time, you can't even remember who you were."</i>   |
|                                  |                                      |  |   |
| <b>*Ways of Coping</b>           | Coping during trafficking experience | Includes how an individual manages emotional, physical, social, and spiritual challenges during the time of being trafficked.  | <i>"I kinda drank a lot, so as long as I would keep drinking, I'm good."</i>  |

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
|  | Coping during reintegration experience                           | Includes how an individual manages emotional, physical, social, spiritual challenges during her time of post-trafficking reintegration   | <i>"And it was through that dog that I was able to regulate my own emotions and be able to engage with people."</i>   |
|  | ***Experiences of Dissociation                                   | Includes descriptions that align with usage of this specific aspect of complex trauma where a person is physically present but disengages mentally and emotionally from an experience.   | <i>"I used to be completely cut off from my emotions so it's taken awhile for me to get to know my emotions and be okay with expressing emotions."</i>  |
| <b>*Spirituality</b>                   | Experiences with faith   | A participant's description and activities that include faith or religion before during and after the trafficking experience.  | <i>"I use the term spiritual resilience because I experienced so much spiritual abuse and so much horrific stuff on a spiritual level, whether that's supposed to be from well-intentioned people or from my experiences with my biological people. But spiritually I really have found a lot of people in being able to practice my faith, my religion..." "I believe in God. I believe in Jesus and everything that works with the Bible. At the time, sometimes until today, I'm like, why? You know what I mean? Everyone's like He wouldn't put you through what you can't handle...I'm like what is the reason for this? What was the plan for this?"</i> |
| <b>*Recommendations from Survivors</b> | Recommendations for service providers                            | Specific or implicit feedback provided from the expressed experiences of survivors for how service providers can be most helpful when working with trafficking survivors or what has happened that they perceive as not helpful. | <i>"I am under the impression right now that unless it is something a client requests, then as a part of their journey and part of the journey that they want to take, that it should not be made a requirement of the program."</i>  |
|  | Recommendations for community members                            | Specific or implicit advice from the expressed experiences of survivors for how community members can most effectively respond and interact with trafficking survivors.  | <i>"I really wish that somebody had seen the trauma that was going on and had said something and had people who knew me back then say, I knew something wasn't right...I really wish people had said something."</i>  |
|  | Recommendations for family members/loved ones                    | Specific feedback from participants on how family members and loved ones can be most helpful.  | <i>"Be a student of the survivor because what you see today is not going to be the person that you see tomorrow or in five years. And the people who stuck it out in my life and who have truly, I see as being major people in my life, are the people who are able to grow with me."</i>  |
|  | Recommendations for survivors                                    | Specific advice from survivors of sex trafficking for survivors of sex trafficking   | <i>"I would recommend not giving up...find beautiful things to see."</i>  |
|  | Recommendations for faith communities/ faith based organizations | Specific feedback for how faith communities and faith based organizations can be most helpful when working with trafficking survivors.   | <i>"So there is a difference between faith-demanding and faith-based. But, if you don't practice that religion, it feels exclusive from the beginning. It doesn't feel like, I'm gonna fit in there..."</i>   |
|  | Recommendations for therapists/clinicians                        | Specific feedback from sex trafficking survivors for what has been helpful when working with therapists.   | <i>"My therapist is so patient with me. I was really grateful for her to be able to walk into what she knew was going to be a long-term relationship and knowing that I have a very severe trauma history and be okay...knowing that...she doesn't make money off of me."</i>   |
|  | Recommendations for Criminal Justice System                      | Specific or implicit feedback provided from the expressed experiences of survivors for how   | <i>"The prison system that didn't make me feel like I was this horrible number and just this person that is drug addicted and a nobody."</i>  |

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
|   |   | criminal justice system representatives such as law enforcement, judges, investigators and attorneys, can be most helpful when working with trafficking survivors or what has happened that they perceive as not helpful.  | <i>There was no contact in that sense that – even for a judge to give you a prostitution charge and – like why didn't anybody say, hey, I know you don't want to live like this."</i>  |
|   | Recommendations for Medical Professionals | Specific or implicit feedback provided from the expressed experiences of survivors for how medical professionals such as nurses, doctors or anyone in a medical setting, can be most helpful when working with trafficking survivors or what has happened that they perceive as not helpful. | <i>"I had an amazing anesthesiologist who, even to this day, I smile when I think about her. She understood trauma and she actually called me the night before my first surgery and she talked for a whole hour. She was like, I need you to be familiar with my voice. I'm just going to read you a story so that you know what you're going to be waking up to. It's going to be okay. I will be talking to you throughout the whole procedure. I just want you to start to know what's going on."</i> |
| <b>Experiences of Survivor Leadership</b> | Experiences of Survivor Leadership        | Captures the descriptions of survivors who have become active in a role of leadership or advocacy with survivors of sex trafficking or organizations within the anti-trafficking movement, as well as survivor experiences with leaders in the survivor community.                           | <i>"It's very fulfilling and my wish is to be that person and to have that organization that wasn't there."</i>  |

