

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES
OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS CHALLENGES IN COMBATTING HUMAN
TRAFFICKING IN ALABAMA

by

Patience S. Johnson-Daniels

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking (HT) is a heinous crime that has gained international attention. Millions of people (specifically young girls and women) are affected by prostitution and sexual exploitation, the most common forms of human trafficking. Currently, anti-trafficking law enforcement agencies are struggling to respond to human trafficking due to the lack of data, the hidden nature of the crime, the current service providers, and the strategies of human trafficking task forces. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study will be to understand better the challenges of law enforcement officers and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking. The goals of the study are threefold: (1) to illustrate the experiences in their own words, (2) to identify themes surrounding efforts to combat human trafficking, and (3) to better understand how law enforcement officers perceive the challenges they must endure. A transcendental phenomenology research design will be used to obtain a detailed description that provides the basis for the essences and meanings to emerge from the perspectives of the law enforcement officers. In this study, the researcher will conduct semi-structured open-ended interviews with ten local law enforcement officers in Alabama. The data will describe the lived experience of each of the ten officers. The transcendental phenomenological research design will also utilize Moustakas' processes: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, structural-textural, composite textural, and synthesis. The study's findings will have implications for the criminal justice field and professional practice.

Copyright Page

Dedication

First, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for providing me with the strength, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding needed to accomplish this journey. I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my husband, thank you for supporting me and having patience with me throughout my entire academic career. To my daughters, Annalise and Arin, my motivation. I hope writing this dissertation and completing doctoral school will make you proud one day. To my mother, thank you for all your love and support through this journey. I appreciate everything you have done for me. You are my biggest cheerleader and worst critic; for that, I am grateful and thankful; it has pushed me into being the woman I am today. Thank you all for the roles you have played in my life. I love you!

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List of Abbreviations

HT	Human Trafficking
IACP	International Association of Chiefs of Police
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning), and Intersex
NGO's	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHTRC	National Human Trafficking Resource Center
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act
WAHTTF	West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

North America is the third largest continent, inhabiting over 500 million people. During the mid-1990s, human trafficking emerged – as a social problem. Human trafficking involves using force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act (DHS, 2021). Every year, millions of men, women, and children of various economic, racial, ethnic, and social groups are trafficked worldwide – including within the United States. According to Farrell & Pfeffer (2019), the International Labor Organization estimated that 20.9 million individuals are exploited worldwide yearly, and 4.5 million (22%) are victims of forced sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Countering Human Trafficking reports a 35% increase in human trafficking arrests from 1,746 in FY 2020 to 2,360 in FY 2021 (DHS, 2022). This includes a record-breaking \$486 million in detainments and seized shipments linked to sex trafficking and forced labor (DHS, 2022).

Law enforcement officers face adversities when distinguishing cases involving sex trafficking and prostitution without evidence of force, fraud, or coercion. Moreover, many victims of human trafficking do not contact law enforcement out of fear, which keeps human trafficking a hidden crime. Because it is a hidden crime, information is not readily available or shared between law enforcement agencies and other social service organizations, which may assist in identifying victims. Additionally, investigating human trafficking cases is usually outside the realm of traditional police roles. It does little to address the root cause of trafficking, including social and economic conditions that make victims vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2019).

Background

Human trafficking is a billion-dollar industry (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2016). The United States Department of Homeland Security defines human trafficking as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act (2021). Yet, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines human trafficking as gathering, moving, receiving, or keeping human beings by threat, force, or deception for exploitive purposes (UNODC, 2022). This includes the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs (Oster, 2016). According to UNODC's definition, the earliest form of human trafficking began with the African slave trade. Since the American and European continents were involved as buyers, and the different African groups were both items of trade and middlemen, it was the first known international flow of human trafficking (Oster, 2016). After the African slave trade cessation, "white slavery" came to light. A general definition of white slavery is the procurement – by use of force, deceit, or drugs – of a white woman or girl against her will for prostitution (Oster, 2016). In 1904, the International Agreement on the Suppression of "White Slave Traffic" was signed (Oster, 2016). The purpose of this document was to ensure the repatriation of victims.

According to the United States Department of State (2016), the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report has identified several populations particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking in the United States. Persons included were homeless and runaway youth, children involved in the child welfare and foster care systems, youth who have made contact with the juvenile justice system, American Indian and Alaska Natives, migrant laborers, people with disabilities, and those who or the LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning), and

Intersex), among others (United States Department of State, 2016). Furthermore, persons who are impoverished, isolated, addicted to drugs, and have a history of sexual abuse are also vulnerable to human trafficking

Human trafficking can occur in various venues, including massage parlors or other commercial-front businesses operating as brothels, on the street, in hotels/motels, residences, strip clubs, truck stops, bars, restaurants, or online. In 2015, of the human trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, the top reported known venues of these incidents were commercial-front brothels (7.7%), hotels/motels (7.4%), and residential brothels (4.2%) (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2016). In Alabama, several men and women have been arrested for soliciting prostitution (CBS 42 Digital Team, 2021). While there have been isolated incidents in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, other incidents of prostitution exist in the United States and abroad.

The United States federal government established the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) to combat this heinous crime in 2000. Its purpose is to ensure that traffickers are punished, and victims are protected. The TVPA's definition is more detailed than the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's definition. The TVPA defines human trafficking as a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person caused to perform such action is not attained 18 years of age, or the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (TVPA, Section 103, 8a and b). The TVPA modified the Justice for Victims of Human Trafficking Act of 2015, which expanded the definition of sex trafficking to include advertising, soliciting, and patronizing an individual who is a victim of human trafficking (JVTA, 2015). Previously, in

2003, 2005, 2008, and 2013, the TVPA was reauthorized to expand resources and powers for law enforcement to identify and investigate trafficking offenses.

Although the United States has implemented this act, further assistance is needed from federal, state, and local law enforcement to investigate and prosecute these crimes. Thus, two human trafficking tasks force in Alabama have been established – The North Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force and The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. The North Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force became a subcommittee of the Madison County Coordinated Community Response Task Force Against Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking (STNOW, 2022). The North Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force comprises volunteers who work with the state task force and other groups like the National Children's Advocacy Center and Safe Harbor Youth (STNOW, 2022). The North Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force educates the community and law enforcement officers, healthcare professionals, and hospitality industry workers.

The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force is comprised of approximately 35 sworn and non-sworn personnel from the Tuscaloosa Police Department, Northport Police Department, The University of Alabama Police Department, Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office, Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's Office, and Trafficking Hope (WAHTTF, 2021). The Attorney General's Office and multiple federal agencies, including Homeland Security and the FBI, assist the task force. Along with investigating human trafficking cases, the task force also works on cases involving sextortion, solicitation, and the promotion of commercial sex. (WAHTTF, 2021)

Problem Statement

The problem is addressing the challenges law enforcement officers face in combatting human trafficking. Human trafficking is a grave abuse of human rights; it promotes the breakdown of families and communities, fuels crime, deprives countries of human capital, undermines public health, creates possibilities for extortion and subversion among government officials, and imposes economic expenses (NIJ, 2019). Research on local law enforcement's response to human trafficking is limited and focuses only on the experiences of a few large municipal police departments that were perceived to be most likely to encounter victims of human trafficking (Clawson et al., 2006b; Wilson et al., 2006).

Current research has proven that law enforcement officers experience challenges in combatting human trafficking due to lacking training and resources. However, there is also a problem in addressing law enforcement officers' experiences in combating human trafficking in Alabama. Local law enforcement officers have been identified as key figures in the fight against human trafficking. Yet, training has lagged, and their preparation to fulfill this role – their experience – is unknown (Mapp, Hornung, D'Almeida, & Juhnke, 2016).

Moreover, according to Ibrahim (2016), there is limited information on responding to human trafficking. Still, there is even less known about the experiences law enforcement are tasked with addressing human trafficking to understand the meaning behind their interactions with those involved in human trafficking. Understanding human trafficking remains in infancy; therefore, this study will shed more light on how bolstering law enforcement officers' strengths might help.

Purpose Statement

This transcendental phenomenological study will better understand law enforcement officers' challenges and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Transcendental phenomenology is based on principles identified by Husserl and was translated into a qualitative method by Moustakas (Rao, 2019). A transcendental phenomenological design aims to understand a phenomenon by collecting data explaining the essence of lived experiences. The researcher will conduct semi-structured open-ended interviews with ten local law enforcement officers assigned to West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. According to Rao (2019), the investigator sets aside their experience and takes a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination based on the description of the lived experience presented by the participant in the research study.

The theory guiding this transcendental phenomenology is social learning theory. Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that observation and modeling play a vital role in how and why people learn. Bandura's theory further devils into the direct experience within the environment. In his 1977 book, "Social Learning Theory," Bandura details how most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action (UC Berkley, 2021). Social learning theory can be used effectively in the workplace, especially in law enforcement, as their duty involves observing and modeling productive behaviors.

Significance of Study

This study is essential to law enforcement everywhere – federal, state, and local. However, it is particularly vital for local law enforcement in Alabama. The Human Trafficking

Task Forces in Alabama were established because an unprecedented number of human trafficking incidents occurred within the state. Law enforcement officers lack experience, training, and resources in combatting human trafficking. Alabama is a breeding ground for human trafficking, sex trafficking, and labor trafficking. Thus, the WAHTTF must establish the means for effectively combatting human trafficking in Alabama. This study will provide law enforcement officers with the necessary information to effectively and efficiently combat human trafficking based on their lived experiences. This study will also be anticipated to add to the current literature and help promote educational awareness about human trafficking.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed in the study:

- 1) What is the experience of a law enforcement officer (WAHTTF) in combatting human trafficking?
- 2) What are the perceptions of law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) and their challenges in combating human trafficking?

Definition

The following key terms will be used throughout this study.

Child pornography – a form of child sexual exploitation; and a visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor (persons less than 18 years old) (DOJ, 2021)

Human trafficking is using force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act (DHS, 2021).

Labor 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 (DOJ, 2021)

Perpetrator – a person who carries out a harmful, illegal, or immoral act

Pimp – a man who controls prostitutes and arranges clients for them, taking part of their earnings in return

Prostitution – the practice of engaging in relatively indiscriminate sexual activity, in general, with someone who is not a spouse or a friend, in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables (Jenkins, 2021)

Sex trafficking – is a commercial sex act that is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person caused to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age (DOJ, 2021)

Sextortion – is the use of coercion and threats to compel the victim to produce sexual images or videos engaging in sexual acts (USAO, 2021).

Solicitation – the act of accosting someone and offering one's or someone else's services as a prostitute

Survivor – to continue living or existing, especially despite danger or hardship.