## Bibliography

- Addams, J. (1912). *A new conscience and an ancient evil*. New York: McMillan.
- America, D. o. (2016). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Department of State.
- Armenta-Buelna. (2017). Trauma-informed Interventions for Sexual Exploitation and their Effectiveness on the Exit Process: An Empirical Review. *California State University, San Bernardino Scholarworks*, 1-44.
- Armenta-Buelna, L. (2017). Trauma-informed Interventions for Sexual Exploitation and their Effectiveness on the Exit Process: An Empirical Review. *California State University, San Bernardino Scholarworks*, 1-44.
- Army, S. (2006). *Anti-trafficking Training Manual. Prepared for the Office for Victims of Crime*.
- Assistance, U. D. (2019). *Human Trafficking Task Force E-Guide*.  
<https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/>.
- Association, A. P. (2005). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR (4th ed.)*. Washington DC: APA.
- Atchison, C. (2010). *Report of the preliminary findings for Johns' Voice: A study of adult Canadian sex buyers*. retrieved from <http://johnsvoice.ca/> .
- Baker, L.M., Dalla, R.L., Williamson, C. (2010). Exiting Prostitution: An Integrated Model. *Violence Against Women*, 579-600.
- Barner, J; Okech, D; Camp, M. (2018). "One Size does Not Fit All:" A Proposed Ecological Model for Human Trafficking Intervention. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 137-150.
- Bromfield, N. (2016). Sex Slavery and Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: Historical and Contemporary Parallels, Policies and Perspectives in Social Work. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, Vol. 31(1) 129-139.
- Bromfield, N; Capous-Desyllas. (Summer 2012). Underlying Motives, Moral Agendas and Unlikely Partnerships: The Formulation of the U.S Trafficking in Victims Protection Act through the Data and Voices of Key Policy Players. *Advances in Social Work*, 243-261 .
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the Family as a Context for Human Development: Research Perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 723-742.
- Busch-Armendariz, N, Busch Nsonwu, M, Cook Heffron, L. (2014). A kaleidoscope: The role of the Social Work Practitioner and the Strength of Social Work Theories and Practice in Meeting the Complex Needs of People Trafficked and the Professionals that Work with Them. *International Social Work*, 7-18.
- Butcher, K. (June, 2003). Confusion Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking. *The Lancet*, 1983.
- Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (2006). The foundations of posttraumatic growth: An Expanded Framework. In L. G. Calhoun, *Handbook of Post-traumatic Growth: Research and Practice* (pp. 1-24). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cecchet, S., & Thoburn, J. (2014). The Psychological Experience of Child and Adolescent Sex Trafficking in the United States: Trauma and Resilience in Survivors. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*, 482-493.
- Choi, H, Klein, C, Shin, M, Lee, H. (August, 2009). Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Disorders of Extreme Stress (DESNOS) Symptoms Following Prostitution and Childhood Abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 933-951.
- Clawson, H. D. (December, 2009). *Study of HHS Programs Serving Human Trafficking*. US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.
- Corbett, A. (2018). The Voices of Survivors: An Exploration of the Contributing Factors that Assisted with Exiting from the Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Childhood . *Children and Youth Services Review*, 91-98.
- Countryman-Roswurm, K & DiLollo, A. (October, 2016). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach Used for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women and Therapy*, 55-72.
- Courtois, C, Ford, J. (2009). Defining and Understanding Complex Trauma and Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders. In F. Courtois, *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders* (pp. 13-30). New York: Guilford Press.
- Courtois, C, Ford, J. (2009). *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorder*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Crawford, M. &. (August, 2008, Volume 14 Number 8). Sex Trafficking in Nepal: Survivor Characteristics and Longterm Outcomes. *Violence Against Women*, 905-916.
- Dalla, R. (2006). *Exposing the "pretty woman" myth : a qualitative investigation of street-level prostituted women*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

- Dalla, R; Xia, Y, Kennedy, H. (2003). You Just Give them what they want and pray they don't kill you: Street-level Sex Workers' Report of Victimization, Personal Resources, and Coping Strategies. *Violence Against Women*, 1370.
- Dell, N., Maynard, B, Born, K, Wagner, E., Atkins, B., House, W. (2017). Helping Survivors of Human Trafficking: A Systematic Review of Exit and Postexit Interventions. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 1-14.
- Department of State, U. S. (2016). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Department of State.
- Department of State, U. S. (2017). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Department of State.
- Donovan, B. (2006). White slave crusades: Race, gender, and anti-vice activism, 1887–1917. *Urbana: University of Illinois*, Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10533442>.
- Elliot, D., Bjelajac, P., & FalLOT, R. M. (2005). Trauma-informed or Trauma-denied: Principles and Implementation of Trauma-informed Services for Women. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 461-477.
- Estes, R. (2001). *The Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Guide to the Empirical Literature*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons.
- Evaluation, U. D. (n.d.). *Human Trafficking within and into the United States: A Review of the Literature*. US Department of Health and Human Services.
- Ezparza, J. (2015). Using Person-centered Expressive Arts Group Therapy with Combat-related PTSD Veterans. *Proquest*, 1-213.
- Farley, M. (2003). *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress*. Binghamton: Haworth Press.
- Flowers, R. (2001). *Runaway kids and teenage prostitution*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Freed, W. (2003). From Duty to Despair: Brothel Prostitution in Cambodia. *Journal of Trauma Practice*, 133-146.
- Gajic-Veljanoski, O., & Stewart, D. E. (2007). Women trafficked into prostitution: Determinants, human rights and health needs. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 338-358.
- Gillece, J. (2012). *SAMHSA's National Center for Trauma-Informed Care Changing Communities, Changing Lives*. National Center for Trauma Informed Care.
- Gozdziak, E, Lowell, L. (February, 2016). *After Rescue: Evaluation of Strategies to Stabilize and Integrate Adult Survivors of Human Trafficking to the United States*. Georgetown: Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown.
- Hardy, V, Compton, K, McPhatter, V. (2013). *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Practice Implications for Mental Health Professionals*. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*.

- Hass-Cohen, N.; Bokoch, R; Clyde Findlay, J.; Banford Witting, A. (2018). A four-drawing art therapy trauma and resiliency protocol study. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 44-56.
- Hedin, U & Mansson, S. (2003). The Importance of Supportive Relationships Among Women Leaving Prostitution. In M. Farley, *Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress* (pp. 223-237). Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press.
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Harpercollins.
- Hickle, K. (2017). Resiliency and women exiting sex trade industry work. *Journal of Social Work*, 302-323.
- Hossain, M, Zimmerman, C, Abas, M, Light, M, Watts, C. (2010). The Relationship of Trauma to Mental Disorders Among Trafficked and Sexually Exploited Girls and Women. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2442-2449.
- Hughes, D, Roche, C. (1999). *Making the Harm Visible: Global Sexual Exploitation of Wome and Girls-- Speaking Out and Providing Services*. Kingston, RI: The Coalition Against Women in Trafficking.
- Hughes, D; Raymond, J. (2001). *Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends*. Coalition against Trafficking in Women.
- Institute, T. C. (2014). *Utilizing Trauma-Informed Approaches to Trafficking-related Work*. Brookline, MA: Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute.
- International, A. (1973). *Report on Torture*. 1973: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Johnson, B. (2012). Aftercare for Survivors of Human Trafficking. *Social Work & Christianity*, Vol.39, No.4, 370-389.
- Jones, M. (2014). Leaving "The Life": The Recovery Journey of Sex Trafficking Survivors. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*.
- Joslin, K. (2002). Introduction: Slum angels. In J. Addams . *New conscience and an ancient evil*, pp. ix–xxxii.
- Kessler, R, Chiu, W, Demler, O, . (2005). Prevalence, Severity, and Comorbidity of 12-Month DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 617-627.
- Landau, J. (2007). Enhancing Resilience: Families and Communities. *Family Process*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 351-365.
- Law, S. S. (June, 2015). *Sex Trafficking: An Abbreviated Overview of Federal Criminal Law*. Congressional Research Service.
- Leidholdt, D. (2003). Prostitution and Trafficking in Women: An Intimate Relationship. In M. Farley, *Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress* (pp. 167-183). Binghamton: The Haworth Maltreatment& Trauma Press.