Traveling to meet a minor – involves going any distance to engage in sexual battery, lewd or lascivious offenses, child abuse, or other forms of illegal sexual conduct with a child after using email, the Internet, or any electronic device to lure, solicit, or seduce them (Hanlon Law, 2021).

Victim – a person harmed, injured, or killed due to a crime, accident, or other event or action.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study – guided by social learning theory – is to better understand law enforcement officers' challenges and their impact in combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Research has determined some of the challenges law enforcement officers experience include the unwillingness of victims to assist with the

investigation, lack of resources, lack of training, reluctance on the part of prosecution bringing forth cases, the need for multi-agency taskforces and partnerships, the need for specialized technology, and the lack of victim service providers. Thus, the researcher will use semi-structured open-ended interviews (1) to illustrate the law enforcement officer's experiences in their own words, (2) to identify themes surrounding efforts to combat human trafficking, and (3) to better understand how law enforcement officers perceive the challenges they must endure.

Human trafficking is a heinous crime affecting millions of people worldwide. This study is significant because it is essential for law enforcement – specifically in Alabama – to combat human trafficking effectively and efficiently. Currently, Alabama is a breeding ground for human trafficking. There has been an increase in technology and a lack of law enforcement officers' experience, training, and resources needed to combat human trafficking effectively. Inevitably, law enforcement agencies are struggling to respond to human trafficking.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Trafficking of persons has existed for decades in this continent, mainly through the relics of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and post-emancipation efforts to secure labor. According to the International Labor Organization (2012), it is estimated that 20.9 million individuals are exploited worldwide each year, and 4.5 million (22%) are victims of forced sexual exploitation.

The United States has tried to provide more accurate counts of identified victims. Yet, collecting reliable data on identified cases has proven to be challenging. This can be attributed to the newness of the crime, the definition of human trafficking across the country, and the classification of incidents as human trafficking. Additionally, law enforcement officers face difficulty distinguishing cases involving sex trafficking from prostitution without evidence of force, fraud, or coercion (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2019). Moreover, because many victims do not contact the police and information is not readily shared between law enforcement agencies and other practitioners such as social service or victim service providers who may have information about identified victims, there is significant variation in the counts of identified victims among practitioners in a single community, making regional or country-wide counts challenging (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2019).

Governmental agencies across North America have a primary anti-trafficking response that involves adopting criminal laws. These laws punish those who engage in human trafficking and fund programs to identify and protect victims, often ensuring successful prosecution (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2019). However, this approach is limiting as it depends on the criminal justice system to identify situations of human trafficking outside the realm of traditional policing roles.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2006), there were 1,876 defendants charged with

labor or sex trafficking charges under different federal anti-trafficking statutes, resulting in 1,551 convictions from 2001 to 2015.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this transcendental phenomenology study is social learning theory. Learning is a complex concept. During the first half of the 20th century, the behavioral school of psychology proposed that all learning resulted from direct experience with the environment through association and reinforcement (Cherry, 2019). Albert Bandura proposed social learning theory and added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching others, known as observational learning (Hammer, 2011).

Many law enforcement officers enter the field with minimal experience. Nevertheless, they often learn how to perform their jobs and recognize their peer's and supervisors' organizational norms, values, and culture (Fitch, 2011). While supervisors provide direct, formal reinforcement, officers' peers offer friendship and informal rewards that are more influential (Fitch, 2011). Thus, law enforcement officers learn about acceptable and unacceptable practices through a consistent, timely, and meaningful system of reward and punishment. Moreover, social learning theory has three core concepts: 1) people can learn through observation, 2) mental states are essential to learning, and 3) learning does not necessarily lead to behavioral change (Fitch 2011).

As discussed previously, people naturally learn by watching the actions of others. In the case of training, law enforcement officers learn by watching the mistakes and successes of those who have done it before. Bandura identified three basic models of observational learning: 1) a live model – which involves an actual individual demonstrating or acting out of behavior, 2) a symbolic model – which involves real or fictional characters displaying behaviors in books,

films, television programs, or online media, and 3) verbal instruction model – which involves description and explanations of behavior (Bandura, 1977).

One's mental state and motivation are important in determining whether a behavior is learned. Bandura describes intrinsic reinforcement as internal rewards, such as pride, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment (Cherry, 2019). Additionally, regarding mental state, competence is an effective learning model. Most police officers take pride in performing their duties with minimal supervision. Therefore, they model the behavior of the most competent and experienced officers (Fitch, 2011). In conjunction, instructors must provide a reason for trainees to pay attention. The motivation may differ depending on the trainee or class, with the most common being pride, satisfaction, or accomplishment (Hatch, 2020).

Often, learning can be seen immediately when a new behavior is displayed. However, observation learning demonstrates that people can learn new information without demonstrating new behaviors (Cherry, 2019). Regarding training and law enforcement experience, one aspect of learning is performance. In this case, performance could be passing a scenario or test after a short training period or hastily analyzing the previous trainee and mirroring their actions (Hatch, 2020). A new behavior must be created to transfer an action from short-term memory to long-term memory successfully. The trainee must practice and recall the learned information often.

Social learning theory can be used in a series of applications. For this transcendental phenomenological study, social learning theory will be used to address law enforcement officers' experience when combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Law enforcement officers are trained to do their job through the teachings and observations of peer law enforcement officers. As a result of their observation and learning, they are motivated to do their job. However, every law enforcement officer's experience is different. The competence level of the instructor,

supervisor, and (senior) peer officers determines the competence level of the "new" law enforcement officer. As stated previously, most law enforcement officers want to learn from the most competent law enforcement officers. Yet, if law enforcement officers lack training due to insufficient resources, they will not have a good experience and will suffer many challenges in combatting human trafficking.

Related Literature

Definition of Human Trafficking

The Blue Campaign, established by the United States Department of Homeland Security, defines human trafficking as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act (2021). Moreover, the U.S. Department of Justice defines human trafficking as a crime that involves exploiting a person for labor, services, or commercial sex (DOJ, 2021). Additionally, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations define human trafficking as 2) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act 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, debt bondage, or slavery ((22 U.S.C. § 7102(9)) (DOJ, 2021).

Characteristics of Human Trafficking

Men, women, and children are trafficked worldwide every year. It can happen in any community, and victims can be of any age, race, gender, or nationality (DHS, 2021). Traffickers often use violence, manipulation, or false promises of well-paying jobs or romantic relationships to lure victims into human trafficking situations (DHS, 2021). Thus, they look for susceptible

people for various reasons, including psychological or emotional vulnerability, economic hardship, lack of social safety net, natural disasters, or political instability (DHS, 2021).

Additionally, traffickers disproportionately target at-risk populations, including individuals who have experienced or been exposed to other forms of violence (child abuse and maltreatment, interpersonal violence, and sexual assault, community and gang violence) and individuals disconnected from stable support networks (runaway and homeless youth, unaccompanied minors, and persons displaced during natural disasters) (DHHS, 2017).

Thus, actions of human trafficking include: a) recruiting – the proactive targeting of vulnerability and grooming behaviors; b) harboring – isolation, confinement, and monitoring; c) transporting – movement and arrangement of travel; d) providing – giving to another individual; e) obtaining – forcibly taking or exchanging something for the ability to control; f) soliciting – offering something of value; and g) patronizing – receiving something of value (DHHS, 2017).

Human Trafficking as a Hidden Crime

Human trafficking is a hidden crime because many victims do not self-report for various reasons. Traffickers often use psychological abuse, fear of deportation or prison, and threats against victims' family members to prevent them from seeking help, particularly from law enforcement, even when victims are in positions where they frequently interact with the public (Shoop, 2020). Although many victims seek assistance despite the danger, law enforcement often depends upon investigation and tips from the public to discover trafficking.

Law enforcement officers are more likely to encounter trafficked individuals than any other profession – health care providers, school administrators, prosecutors, and judges. Yet, some officials do not believe that human trafficking impacts their local community, negatively impacting their ability to identify trafficked victims (Shoop, 2020). For example, before 2015,

50% to 88% of trafficking victims were seen by one or more healthcare professionals while trafficked, yet none were identified as victims (Shoop, 2020).

Regarding investigations of human trafficking, the increase in technology has made it harder to trace and observe crimes. Information moves through networks between different nodes or points in a larger network (Latonero et al., 2015). In the context of human trafficking, research confirms that public areas of the Internet contain traces of offline human trafficking activity (Latonero et al., 2015). For example, numerous accounts show how human trafficking operations use the Internet to recruit victims and promote illicit activities linked to trafficking through online classifieds, review boards, and forums (Latonero et al., 2015). Yet, within these online domains, the digital traces of human trafficking may be encoded in language throughout the system. For example, in cases where sex traffickers use the Internet, specific patterns begin to emerge: (1) Online classified sites are used to post advertisements for victims, (2) social networking sites are used in the recruitment of victims, and (3) investigations may begin with a picture of what appears to be an underage girl in an online classified ad, and (4) several victims have been identified as runaways (Latonero, 2011).

Identifying Human Trafficking

Everyone has the potential to discover human trafficking. Victims of human trafficking work in legal and illegal industries, including commercial sex, hospitality, traveling sales crew, agriculture, janitorial services, massage parlors, fair and carnivals, peddling and bedding, drug smuggling distribution, and childcare and domestic work (Shoop, 2020).

Recognizing key indicators is the first step in identifying victims of human trafficking. While this list is not exhaustive, these are some of the key red flags that could alert one to a potential trafficking situation that should be reported:

- living with an employer
- poor living conditions
- multiple people in a cramped space
- inability to speak to an individual alone
- answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed
- the employer is holding identifying documents
- signs of physical abuse
- submissive or fearful behavior
- unpaid or paid very little
- under 18 years of age and is involved in prostitution (DOS, 2021).

Human Trafficking as Forced Labor or Coercion

Forced labor is enslavement used worldwide to produce many products in the global supply chain. Examples of forced labor include domestic servitude, child labor, bonded labor, and forced sex. As of 2021, there are 20.9 million victims of forced labor and sexual exploitation (End Slavery Now, 2021). Forced labor is like historical American slavery, coerced, often physical, and without pay. Force includes physical restraint, physical harm, sexual assault, and beatings (DHHS, 2017). During trafficking situations, monitoring and confinement are often used to control victims, especially during the early stages of victimization, to break down the victim's resistance. Additionally, coercion includes threats of serious harm to or physical restraint against any person, psychological manipulation, document confiscation, and shame and fear-inducing threats to share information or pictures with others or report to authorities (DHHS, 2017).