- Little, S, Little, Akin-Little, A, Somerville, M. (2011). Response to trauma in children: An examination of effective intervention in response to Post-traumatic Growth. *School Psychology International*, 448-463.
- Lloyd, R. (2011). From Victim to Survivor From Survivor to Leader: The Importance of Leadership Programming and Opportunities for Commercially Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Young Women and Girls.
- Lorenz, L. (2010). *Brain Injury Survivors: Narratives of Rehabilitation and Healing*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- Macy, R, Johns, N. (2011). Aftercare Services for International Sex Trafficking Survivors: Informing U.S. Service and Program Development in an Emerging Practice Area. *TRAUMA, VIOLENCE, & ABUSE*, 87-98.
- Mansson, S. A. (2004). Clients of Prostitutes: The Swedish Case. *La Découverte*, 64-69.
- Mayfield-Schwartz, L. (2006). SEVERITY OF TRAUMA EXPOSURE AND COMPLEX POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER SYMPTOMATOLOGY IN WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE. *California Institute of Integral Studies*, 1-154.
- McIntyre, B. (2014). More than just Rescue: Thinking Beyond Exploitation to Creating Assessment Strategies for Child Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation. *International Social Work*, 39-63.
- Meston, C; Lorenz, T; Stephenson, K. (2013). Effects of Expressive Writing on Sexual Dysfunction, Depression, and PTSD in Women with a History of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Results from a Randomized Clinical Trial. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 2177-2189.
- Milrod, C & Monto, M. (2012). The Hobbyist and the Girlfriend Experience: Behaviors and Preferences of Male Customers of Internet Sexual Service Providers. *Journal of Deviant Behavior* , 792-810.
- Okech, D., & N. Hansen, W. H. (2018). Social Support, Dysfunctional Coping, and Community Reintegration as Predictors of PTSD among Human Trafficking Survivors. *Behavioral medicine*, 209-218.
- Okech, D., Morreau, W., & Benson, K. (2012). Human Trafficking: Improving Victim Identification and Service Provision. *International Social Work*, 488-503.
- Onwuegbuzie, A; Collins, K; Frels, R. (2013). Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to Frame Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Research. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 208.
- Orme, J, Ross-Sheriff, F. (2015). Sex Trafficking: Policies, Programs and Services. *Social Work*, 287-294, volume 60, number 4.

- Padgett, D. (2017). *Qualitative Methods in Social Work Research, 3rd Edition*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Pearce, A. (2012). AMERICAN INDIAN ADOLESCENT GIRLS: VULNERABILITY TO SEX. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 37-56.
- Pearce, E, McMurray, K, Walsh, C, Malek, L. (May, 2016). Searching for Tomorrow—South Sudanese Women Resconstructing Resilience through Photovoice. *International Immigration and Migration*, 1-21.
- Perez, E. (2015). *Body Image and Sexuality in Female Survivors of Sexual Human Trafficking*. Ann Arbor, MI: Proquest.
- Perry, C. (2015). The Relationship Between Post Traumatic Growth and Quality of Life With Sex Trafficked Survivors. *Proquest, LLC*, 1-197.
- Pittenger, S; Huit, T; Hansen, J. . (2016). Applying ecological systems theory to sexual revictimization of youth: A Review with Implications for Research and Practice. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 35-45.
- Polaris. (2015). *Human Trafficking Issue Brief: Safe Harbor*. American Bar Association.
- Polaris. (2017). *2016 Statistics from the National Human Trafficking Hotline and BeFree Textline*. Washington, DC: Polaris.
- Project, P. (2012). *Understanding the Definitions of Human Trafficking: The Acts Means Purpose Model*. Washington, DC : National Human Trafficking Resource Center.
- Rajaram, S. & S. Tidball. (2018). Survivors' Voices-Complex Needs of Sex Trafficking Survivors in the Midwest. *Behavioral Medicine*, 189-198.
- Raphael, J & Myers-Powell, B. (2010). *From Victim to Victimizers: Interviews with 25 Ex-Pimps in Chicago*. Chicago, IL: Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center of DePaul University College of Law.
- Reid, J. (2014). Risk and resiliency factors influencing onset and adolescent-limited commercial sexual exploitation of disadvantaged girls. *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health*, 332-344.
- Reid, J. (2014). Risk and resiliency factors influencing onset and adolescent-limited commercial sexual exploitation of disadvantaged girls. *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health*, 332-344.
- (2014). *Report of the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Ross, C, Farley, M, Schwartz. (2003). Dissociation Among Women in Prostitutiion. In M. Farley, *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress* (pp. 199-212). Binghamton, NJ: Hayworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press.