According to the Department of Homeland Security (2021), forced labor occurs when individuals are compelled to provide work or service through force, fraud, or coercion. This crime happens both in the United States and overseas, and victims rarely come forward to seek help because they may be unable to escape their environment, are too vulnerable to seek assistance, potential language barriers may exist, or they do not self-recognized as a victim (DHS, 2021). Traffickers frequently target vulnerable populations, such as individuals without lawful immigration status, those who incurred recruitment debts, and isolated, impoverished, or disabled. Law enforcement officers tend to uncover forced labor in a variety of industries, including illicit massage businesses, domestic work, agriculture, factory work, door-to-door sales crews, bars, and restaurants, peddling and begging, health and beauty services, construction, hospitality, and commercial cleaning services, to name a few (DHS, 2021).

Human Trafficking Public Policy

In 2000, the 106th United States Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). This act aimed to combat trafficking in persons, a contemporary manifestation of slavery whose victims are predominantly women and children, to ensure just and effective punishment of traffickers, and to protect their victims (TVPA, 2000). Thus, the original goals of the TVPA were prevention, protection, and prosecution.

Subsequently, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) formed and encouraged multi-disciplinary task forces composed of government agencies, businesses, and non-government organizations (NGOs) whose stakeholders work together to meet the needs of trafficking victims through resources such as an integrated operations center, victim assistance, intelligence analysis, outreach, and training; increase public awareness; share comprehensive

resources and provide training, and help citizens and law enforcement detect victims, investigate trafficking situations, and prosecute criminals (Shapiro, 2021).

In 2012, the Alabama Code Title 13 A. Criminal Code § 13A-6-153, classified Human trafficking is a Class B Felony (Find Law, 2019). A person commits the crime of human trafficking in the second degree if:

1. A person knowingly benefits financially or by receiving anything of value, from participation in a venture or engagement for sexual servitude or labor servitude (Find Law, 2019).
2. A person knowingly recruits, entices, solicits, induces, harbors, transports, holds, restrains, provides, maintains, subjects, or obtains by any means another person for labor servitude or sexual servitude (Find Law, 2019).
3. A corporation, or any other legal entity other than an individual, may be prosecuted for human trafficking in the second degree for an act or omission only if an agent of the corporation or entity performs the conduct which is an element of the crime while acting within the scope of their office or employment and on behalf of the corporation or entity, and the commission of the crime was either authorized, requested, commanded, performed, or within the scope of the person's employment on behalf of the corporation or entity or constituted a pattern of conduct that an agent of the corporation or entity knew or should have known was occurring (Find Law, 2019).

If a person is found guilty of committing this crime, they can be punished anywhere from 2 years to life in prison and pay a \$30,000 to \$60,000 fine.

Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking

2020 Report on U.S. Gov. Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons

Since the passing of the TVPA, the anti-trafficking movement has become more agile at targeting and dismantling trafficking schemes. In addition, it has become more victim-centered and trauma-informed in its approach because of the incredible advocacy and leadership of key stakeholders, including those who have experienced and survived human trafficking (DOS, 2020). In FY 2020, law enforcement, service providers, survivors, and advocates have warned about the increasing number of people vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers due to the instability, isolation, and lack of access to critical services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (DOS, 2020). Since then, the U.S. government has stepped up its pressure on state-sponsored forced labor programs.

In January 2020, the White House hosted a Summit on Human Trafficking: Honoring the 20th Anniversary of the TVPA; former President Trump signed Executive Order 13903 on Combating Human Trafficking and Online Child Exploitation in the United States (DOS, 2020). Among other things, the Executive Order designates an employee position at the White House dedicated solely to work on issues related to combating human trafficking occurring into, from, and within the United States and to coordinate with personnel in other components of the Executive Office of the President, including the Office of Economic Initiatives and the National Security Council (NSC), on such efforts (DOS, 2020).

Additionally, the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF) and the Senior Policy Operating Group (SPOG), which consists of senior officials designated as representatives of the PITF agencies, work year-round to address the many aspects of human trafficking both in the United States and around the world (DOS, 2020). PITF's focus areas include enforcing criminal and labor laws to end impunity for traffickers; victim-centered identification and trauma-informed assistance; innovations in data gathering and

research; education and public awareness activities; and synchronization of strategically linked foreign assistance and diplomatic engagement.

Furthermore, in addition to PITF, other governmental agencies have adopted programs and launched initiatives to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Health and Human Services (HHS) have engaged with local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) nationwide to understand the impact of COVID-19 on child trafficking and exploitation (DOS, 2020). The agencies also published comprehensive resource guides that included operating, providing services, and managing grants during COVID-19. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations (ICE/HSI) Victim Assistance Program created new guidance on conducting remote forensic interviews (DOS, 2020). The guidance, which includes safety protocols, allows Forensic Interview Specialists to continue their interviews; during the COVID-19 pandemic.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

The United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has served the entire law enforcement community. It participates in more than 120 human trafficking task forces nationwide alongside other federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement (ICE, 2021). HSI works with other investigative authorities, such as code inspectors, labor officials, and child welfare investigators. Furthermore, HSI participates in the federal Anti-Trafficking Coordination Teams, the Departments of Justice and Labor, and the FBI to proactively coordinate and plan significant federal human trafficking investigations and prosecutions (ICE, 2021).

Lastly, the Blue Campaign is the unified voice for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's efforts to combat human trafficking. Through the Blue Campaign, DHS raises public

awareness about human trafficking, leveraging partnerships to educate the public to recognize human trafficking and report suspected instances (ICE, 2021). The Blue Campaign also offers training to law enforcement and others to increase the detection and investigation of human trafficking, protect victims, and bring suspected traffickers to justice. The Blue Campaign, and DHS, are responsible for investigating human trafficking, arresting traffickers, and protecting victims. Thus, they use a victim-centered approach to combat human trafficking, which places equal value on identifying and stabilizing victims and investigating and prosecuting traffickers (WAHTTF, 2021). According to the DHS Countering Human Trafficking: Year in Review (2022), The Blue Campaign developed three new trainings for youth program professionals, frontline convenience store employees, and campus law enforcement, and created animated videos for youth ages 11-17 and for the trucking industry. This training explains how to identify instances of human trafficking and how to report it.

Lived Experiences

The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force

The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force is comprised of approximately 35 sworn and non-sworn personnel from the Tuscaloosa Police Department, Northport Police Department, The University of Alabama Police Department, Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office, Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's Office, and Trafficking Hope (WAHTTF, 2021). In addition, the Attorney General's Office and multiple federal agencies, including Homeland Security and the FBI, assist the task force.

In 2019, The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was ranked 4th among all participating National Johns Suppression Initiative agencies, with 67 cases (Kempster & Wilson, 2020). The task force emphasized human trafficking for the first time in January 2017 (Kempster

& Wilson, 2020). In addition, the first Tuscaloosa Police Department, Human Trafficking Investigation, was conducted in February 2017; it consisted of a rape/robbery gone wrong at a local hotel (Kempster & Wilson, 2020).

The following charges were part of the Task Force's Statistics in 2020: soliciting prostitution (males) (47), soliciting prostitution (females) (6), soliciting prostitution (no arrest) (1), promoting prostitution (2), human trafficking cases (1), human trafficking contacts (3), rescued to Wellhouse (2), distribution of private images (15), sexual extortion (12), dissemination of child pornography (3) (5 arrested), and possession of child pornography (33) (4 arrested) (Kempster & Wilson, 2020).

Victims of human trafficking can be male, female, adults, or children. However, eighty percent of trafficking victims are females (Kempster & Wilson, 2020). The average age of entry into sex trafficking as a victim is 11 – 14 (Kempster & Wilson, 2020). Often, victims have experienced multiple victimizations (e.g., child abuse and neglect). Moreover, victims do not identify themselves as victims. Subsequently, they do not tell their complete story or tend to rehearse their response. Lastly, victims tend not to have personal identification and may not know where they are. This results from the victim identifying with their trafficker and being physically and mentally restrained because of drug dependency, having nowhere to go, no money, no identification, no clothing, and no shelter.

Alabama Uniform Human Trafficking Initiative

The community stakeholders in Alabama must determine to what degree the issue of human trafficking impacts the state. Understanding this will enable the identification of the appropriate resources to mitigate the problem and develop capacity where needed to address the issues responsibly and sustainably (Lim & Trull, 2020). Thus, the research conducted for the

Alabama Uniform Human Trafficking Initiative was to ascertain the number of victims of human trafficking in Alabama in 2018 and reflect the experiences of the professionals who participated (Lim & Trull, 2020).

Alabama gains insight from those who have lived the experience. Lived experience expert Dixie Shannon, contributed to the development of the Alabama Uniform Human Trafficking Initiative and numerous ongoing anti-trafficking efforts in the state (Lim & Trull, 2020). Additionally, several resources have been mobilized to address human trafficking in Alabama over the past few years (Lim & Trull, 2020). The Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, in conjunction with North Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, is a tremendous resource, providing training and awareness through the annual End It Alabama Human Trafficking Summit (Lim & Trull, 2020). The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force has demonstrated leadership in our law enforcement community through suppression reverse sting operations, John Schools, and community training (Lim & Trull, 2020). This is an excellent example of collaborative law enforcement efforts.

Numerous local law enforcement agencies have received human trafficking training from Teresa Collier from the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA), who works as the state's human trafficking analyst for the Fusion Center (Lim & Trull, 2020). She has conducted many pieces of training for local law enforcement partners around the state and has trained hundreds of local officers in human trafficking identification best practices. The ultimate goal of the Fusion Center is to provide a mechanism where law enforcement, public safety, and private partners can come together with a common purpose and improve the ability to safeguard our homeland and prevent criminal activity by merging data from various sources (BJA, 2022).

In terms of prevalence, in 2017, approximately 1,167 suspected victims of human trafficking (sex and labor) had contact with a professional in Alabama, of which 665 (57%) were minors (Lim & Trull, 2020). To eliminate human trafficking, one of the following approaches is required: comprehensive, collaborative, trauma-informed, and victim-centered/offender-focused. A comprehensive approach to human trafficking ensures that training, investigations, prosecutions, and service provision proactively address all labor and sex trafficking categories, for adults and minors, males and females, and citizens and foreign nationals regardless of citizenship status (Lim & Trull, 2020). A collaborative approach to human trafficking understands that, while each partner has differing and sometimes opposing goals, perspectives, and responsibilities, each party is necessary and vital to seeking justice and supporting victims/survivors of human trafficking (Lim & Trull, 2020). Furthermore, collaboration encourages open and honest dialogue, sharing of data and resources, and a commitment to share goals.

A trauma-informed approach to human trafficking involves agencies and individuals recognizing the signs and indicators of trauma in individuals, families, and those who work with them as it presents to that profession (Lim & Trull, 2020). That knowledge is then integrated into policies, procedures, and practices, carefully mitigating re-traumatization. Lastly, a victim-centered/offender-focused approach prioritizes the victim's safety and well-being in all matters and procedures. It understands that, because of the trauma experienced from their victimization, victims/survivors of human trafficking often present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision. Therefore, a victim-centered approach is where the professional and their agency adapt their processes, protocols, and practices to mitigate

additional trauma and create an environment most conducive for the victim/survivor during investigation or service provision (Lim & Trull, 2020).

The primary purpose of a multi-disciplinary team is to facilitate the communication and collaboration of all the various services being provided for minor victims/survivors and to support the investigative and prosecutorial efforts when possible (Lim & Trull, 2020). To provide the basic essential services to victims, the following three core must be filled by community partners: law enforcement (protection), social services (provision), and advocate (presence) (Lim & Trull, 2020). According to Lim & Trull (2020), the purpose of the Alabama Trafficking Task Force is to:

1. Combat all aspects of human trafficking, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking.
2. Pursue a comprehensive response to crimes of human trafficking.
3. Coordinate strategies to provide necessary services for victims of human trafficking.
4. Focus on prevention efforts to end the demand for human trafficking and create awareness through education and community initiatives.
5. Develop legislation to prevent, intervene, and treat human trafficking.

When responding to suspected human trafficking, all responding agencies – law enforcement, social services, and an advocate – must adhere to a trauma-informed, victim-centered/offender-focused approach. However, during an incident response, the three professionals must adhere to the four guiding principles of collaborative and comprehensive efforts that are trauma-informed and victim-centered/offender-focused. In addition, their engagement should reflect mutual respect for each partner's value to the response.

An investigation will typically begin with a patrol. An officer might respond to a call to investigate a suspected incident of human trafficking or might be investigating a different complaint or incident and notice indicators of human trafficking. Unfortunately, indicators of human trafficking can be easily overlooked or misidentified by the untrained law enforcement officer. Thus, continuous and advanced training for individuals working on human trafficking cases will enable officers to stay current on human trafficking indicators, methods, and tactics (Lim & Trull, 2020). These officers can also be available to the patrol officers to answer any questions they may have in the field to investigate other crimes and think they may have a human trafficking case. These practices will increase law enforcement's accuracy in identifying potential human trafficking victims.

Once law enforcement decides they are engaged with a potential victim of human trafficking, they should immediately activate the Incident Response Protocol (IRP) (Lim & Trull, 2020). Because almost all victims of human trafficking have experienced trauma and therefore may have trauma responses, a best practice for law enforcement is to notify the advocate immediately and request their response. The advocate can attempt to build trust and begin the stabilization process with the victim, becoming increasingly influential as the Advocate and Law Enforcement partners build mutual trust and respect for each other and their roles.

Two primary barriers to addressing problems associated with human trafficking are the lack of data and the limited ability of systems to communicate between agencies (Lim & Trull, 2020). Victims of human trafficking frequently engage with law enforcement, medical, and social services. Each industry may be collecting or should be collecting data related to human trafficking and human trafficking victims. The ability to aggregate and use that data would result in a sustainable and reliable source of information that could be used in many ways to advance

the effort to strategically address human trafficking in Alabama (Lim & Trull, 2020). Thus, each agency with exposure to victims of human trafficking should create guidelines and processes to facilitate the inter-agency sharing of information and data.

Traditional Law Enforcement Methods Do Not Work

Traditional law enforcement methods do not work when identifying victims of human trafficking. According to Pelella, a lieutenant of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Criminal Investigation Division, victims are being missed by law enforcement due to their lack of knowledge of human trafficking, their lack of compassion for potential victims – that appear as prostitutes, massage parlor employees, or gentlemen's club dancers, and the historical tendency to exclude others from their investigations (Pelella, 2021).

Law enforcement can only successfully combat human trafficking by identifying, rescuing, and building victims' trust. The key to success lies in law enforcement's ability to adapt and overcome traditional investigative methods (Pelella, 2021). Thus, law enforcement must re-evaluate their operating processes, educate their personnel through updated training, and foster good working relationships with other agencies, including non – governmental agencies (Pelella, 2021).

To this end, a research study was conducted in Florida. The purpose of the research was to identify three primary factors that law enforcement agencies must improve to increase their effectiveness in identifying and rescuing victims of human trafficking (Pelella, 2021). The three primary factors include training, investigative methods, and multi-agency collaboration. Data was collected from a written survey (25 questions requiring a yes or no response). The survey was distributed to 48 law enforcement agencies within the State of Florida – 47.9% to the Sheriff's Office, 47.9% to Municipal Police Departments, 2.1% to state agencies, and 2.1% to a

task for operating within the municipality (Pelella, 2021). The agency's supervisor was requested to either complete the survey or forward it to an investigator who deals with the enforcement of sex-related crimes, such as prostitution, gentlemen's clubs, and massage parlors.

Personal interviews were also conducted with law enforcement officers and non-governmental agencies. A personal interview was then performed with a subject matter, Officer James McBride, an expert assigned to the Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Human Trafficking Task Force. The interview focused on three topics; 1) why the task force got started, 2) what types of traditional enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to become successful in rescuing victims of human trafficking, and 3) can law enforcement agencies be successful in rescuing victims of human trafficking without forming collaborative partnerships (Pelella, 2021).

A second personal interview was conducted with the Director of Social Services, Kip Corriveau, with the Salvation Army, a non-governmental organization. The interview focused on three topics; 1) how is this organization involved with human trafficking victims; 2) did the organization have to change the way their organization functioned to assist law enforcement and victims of human trafficking; and 3) does the organization think that a collaborative partnership with law enforcement is critical to the success of rescuing victims of human trafficking (Pelella, 2021).

It was found, based on a 56.3% response rate, 28 agencies:

- 64.3% of the respondents answered "yes," indicating that their agency does define human smuggling and human trafficking separately

- 100% of respondents answered "yes" to arresting for prostitution; only 46.4% of these same agencies answered "yes" to asking the arrested prostitute questions related to human trafficking
- 28.6% of the agencies indicated that they interview the arrested (prostitutes, massage parlor employees, and gentlemen's club employees) more than one time, while 64.3% indicated that they do not conduct more than one interview
- 14.3% of the agencies indicated that they had non-governmental agency members accompany them on their prostitution operations
- 32.1% of agencies indicated that they have collaborated with non-governmental agencies during their trafficking investigations; while 71.4% of agencies indicated that they had never worked with a non-governmental agency during their human trafficking investigation
- 50% of the agencies answered "yes" when asked if they had attended a formalized training course related to human trafficking investigations
- 42.9% answered "yes," while 53.6% answered "no" when asked if their respective agency provided human trafficking training to their patrol officers (Pelella, 2021).

During Officer McBride's interview, he stated that law enforcement should be concerned with human trafficking now and in the future (Pelella, 2021). The crime of human trafficking is interconnected to many other crimes that law enforcement is already dealing with (e.g., prostitution, smuggling, drugs, document fraud, gangs, kidnapping, false imprisonment, and organized crime). McBride further discusses how human trafficking is a lucrative business; victim types of human trafficking vary; traffickers use fear, intimidation, coercion, deceit, physical and mental abuse on their victims; and the basis of a trafficker's operation.

In conclusion, Officer McBride stated that law enforcement must change their traditional methods of operation if they want to combat human trafficking successfully (Pelella, 2021).

Personnel, interviewing techniques, and multi-agency cooperation must be modified to increase the ability of law enforcement agencies to identify victims of human trafficking (Pelella, 2021).

During Mr. Corriveau's interview, he was asked several questions about his experience with human trafficking victims and the relationship law enforcement should have with NGOs. Mr. Corriveau first became involved with human trafficking when he attended a statewide training on how to deal with victims. Based on his recollection, Mr. Corriveau estimates he has dealt with approximately 66 human trafficking victims: 6 sex trafficking, five domestic, 28 international, and 27 labor trafficking victims (Pelella, 2021). Regarding law enforcement, Mr. Corriveau stated that he heard positive comments about local law enforcement but has heard negative comments about federal authorities, especially those enforcing the immigration laws (Pelella, 2021). Mr. Corriveau further stated that if law enforcement wants to combat human trafficking violations successfully, they must be willing to form close partnerships with NGOs (Pelella, 2021). The Salvation Army did not have a good relationship with law enforcement until the Clearwater Tampa Bay Area Human Trafficking Task Force was formed.

NGOs play a vital role in providing services to the victim. They can immediately provide necessities, such as food, clothing, toiletries, housing, and, most importantly, a sense of security. Thus Mr. Corriveau concluded that it was imperative for law enforcement to foster relationships with NGOs. He suggested that law enforcement officers change their method of operations, bring personnel from the NGO or victim advocate group, and contact potential victims (Pelella, 2021). It is essential to build trust with the victim.

Challenges Faced

Challenges to the North American Anti-Trafficking Response

Police officers must distinguish between human trafficking and other forms of criminal sexual activity. According to a study on police officers' perception of human trafficking, conducted by Newton (2008), it was found that even when police officers are familiar with federal definitions of trafficking, they sometimes still have trouble distinguishing between human trafficking and smuggling. Consequently, law enforcement officers also have a similar problem determining sex trafficking and prostitution. Those who have experience enforcing laws against prostitution overlap the definitions of human trafficking and prostitution, creating a challenge for enforcement and victim identification.

Although law enforcement officers are provided training regarding human trafficking, Newton's research has proven that law enforcement's perception about human trafficking is that human trafficking is not a problem within their community but instead in their jurisdiction (Newton, 2008). There is often a disconnect between what the police officers think human trafficking cases look like versus the reality of such cases. In conjunction with Newton, Wilson et al. (2006) conducted a study. Police officers have an incorrect perception of human trafficking because their understanding of the phenomenon has been acquired through the media. Therefore, law enforcement officers have difficulty inferring what they have learned about human trafficking and what they see in their day-to-day enforcement duties. Moreover, local law enforcement officers often perceive human trafficking as a matter for the federal governmental agencies.

In addition to the identification challenges, many officers lack the specialized interview skills to investigate victimization. Fear is a common experience among victims of human

trafficking; some victims have been physically assaulted, and others fear retaliation by their trafficker. Astonishingly, fear of law enforcement is common, and this concern is particularly astute for foreign national victims who are currently without documentation (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2019). The trauma experienced by victims can manifest in many ways – depression, anxiety, and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Still, for those seeking to provide restorative services to survivors of trafficking, a significant challenge can be that because of feeling betrayed by a trafficker that they once trusted, some survivors have a difficult time trusting well-intentional law enforcement and non-governmental providers after they escape from a trafficking situation (Clawson et al., 2008).