- Royal, M. (1998). *The Pimp Game: Instructional Guide*. Los Angeles: Sharif Publishing.
- Rozenkranz, S., Muller, R., & Henderson, J. (2013). The role of complex PTSD in mediating childhood treatment and substance abuse severity among youth seeking substance abuse treatment. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*, Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0031920.
- Saleebey, D. (1996). The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice: Extensions and Cautions. *Social Work*, 296-305.
- Saleebey, D. (2002). *The strengths perspective in social work practice*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Schmidt, C. (2014). Working with Survivors of Domestic Sex Trafficking: Obtaining the Perspective of Mental Health Professionals to Build a Therapeutic Model. *UMI Dissertation Publishing*.
- Schultz, T; Schwer Canning, S, Eveleigh, E. (2018). Posttraumatic Stress, Posttraumatic Growth, and Religious Coping in Individuals Exiting Sex trafficking. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 1-17.
- Shah, S. (2011). Trafficking and the conflation with sex work: Implications for HIV control and prevention. *Presented at the Third Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group of the Global Commission on HIV and*.
- Sher, J. (2011). *Somebody's Daughter: The Hidden Story of America's Prostituted Children and the Battle to Save Them*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- Silbert, M; Pines, A. (1983). Early Sexual Exploitation as an Influence of Prostitution. *Social Work*.
- Smith, H. A. (2014). *Walking Prey: How America's Youth are Vulnerable to Sex Slavery*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, L, Healy Vardaman, S, Snow, M. (2009). *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*. Vancouver: Shared Hope International.
- Smolak, A. (2013). White slavery, whorehouse riots, venereal disease, and saving women: Historical context of prostitution interventions and harm reduction in New York City during the Progressive Era. *Social Work in Public Health*, 28, 496–508.
- Sornborger, J; Fann, A; Serpa, G; Ventrelle, J; Sornborger, J; Fann, A; Serpa, J.G.; Ventrelle, J; Ming Foyne, M; Carleton, M; Sherrill, A; Kao, L; Jakubovic, R; Bui, E; Normand, P . (2017). Integrative therapy approaches for posttraumatic stress disorder: a special focus on treating veterans. *Focus: The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry*, 390-398.
- Southwick, S, Charney, D. (2014). *Resilience: The science of mastering life's greatest challenges*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spear, D. (2004). Human Trafficking: A health care perspective. *Nursing for Women's Health*, 314-321.

- Spinazzola, J, Blaustein, M, Kisiel, C, Van der Kolk, B. (2001). Beyond PTSD: Further Evidence for a Complex Adaptational Response to Traumatic Life Events. *Paper presented at American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting*, (pp. 373-392). New Orleans.
- Stark, C, Hodgson, C. (2003). Sister Oppressions: A Comparison of Wife Battering and Prostitution. In M. Farley, *Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress* (pp. 17-32). Binghamton: The Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press.
- Talbot, E, Carlson, H, Hage, D, Palm, M, Prasad, A. (2007). Understanding the Psychological Needs of Survivors. In B. a. Grant, *Hands that Heal: International Curriculum to Train Caregivers of Trafficking Survivors* (pp. 183-214). Project Rescue International/FAAST.
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). *Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundation and empirical evidence*. Philadelphia, PA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- The Field Center for Children's Policy, P. a. (2017). Field Center Completes Multi-city Study on Child Trafficking Among Homeless Youth; Identifies Risk and Resilience Factors. *Research on Human Trafficking Among Homeless Youth: New Findings and Implications for Policy and Practice* (p. 1). Philadelphia: The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research.
- U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) and Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). (n.d.). *Human Trafficking Task Force E-Guide*. retrieved <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/>.
- Vagle, M. (2014). *Crafting Phenomenological Research*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis.
- Van der Kolk, B. (1996). Dissociation, somatization, and affect dysregulation: the complexity of adaptation of trauma. *Psychiatry Online*, 83-93.
- Wahab, S. (2002). For their own good: Sex work, social control and social workers, a historical perspective. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 29, 39–57.
- Walsh, D. S. (April, 2016). Sex Trafficking and the State: Applying Domestic Abuse Interventions to Serve Victims of Sex Trafficking. *Human Rights Watch*, 221-245.
- Wang, C, Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, Vol. 24 (3), 369-387.
- Williams, L. (2010). Harm and Resilience among Prostituted Teens: Broadening our Understanding of Victimization and Survival. *Social Policy and Society*, 243-254.
- Williamson, E., & Dutch, N. C. (2009). *National Symposium on the Health Needs of Human Trafficking Victims: Post-Symposium Brief*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Wilson, B. & Butler, L. D. (2014). Running a gauntlet: A review of victimization and violence in the pre-entry, post-entry, and peri-/post-exit periods of commercial sexual exploitation. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 6(5), 494-504.

Zimmerman, K; Hossain, A, Watts, C. (2011). Human trafficking and health: A conceptual model to inform policy, intervention. *Social Science and Medicine*, 327-335.