The final and most significant challenge to responding to human trafficking in North America is the failure to cooperate across borders. Although Canada, Mexico, and the United States have attempted to combat human trafficking, significant barriers remain. In 2009, the Department of Justice and Homeland Security developed a cross-border human trafficking enforcement initiative with Mexico (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2019). During the early stages of the partnership, the U.S. Department of Justice Human Trafficking Prosecutions Unit and the Mexican authorities worked together to develop and exchange information and intelligence about human trafficking networks (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2019). The initiative has been abandoned due to growing distrust between law enforcement partners and the changes in leadership across the countries.

Challenges of the Police Response to Human Trafficking

Historically, police effectiveness has been less attentive to the needs of victims. As the police are increasingly called on to combat sex and labor trafficking crimes, one must explore victims' needs and how law enforcement can effectively and efficiently serve them. Police are

often the first officials to interact with crime victims; therefore, the police are responsible for responding to criminal incidents. As cited in Farrell, Dank, Vries, Kafafian, Hughes, and Lockwood (2019), central to their public safety mission, the police have a duty to help victims feel safe, assess their immediate needs, and connect them with service providers and healthcare professionals who are in the best position to assist, provide information about the justice process, and allow them to tell their story without revictimization or additional trauma (President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, 1982).

The police depend on victims to provide information about the crime, the perpetrator, and their victimization facts. This information is necessary to develop intelligence, establish probable cause, solve crimes and protect others from future victimization (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2018). When victims believe they are being treated respectfully by law enforcement, they are more likely to report crimes, cooperate with the police, and participate in the criminal justice process. To assist with the shortcomings of law enforcement's response to the needs of victims, the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) and the IACP has invested in training involving victim-centered response.

Farrell et al., (2019) reviewed human trafficking incidents investigated by police in three U.S. communities. Interviews with law enforcement and providers serving victims in these communities revealed that the police struggle to identify and respond to this new type of victim. Nonspecialized officers commonly identified victims of human trafficking who encountered a victim during their routine duties. Most of these officers were not trained on the signs to look for, how to approach, or engage with a potential victim if they were suspected of being trafficked.

As researchers in prior studies have noted, without training, police are more likely to overlook victims or misclassify human trafficking cases as other offenses such as prostitution,

drug activity, or driving without the proper documents (Farrell, 2014). As a result, potential victims may not be referred to specialized human trafficking investigators, and opportunities might be missed to collect substantial evidence. Consequently, failure to recognize and respond to incidents of human trafficking raises concerns about justice for victims.

Initial Law Enforcement Response: Common Challenges

The actions of the first responding law enforcement officer are critical to the investigation's success. The first responding officer can often, directly and indirectly, impact how a victim interacts with law enforcement and others involved with the criminal justice process. The initial response by law enforcement should include the following responsibilities: victim/witness safety and basic needs, interview, crime scene preservation, and reporting and notification (Baker, Polito, & Turco, 2021).

The medical treatment and well-being of the victim should be the law enforcement officer's priority. Law enforcement must be cognizant of a trauma-informed approach and utilize training and experience to present a professional and empathetic response to the situation (Baker et al., 2021). When interacting with victims, patience is the key. Prioritizing meeting basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, medical care, rest, detox, etc.) and focusing on building a good rapport at an early stage can provide the victim with appropriate support and increase the likelihood of "exiting" and their willingness to assist in the criminal justice process (Baker et al., 2021). Subsequently, victims may be more willing to provide detailed information about the crime to officers, investigators, and prosecutors, increasing the likelihood of successful prosecutions.

Law enforcement officers should conduct a preliminary interview and a subsequent, in-depth interview. An in-depth interview should be conducted after the victim has been medically examined, treated, and personal needs have been met. The primary purpose of the preliminary

interview is to establish whether a crime has occurred and obtain essential information similar to when investigating any other offense (e.g., who, what, where, when, and how) (Baker et al., 2021). During the interview, the first responder should: 1) separate the parties and interview them independently of each other; 2) address the safety concerns of the victim and provide appropriate referrals; 3) obtain basic information to determine if a crime occurred; 4) establish the elements of the crime(s); 5) identify all witnesses and suspect(s); 6) identify possible locations of evidence and crime scene(s); 7) identify additional interviews to be conducted, and 8) advise a supervisor of additional resources and/or personnel needed (e.g., crime scene services, crime lab, etc.) (Baker et al., 2021).

Barriers to Success

Understanding and Improving Law Enforcement Responses to Human Trafficking

As cited in Farrell, McDevitt, and Fahy (2008), research on local law enforcement's response to human trafficking is limited and focuses only on the experiences of a few large municipal police departments that were perceived to be most likely to encounter victims of human trafficking (Clawson et al., 2006b; Wilson et al., 2006). Furthermore, Northern University's Institute of Race and Justice conducted a study on understanding and improving law enforcement's response to human trafficking (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy, 2008). It was found that problems of human trafficking consist of based on the definition of human trafficking, the prevalence of the problem, and the characteristics of human trafficking. Some enforcement officers' experience includes identifying human trafficking incidents, reports, and investigations.

To assist with law enforcement's preparation and identification of human trafficking, a national law enforcement human trafficking survey was conducted. The survey measured law enforcement's: 1) perception of human trafficking problems locally; 2) training and preparation

to identify human trafficking cases; 3) identification and investigation of human trafficking cases; and 4) multivariate analysis. It was determined that the perception of human trafficking and preparation to identify cases is generally weak. Local law enforcement officials perceive human trafficking as rare or non-existent in their local communities. Agencies serving larger communities (serving populations over 75,000) are more likely to identify human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking, as a more pervasive problem in their local community (Farrell et al., 2008). Thus, only 18% of local, country, or state law enforcement agencies nationwide have had some type of human trafficking training, 9% have a protocol or policy on human trafficking, and only 4% have designated specialized units or personnel to investigate these cases (Farrell et al., 2008).

Although local law enforcement agencies face limitations in being prepared to identify and respond to human trafficking, more cases of human trafficking were identified by local law enforcement agencies than federal officials. Based on the findings from the random sample, it was estimated that approximately 907 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. investigated at least one case of human trafficking between 2000 and 2006 (Farrell et al., 2008). The highest proportions of agencies indicating they had investigated cases of human trafficking were from Arizona (50%), Florida (26.5%), and California (26.5%) (Farrell et al., 2008).

Lastly, the use of multi-agency task forces has been suggested as a promising strategy for identifying and investigating cases of human trafficking (Farrell et al., 2008). Although not surprising, agencies participating in federally funded task forces are more likely to receive training, have policies and specialized personnel, and are more likely to identify and investigate cases of human trafficking (than non-task force agencies). Additionally, local law enforcement agencies participating in federally funded human trafficking task forces reported investigating

more cases than non-task force agencies (36 on average for task force agencies compared to 15 for non-task forces agencies) (Farrell et al., 2008). Moreover, cases identified by local law enforcement agencies participating in task forces were more likely to result in formal charges following human trafficking-related arrests than non-task force agencies (75% compared to 45%) (Farrell et al., 2008).

Innovations and Promising Practices

To address the many challenges and barriers affecting law enforcement officers and their combatting of human trafficking, there have been developments of innovative strategies and promising practices of agencies. One innovation is collaboration. The importance of collaboration in meeting the needs of victims of human trafficking cannot be overstated. Law enforcement and service providers stress the importance of working together to meet this population's diverse and complex needs (Clawson & Dutch, 2008). Thus, establishing coalitions and task forces is one strategy that has increased barrier success. Additionally, in several communities across the country, collaboration among local law enforcement, juvenile and family court judges, child protection services, and youth shelters and programs has proven to be a promising and necessary practice for identifying and meeting the needs of sex trafficking victims (Clawson & Dutch, 2008).

Moreover, given the complexity of the victim's needs and the comprehensiveness of the services provided, service providers, law enforcement, and victims reports that having a consistent case manager from identification to case closure is a promising practice (Clawson & Dutch, 2008). This is an extreme barrier because this is not possible due to the lack of funding for case managers. Yet, this consistency benefits the victims, service providers, and law

enforcement (including prosecutors). A central case manager with knowledge of all aspects of the victim's situation can save time and resources.

Furthermore, the availability of services is limited for victims of human trafficking. Housing is often a limited service that law enforcement and service providers report. Finding emergency shelters for women and girls is not usually a problem; finding the same placements for men and boys is difficult (Clawson & Dutch, 2008). Transitional and permanent housing is scary for everyone, particularly domestic minors with felony convictions and victims with mental health or substance abuse issues (Clawson & Dutch, 2008).

In connection with finding housing for domestic minors, there are several instances of referrals to child welfare agencies by service providers and law enforcement only to find out that the agencies would not see the domestic victims because the abuse did not occur at the hands of a parent or legal guardian (Clawson & Dutch, 2008). In these cases, providers and law enforcement report minors falling through the cracks of the mainstream system and not receiving services (Clawson & Dutch, 2008). Unfortunately, children are handed back to their abused and turned back to the streets.

Improving Human Trafficking Investigations

As with many other crimes today, technology significantly facilitates human trafficking, especially in supporting investigations. Through the Internet, human trafficking can occur almost anywhere at any time. Law enforcement agencies need to understand how to identify and disrupt human trafficking online (PERF, 2020). Law enforcement officers need the tools and skills to capture digital evidence. Although law enforcement agencies are becoming more adept at identifying and investigating cybercrimes, gaps remain in the technology and their ability to use it (PERF, 2020).

Many police departments have a weak information technology infrastructure, making information-sharing difficult (PERF, 2020). The information is often embedded in multiple databases, making information sharing and analytics difficult between agencies. A 2016 study conducted by RTI International showed that many police agencies do not have the tools to perform basic analytics. In a survey of 749 agencies, only 14% had the technology to search data shared across silos, 10% had data-mining tools for massive databases, and 5% had software that could discover connections between data (PERF, 2020). Because there are no national standards for software at police agencies, external sharing is difficult due to the incompatible software. This is due to many agencies' lack of funding and training available to the department.

Furthermore, the current technology tools do not always fit the specific needs of human trafficking investigations. For example, geographic information systems (GIS) are often used by police agencies to map different types of crimes to identify trends and movements. However, Ms. Deeb-Swihart states, "this doesn't work well when you have human trafficking data, which has vague information" (PERF, 2020, p.43). "A victim might say, 'I was taken to the metro Atlanta area.' How do you put that on a map?" (PERF, 2020, p.43). Developing software that can identify and flag online advertisements would be valuable for human trafficking investigations. However, most of the currently available software is focused on sex trafficking; technology to investigate labor trafficking is lagging.

At the PERF conference, some non-governmental agencies discussed two technologies developed to identify human trafficking: Freedom Signal and Spotlight. Freedom Signal was designed by Seattle Against Slavery, an anti-trafficking organization. The software was created with the assistance of Microsoft and Amazon Web Services. The purpose of this platform was to disrupt sex trafficking online. The technologies can collect phone numbers of potential human

trafficking victims through automated online searches and allow service providers to contact them directly (PERF, 2020). This tool also focuses on deterring buyers by decoying chatbots that pose as minor or adult sex trafficking victims to interact with potential online buyers. Once the person connects to the software, the technology redirects potential buyers to "deterrence websites," which produce messages such as "You could be arrested for buying sex online" and provide links for more information on human trafficking" (PERF, 2020, p.48).

Spotlight is another technology widely available to law enforcement. Thorn, a nonprofit organization, developed it. It is primarily used to identify child victims of sex trafficking. Spotlight scans online advertisements for sex and compares phone numbers and images to open-data sources on missing children, including the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's register of missing children (PERF, 2020). Unfortunately, Spotlight only analyzes 16 websites and has data from 2014 (PERF, 2020). Therefore, it was recommended that human trafficking investigators learn how to analyze common money-sending apps, such as Venmo, which may have payment logs that can be useful for an investigation.

Summary

The trafficking of persons has existed in the United States for decades. Law enforcement officers face adversities in combatting human trafficking, specifically in Alabama. The theory guiding this transcendental phenomenology study is social learning theory. The researcher believes that law enforcement officers are trained to do their jobs through the knowledge and observation of peer law enforcement officers. The literature review was organized on the following themes: definition of human trafficking, characteristics of human trafficking, human trafficking as a hidden crime, identifying human trafficking, human trafficking as forced labor or

coercion, human trafficking public health policy, efforts to combat human trafficking, the lived experience, challenges faced, and barriers to success.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Law enforcement officers experience many challenges in combatting human trafficking. Research has determined that some of the challenges experienced by law enforcement officers include: the unwillingness of victims to assist in the investigation, lack of resources, lack of training, reluctance on the part of prosecution bringing forth cases, the need for multiagency taskforces and partnerships, the need for specialized technology, and the lack of victim service providers. This transcendental phenomenological study aims to better understand law enforcement officers' challenges and their impact in combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Thus, the researcher will use semi-structured open-ended interviews to 1) illustrate the law enforcement officer's experience in their own words, 2) identify themes surrounding efforts to combat human trafficking, and 3) better understand how law enforcement officers perceive the challenges they must endure. This study is significant as it will allow law enforcement officers to combat human trafficking effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, this chapter presents this study's procedures, research design, and analysis.

Design

This phenomenological study addresses the lived experience of law enforcement officers' challenges in combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Phenomenology provides the researcher the opportunity to investigate the experiences of a distinct group of participants with a specific phenomenon. Creswell (2013) defined phenomenology as taking individual experiences and reducing them into a universal essence of the phenomenon. The common perspective seen across phenomenology includes the ability to study lived experiences and develop descriptions of the experiences, not explanations or analyses (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The

phenomenological approach described a common experience for law enforcement officers who have dealt with human trafficking cases. The focus was on the need for the practice of phenomenology based around a more philosophical foundation in the ability to create formative relationships between who people are and how they present their actions, as well as between contemplation and sensitivity (Van Manen, 2007). Collecting information from a demographic questionnaire, survey, and semi-structured interviews led to an integration of a description of the lived experiences of each participant to describe the essence of the experience.

The transcendental approach to phenomenology involves the researcher transcending or looking upon a phenomenon with fresh eyes as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology focuses not on the researcher's interpretations but on describing participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Interpretations function as a main part of phenomenology, and in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher must analyze the data from the participants' viewpoint until data saturation is reached. Due to the researcher's personal interest in the study, the phenomenological approach also allowed a focus on what participants had in common with their individual descriptions of their experiences while making sure to bracket out and set aside personal thoughts and presumptions on the topic. The need for a systemic approach allowed the researcher, a person currently experiencing the phenomenon, to set aside all prejudgments, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon in a disciplined unbiased manner, which is why the transcendental approach was appropriate for the design (Moustakas, 1994). The use of phenomenology and the transcendental approach supported the research questions as they built upon a foundation to describe participants' lived experiences better.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What is the lived experience of law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) in combatting human trafficking?
2. How do law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) perceive and describe their challenges in combatting human trafficking?

Setting

This study will take place in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established in 2017. As a result, it is Alabama's most significant human trafficking task force. It is comprised of approximately 35 sworn and non-sworn personnel from the Tuscaloosa Police Department, Northport Police Department, the University of Alabama Police Department, the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office, the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's Office, and Trafficking Hope.

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2020), 252 contacts/substantive signals in Alabama and 89 human trafficking cases were reported. The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force has attempted to combat this heinous crime by providing informational sessions to organizations and agencies within the community. The researcher is confident that this setting is best for this transcendental phenomenological study.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 10 members of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. This sample size was within the accepted range for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013). The researcher was recruited through various forms with permission from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were male, female, and African American and Caucasian sworn law enforcement officers about their experiences combatting human trafficking.

The study will use purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique that qualitative researchers use to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. Palinkas et al. (2015) defined purposeful sampling as identifying and selecting an individual or group based on members' specific knowledge or experiences around a phenomenon of interest. Purposeful sampling allows available and willing participants to widely discuss their experiences and opinions eloquently, animatedly, and thoughtfully (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling began with an informative e-mail to all district personnel requesting any individual who met the criteria and was willing to participate complete an online informed consent form and a demographic survey.

Following this process, the researcher strived for maximum variation from respondents to obtain a representative sample of participants. The maximum variation for this study included law enforcement officers from various ethnic backgrounds and multiple age groups who have been involved in combatting human trafficking. The researcher employed a snowball procedure from the initial responses to obtain more participants until data saturation occurred and no new themes emerged. Therefore, a participant may know at least one individual from their organization or current position who would meet the criteria for the study, creating a snowball procedure for gaining more participants.

Procedures

Initially, the researcher requested preliminary approval to use the organization's e-mail roster. The IRB approved to make a formal request from Captain Simpson, the organization's lead supervisor. The researcher also requested approval from Captain Simpson to send information about the study to the organization to help locate participants following IRB approval. The researcher secured final approval from the IRB before collecting any data.

The Captain denied the use of the organization's email roster, so the researcher had to text sworn law enforcement officers individually and asked them if they had been involved with any human trafficking cases. The text message included a link for potential participants to follow if they wanted to join the study. The link led the interested party to log into a Google account for security purposes and recordkeeping of each participant's responses. Subsequently, the participants were led to a Google Form. At the top of the Google form was the consent form. Upon completing the consent form, participants completed the demographic survey and questionnaire. If participants preferred a hard copy rather than an online format, they could request such forms and/or data collection tools; however, no participants requested a hard copy. Following completing these items, the researcher contacted the participant to schedule an interview. At the time of the face-to-face or video conference interview (Zoom), the researcher reminded the participant about the informed consent, obtaining their approval to participate, and allowing for audio and video recording during the interview. The semi-structured interviews started in June 2022 and continued into September 2022. The comfort of the participants dictated the time and location of the interview; travel and time requirements forced some video chat interviews. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews and digitally stored them on a password-protected computer. Each participant received a copy of their transcribed interview for member-checking. Upon approval or disapproval with edits, the interviews underwent coding following data analysis procedures.

The Researcher's Role

I am a researcher and a full-time Criminal Justice Instructor at Miles College. I am an African American female who has been married for 10 years with two children, girls ages 5 and 4 months old. I have 10 years of experience in the criminal justice sector. I spent 6 years working

in the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's Office as a paralegal and victim service officer. I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Criminal Justice Leadership. I previously earned my bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and a Master's degree in Criminology. As a professional, full-time working mother, I have a vested interest in the theories and information produced from this study as they applied to my own life experiences. Family members, coworkers, and high-level administration have commented on my ability and/or reasoning to complete the doctoral degree.

I have had associates get caught up in some of the prostitution stings and human trafficking efforts around Tuscaloosa County. Furthermore, as a mother of girls, I want to ensure law enforcement officers do everything in their power to combat this crime so that nothing happens to my little girls. Due to my connection to the phenomenon, I bracketed my feelings throughout the process by writing personal notes after reviewing each questionnaire and while conducting interviews. I reflected upon these notes when completing data analysis to ensure my personal views did not factor into the findings. My goal for this study was to help law enforcement officers understand the importance of human trafficking and address the challenges they face when combatting human trafficking so that they can obtain the resources needed to do their jobs effectively and efficiently.

Data Collection

The researcher used a variety of data collection instruments to provide descriptive information about the individual participants and the group of participants. The participants received a general questionnaire to provide biographical and demographic information before the interview. In addition, they completed a survey based on their own experiences. All the data collection tools had their validity confirmed via their independent uses. Finally, the researcher

conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant, with the conversation recorded, transcribed, and sent to participants for member checking.

Demographic Questionnaire and Survey

The demographic questionnaire for this study noted participant criteria of being sworn law enforcement officers. The demographic questionnaire and survey also created a visual research representation of their lives. Rose (2014) defined visual research as a method that may incorporate visual materials and options as a tool for generating evidence to support narrative research and explore research questions from the participant's viewpoint. This was successful as it increased interview detail and facilitated possible correlations between participants when analyzing data. Furthermore, the survey provided information on how individual participants defined human trafficking, identified human trafficking, and the challenges faced when combatting human trafficking.

1. Interviews

The researcher thoroughly grasped the experiences with descriptions and specific themes by using the semi-structured interviews as a general interview guide (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological interview is an informal, interactive procedure that uses open-ended questions to direct the participant. It was possible to omit some of the prewritten questions because the semi-structured interview's set of questions was designed to extract information on each participant's unique experience with the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). To further the participant's responses to a certain question, you might use probing questions. There are three types of inquiries: (a) detail-oriented (who, what, when, etc.); (b) elaboration (using tactful nonverbal communication); and (c) general.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met one another.
2. What are the most significant of the experiences you identified on the survey?
3. What made them significant?
4. Is there another experience you would like to add that has not already been discussed on the survey?
5. Experts suggest that law enforcement officers are not aware of the reality of human trafficking. On a scale from one to five, with one being very unaware and five being completely aware, how aware are you of human trafficking?
6. Describe your experiences.
7. Ideally, part of being a West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force member required specialized training. What did your training process entail?
8. Does your training with this organization compare to other organizations' training?
9. Tell me about the struggles you've experienced when combatting human trafficking.
10. Imagine you're giving a presentation on human trafficking at the police academy; what would you want to tell them to expect to experience as they develop their law enforcement careers?
11. Reflecting on your own experiences, what advice would you give a new law enforcement officer coming into this field of human trafficking?
12. How do you expect human trafficking to evolve over the next few years?
13. How do you expect law enforcement to combat human trafficking as it evolves over the next few years?
14. What tactics can one use to overcome the barriers posed by law enforcement when combatting human trafficking?

15. What else would be vital for me to know about your experience as a law enforcement officer combatting human trafficking?

Question 1 was a background/demographic question included as an open-ended query to encourage participants to open up about their lives and nonessential terms. The question served as a starting point and allowed participants to describe their lives in their worldview (Patton, 2015).

Sequencing questions are dependent on the type of interview conducted. In this semi-structured interview, the researcher asked standardized open-ended questions, which allowed for freedom of the sequence of the questions. Patton (2015) noted that noncontroversial questions are strong questions to begin with to keep the participant open and willing to talk descriptively. Questions 2, 3, and 4 were preliminary questions about the participant's experience with human trafficking. These questions provided information to support the first research question: What is the lived experience of law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) in combatting human trafficking?

Interview Question 5 was an introductory question about the awareness the participant may or may not have had when combatting human trafficking. The question appeared near the beginning to allow the researcher to gauge initial reactions about participants' feelings toward their superiors, and the people who trained them. Question 6 supported question 5 as related to awareness.

The focus of Interview Questions 7 through 9 might have provoked feelings related to the experience, positive or negative, which supported the second research question: How do law enforcement officers perceive and describe their challenges in combatting human trafficking? It was noted across the literature that there were challenges that affected law enforcement's ability to effectively combat human trafficking.

Questions 10 to 13 asked participants about challenges they think that they, and future law enforcement officers, may encounter in the future as human trafficking evolves. Question 14 asks for a solution to challenges that law enforcement officers have experienced while combatting human trafficking as a means of preparation for being able to do their job in the future effectively and efficiently.

The final question, 14, was a one-shot question designed to give the participant final ownership of the interview. An outcome of this study involves law enforcement officers benefiting from the information provided in this study. Allowing each participant to give in their own words what their experience provided an end to the interview with personal descriptive advice for future law enforcement officers in similar positions.

Data Analysis

To ensure rigor in successful qualitative data analysis and triangulation, the researcher went through several procedures in the data analysis process. Participant/group profiles were obtained using questionnaires, and the researcher was able to get more detail about a particular topic during a semi-structured interview by asking probing questions. For the first interview question, "Please identify yourself, giving general information about yourself," some detail-oriented queries might be (a) What does an average workday look like for you? (a) How long have you worked in law enforcement?

After individually assessing data from each data collection method to produce themes, the researcher used an individual table to develop a composite for each participant. Each respondent was given the opportunity to answer an open-ended question about the survey's subject. The researcher examined the survey responses individually, who then used them to do a descriptive analysis of each participant individually and collectively. To explore lived

experiences and themes across the participants, the data was analyzed across all participants. The researcher triangulated the demographic questionnaire with the survey and semi-structured interviews using individual and composite level tables after completing the formal qualitative data analysis of the semi-structured interviews. Before doing formal qualitative data analysis, the researcher manually transcribed all semi-structured interviews to ensure accuracy and anonymity. Before beginning any data analysis, the researcher emailed the participant a copy of each completed transcription so they could review it for accuracy.

Moustakas (1994) modified the Van Kaam technique to study phenomenological data. This modification provided a framework for semi-structured interviews, surveys, and demographic questionnaires. Only if the participant provided more information in the open-ended answer area of the data collecting tool did the survey and interview contain the Van Kaam method phases. The following are the steps of Moustakas' (1994) modification: The following steps are involved: (a) listing and preliminary grouping; (b) reduction and elimination; (c) clustering and creating themes; (d) final identification with validation; (e) developing textural descriptions; (f) developing structural descriptions for each participant; and (g) creating a composite description of the main themes of the experience for the entire group. Without the use of any software, all analysis was performed by hand and then verified by peer debriefing and member verification.

Steps 1 and 2

Making a list of every expression pertinent to the experience and preliminary classification was the first stage in developing the essence of the phenomena. The crucial common meanings and essences that repeatedly appeared in the transcriptions of the participants served as an expression. Essences and common meanings stood out during analysis, according to

Moustakas (1994). The researcher asked, "Does this expression contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and adequate for interpreting the experience?" while assessing the responses. Can it be horizontalized (i.e., abstracted) and labeled? During this analysis phase, colored sticky notes were used for memorization and coding. Multiple colors made it simpler to spot similarities in the data during triangulation. The researcher used the reduction and elimination process to evaluate each of the statements made in Step 1 in two ways: to determine whether they were relevant to the main question and/or any sub-questions, and to determine whether they were specific and not ambiguous or vague. If applicable, the researcher identified each expression along with the underlying constructs that each expression represents, such as self-efficacy, imbalance, balance, satisfaction, or struggle, according to the research topic it addressed. The semi-structured interview transcripts underwent the first two phases on an individual basis.

Steps 3 and 4

In steps three and four, the data were grouped collectively to examine recurrent expressions. The combined perspective of the participants was supplied by clustering, establishing themes, and final identification with validation, which assisted in identifying essential themes. Any expressions that lacked explicitness were removed because they didn't accurately reflect the group. The researcher thought about the following issues raised by Moustakas (1984) while she examined the data: Is the expression made explicit at least once during data collection? Does the general meaning alter if the phrases are compatible but clearly stated differently?

Steps 5 and 6

Using the verified core themes from Steps 3 and 4, the researcher created unique textural and structural descriptions of the event for each research participant. Verbatim quotes from interviews that explained a participant's perspectives on the phenomenon under research were included in the individual textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). These textural explanations emphasized the participant's personal experiences battling human trafficking. Participants' opinions of training and awareness in the fight against human trafficking was one example. The sensations a participant had while experiencing a phenomenon are vividly portrayed in each structural description, together with the themes and characteristics that illustrate how their thoughts and feelings were related to the happening occurrences (Moustakas, 1994). Examples of structural descriptions were how the participant allocated their time to address the needs of human trafficking victims. To establish validation of the descriptions, the individual structural descriptions additionally included verbatim instances from the transcripts and other data-gathering materials.

Step 7

The researcher created a final textural-structural description for each participant based on their distinct textural and structural descriptions of the encounter. Creating a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences that represent the participants was the final step in Moustakas' (1994) version of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data. Therefore, the precise claims and quotations that made up the composite themes and descriptions and embodied the participants could respond to the main study question and its sub-questions. Each composite description is related to an answer to the study's research

questions regarding the difficulties law enforcement officials have in preventing human trafficking.

Triangulation of Data

All data collection techniques, including semi-structured interviews, surveys, and questionnaires, were used in the data analysis process to triangulate the data and produce detailed, structural, and individual descriptions of the experiences. Unless otherwise noted, each data gathering technique adhered to the data analysis procedures of Moustakas' (1994) adaptation of the Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis to offer a precise and understandable triangulation of the data. The researcher wrote individual, composite, and structural descriptions of the events before organizing the data analysis for each data-gathering tool in a table. For the individual-level tables, a composite-level matrix was built using the demographic questionnaire, survey, and semi-structured interviews as the data sources. The matrix allowed cross-reference key topics from Steps 5 and 6's data collection techniques. Using triangulation, according to Patton (2002), does not produce essentially the same outcome, but it can help in identifying consistency between the results and offers opportunities for further understanding.

Trustworthiness

According to Schwandt (2015), trustworthiness is the ability to provide criteria for judging one's research for goodness and quality. Trustworthiness should also comprise balance, fairness, and conscientiousness when accounting for multiple perspectives that participants provide and the researcher's biased perspective (Patton, 2015). This judging is aided by the four components of credibility, reliability, confirmability, and transferability. By including this

section, the researcher establishes herself as someone determined to conduct reliable research by adhering to established standards of trustworthiness.

Credibility

Establishing credibility entails conducting steps to demonstrate the representation of the data met the expectations of the participants' views of stories (Schwandt, 2015). Triangulation is also the basis for strengthening a study by combining multiple data collection methods (Patton, 2002). Initial triangulation occurred through this study's three forms of data collection: questionnaire, survey, and semi-structured interviews. Triangulation allows for diverse ways of examining data to provide the most accurate representation of the data (Patton, 2015). It also aids in checking the integrity of the assumptions and inferences made by the researcher (Schwandt, 2015). Without triangulation, the study would not be validated (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Schwandt, 2015).

Support for triangulation transpired through member checks that ensured the researcher stayed close to the participant data and that all interpretations and analogies remained focused on participant perspectives (Anderson & Herlihy, 2013). Member checks with the individual participants occurred via e-mail after each interview's transcription and again upon completion of all findings to clarify and confirm the conclusions drawn by the researcher about participants' experiences.

The final aspect of credibility was a peer debrief with law enforcement officers having experience with combatting human trafficking. Peer debriefing provided a sounding board throughout the data collection process and with the following discussion. Peer review gives a researcher someone to share dilemmas with as they occurred during the study and provides a

support system when for sharing ideas or thoughts (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Schwandt, 2015).

Dependability and Confirmability

The basis behind confirmability involved the ability of the researcher to establish interpretations of the data that were not of their imagination and ensuring the process of conducting the research was logical, visible, and documented throughout (Schwandt, 2015). Subsequently, although a personal connection to the research existed based on the researcher's status as a professional, full-time working mother with two daughters, working on a doctoral degree in the field of criminal justice, it was necessary to bracket personal experiences related to the phenomenon. Bracketing entails setting aside one's assumptions, descriptions, feelings, and experiences to provide a composite description of the phenomenon from the view of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing aligns with the basis of phenomenological research, showing that one's own experiences may be similar to the participants' experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

Validation of the study is essential; therefore, the researcher is responsible for linking assertions, findings, and interpretations to the actual data collected from participants (Schwandt, 2015). The researcher created an audit trail throughout the study. The appendixes contain examples of participant demographic spreadsheets, personal memoing, peer debriefing, member checks, questionnaire examples, transcriptions, and surveys. These methods of confirmability incorporated and allowed for a dependability check. Dependability required accountability from the researcher to make sure the study was logical, traceable, and well-documented throughout. The external auditor was a content expert to help validate the audit trail. The content expert for

this study was a member of the dissertation committee due to having specific knowledge and published works in the field of doctoral student persistence.

Transferability

Transferability of findings from this research study to another depend upon the established methodology in which a case-to-case transfer could occur with readers who judge they are working with similar participants, settings, and/or data collection/analysis (Schwandt, 2015). Discussions of methodology in Chapter 3 were detailed to allow reproduction or transferability due to rich, thick descriptions of the steps taken to conduct this study and arrive at the findings. As stated, in both the participants and the setting selection, maximum variation in the sample provided a set of participants who varied in age, ethnicity, and professional experience. The Chapter 2 literature review guides the discussion in Chapter 5 with consideration of theoretical perspective, law enforcement, and the combating of human trafficking.

Ethical Considerations

All researchers need to take potential ethical dilemmas into account. Ethical consideration is the ability of the researcher to maintain and identify any moral or ethical questions that may impact the participant, the researcher, or the overall findings of the study. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities. The informed consent form includes a right to withdraw with no penalties or repercussions as well as permission for audio and video recording. All information gathered was protected by the researcher using encrypted files, and hard copies were kept in locked cabinets. A computer was password-protected for all access. No component of the study caused any psychological suffering; thus, a counselor was not required.

Summary

Chapter 3 contained a descriptive explanation of the procedures and rationales used for this transcendental phenomenological study investigating the experiences of law enforcement officers' challenges and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking. The literature review indicated a gap for law enforcement officers combatting human trafficking due to the characteristics of human trafficking, the identification of human trafficking, and the lack of training. This chapter thoroughly described the transcendental phenomenological approach to qualitative research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the challenges of law enforcement officers and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking in Alabama.

The following research questions were addressed in the study using a survey and semi-structured interview questions:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) in combatting human trafficking?

RQ2: How do law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) perceive and describe their challenges in combatting human trafficking?

This chapter begins with descriptions of each participant. Recruitment of participants occurred through text messages and then snowball sampling. Data from the participants came through questionnaires, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. The remainder of this chapter includes data analysis and significant findings.

Participants

After contact through initial purposeful sampling and the snowball procedures, 10 individuals responded to the survey. Each of these participants met the criteria and completed all data collection steps. After returning the consent forms, participants received the questionnaire and the survey. Upon completion, the researcher corresponded with each law enforcement officer individually to stay in touch to secure an interview time. The use of pseudonyms instead of names ensures confidentiality among the participants. Each participant was identified using the acronym: LEO for law enforcement officer, followed by a number in numerical order. The 10

participants were law enforcement officers directly involved with human trafficking cases in Tuscaloosa County, AL.

Participants in this study collectively worked in law enforcement for a total of 160 years. Eight participants have been members of law enforcement for 10 to 24 years. The average law enforcement officer was between 30 and 39 years of age. Of the ten participants, six were male, and four were female. Furthermore, seven were African American, and three were Caucasian.

LEO 1

LEO 1 is a Caucasian female between 30 – 39 years old. She has been a law enforcement officer for 10 – 14 years. She defined human trafficking as a person forced to commit sex acts. When asked what her experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, she stated, “it is a dark enterprise that affects all walks of life and includes other various crimes often involving drugs.” Accordingly, LEO 1 strongly agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 1 made this statement as she has witnessed human trafficking as forced labor in one or more forms: domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage business, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, and/or peddling and begging. Because of this, she further agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach is essential.

LEO 1 has been a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, a collaboration of many local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, for one to two years. She serves in the role of undercover operations. LEO 1 presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to eradicate human trafficking in West Alabama. However, LEO 1 was neutral on law enforcement agencies forming a collaborative partnership to

successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. Subsequently, she was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 1 answered, “law enforcement officers must be immersed in the culture and trends, such as social media used in involvement.”

Due to people using social media, LEO 1 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. Nevertheless, she was able to identify the following as characteristics of human trafficking: victims’ answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Yet, LEO 1 has experienced challenges identifying human trafficking at the surface. Wherefore this can be attributed to her lack of training. LEO 1 stated that lack of training and equipment are barriers to success when combatting human trafficking. This is relevant as she has received only basic human trafficking and resource training.

LEO 2

LEO 2 is an African American male between 50 – 59 years old. He has been a law enforcement officer for 20 – 24 years. He defined human trafficking as forced labor to benefit. When asked what his experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, he stated, “age, vulnerability, gender, and economic hardship.” Accordingly, LEO 2 strongly agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 2 made this statement as he has witnessed human trafficking as forced labor in one or more forms: domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage business, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, and/or peddling and begging. Because of this, he further agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are

not conducive to investigation or service provision. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach is essential.

LEO 2 has been a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force for five or more years. His role as a Task Force member involves supporting cross-departmental initiatives. He presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to provide investigative and prosecutorial resources for victims. LEO 2 disagreed when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, he was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 2 answered, “law enforcement officers must respond to human trafficking and the implications for victims.”

LEO 2 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. LEO 2 has experienced challenges identifying victims of human trafficking. Nevertheless, he was able to identify the following as characteristics of human trafficking: victims living with an employer, multiple people in a cramped space, victims appearing to be under the age of 18, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Wherefore this can be attributed to his training. LEO 2 stated that the lack of resources for victims is a barrier to success when combatting human trafficking. This is relevant as he has received only human trafficking awareness training.

LEO 3

LEO 3 is an African American female between the ages of 30 – 39. She has been a law enforcement officer for 15 – 19 years. She defined human trafficking as “the sensual enslavement of a person against their will, including those who can’t lawfully give consent

because of their age, relationship to the abuser/trafficker, or mental capacity.” When asked what her experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, she stated,

“Research has proven that, although any social class can become a victim of human trafficking, the majority of victims come from lower socioeconomic status. Minorities, people living in poverty, children from single-parent homes, and neglected/abused youth make up the greatest number of human trafficking victims. Additionally, trafficking can include an abuser who is authoritative over the victim by silencing them with gifts or threats if they do not participate in sexual acts.”

Accordingly, LEO 3 strongly agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 3 made this statement as he has witnessed human trafficking as forced labor in one or more forms: domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage business, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, and/or peddling and begging. However, she disagrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision.

LEO 3 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. However, she has worked as the sole investigator for physical and sexual abuse for the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office. She worked in this capacity for three years. She presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to combat the global epidemic of hidden human enslavement. LEO 3 strongly disagreed when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, she was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 3 answered, “more collaborative efforts with local school systems in educating youth about

what trafficking is needed. Trafficking victims can age out (meaning their age makes them less desirable.) Young children and adults (under 25) do not necessarily understand that they are being trafficked. This age range makes up the greater number of victims, and because of their immaturity, they may realize something is wrong but do not understand the gravity.”

LEO 3 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. LEO 3 described the following challenges she has experienced when combatting human trafficking, “any sexual abuse is usually hidden by the victim for many reasons, fear, shame, trauma, etc. Because most people (adults and children) do not disclose the abuse when it occurs, combating sexual slavery is difficult for law enforcement to identify. That is why strategies like "prostitution stings" are used to trick predators into identifying themselves. Victims do not feel safe identifying their traffickers. Nevertheless, she could identify fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone as a characteristic law enforcement officers can use to identify human trafficking. Wherefore this can be attributed to her training. LEO 3 has attended several schools and trainings on sexual abuse of children, domestic abuse, and sexual abuse victims. LEO 3 provided the following information regarding her experience and barriers to success when combatting human trafficking,

“Living in Alabama, funding is a huge obstacle. Collaborating with schools and adequately funding those collaborations is an issue. The school systems, as recent as the year 2020, started adding mental health social workers to the schools, and not enough to cover each school. For example, Tuscaloosa County School System has one mental health social worker for the entire school district. More qualified school professionals in this field must partner with law enforcement. Identifying victims when

they are young can only be accomplished effectively when victims spend a greater amount of time away from their abusers in the school setting.”

LEO 4

LEO 4 is a Caucasian female between the ages of 40 – 49. She has been a law enforcement officer for 20 – 24 years. She defined human trafficking as someone being forced to have sex with others against their will. When asked what her experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, she stated, “seeing people targeted who are vulnerable and are afraid to report it because of fear or retaliation.” However, LEO 4 strongly disagrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 2 made this statement as she has not witnessed human trafficking as forced labor. Be that as it may, she agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach is essential.

LEO 4 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. However, she is a Sargent who has worked in criminal investigations for five years and homicide for three years. She presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to help combat human trafficking in the area. LEO 4 disagreed when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, she was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 4 answered, “law enforcement officers be more open to listening to victims and be more understanding – knowing that they might not be willing to be truthful at first, out of fear and retaliation from their trafficker.”

LEO 4 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. LEO 4 has experienced challenges with victims – trying to get them to cooperate. Nevertheless, she identified the following characteristics of human trafficking: multiple people in a cramped space, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. This can be attributed to her minimal training, mainly video. LEO 4 stated that the lack of knowledge, training, and resources for victims are barriers to success when combatting human trafficking.

LEO 5

LEO 5 is a Caucasian male between the ages of 40 – 49. He has been a law enforcement officer for 20 – 24 years. He defined human trafficking as using an individual for labor or sex against their will. When asked what his experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, he stated,

“Anyone can become a victim of human trafficking, regardless of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Becoming a victim has more to do with their particular vulnerabilities than any other factor. Some of the victims don’t even consider themselves victims until someone or something shines a light on their situation from an outside perspective.”

Accordingly, LEO 5 strongly agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 5 made this statement as he has witnessed human trafficking as forced labor in one or more forms: domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage business, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, and/or peddling and begging. Because of this, he further agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach is essential.

LEO 5 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. However, he has served as an investigator for the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office, Criminal Investigations Division. His role involved being the investigator for domestic violence and intimate partner violence for 10 years. He presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to combat human trafficking in the Tuscaloosa area and provide victims with resources. LEO 5 disagreed when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, he was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 5 answered, "law enforcement officers must change their view. Just because someone is engaged in an illegal activity doesn't mean the investigation ends with that individual. The investigator must put some time and effort into discovering why the illegal activity is happening. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to continue to pursue cases due to management concerns and staffing shortages."

LEO 5 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. LEO 5 has experienced challenges identifying victims of human trafficking. Nevertheless, he was able to identify the following as characteristics of human trafficking: victims living with an employer, multiple people in a cramped space, victims' answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Wherefore this can be attributed to his training. LEO has attended several classes on how to identify the signs associated with human trafficking and how to investigate human trafficking. LEO 5 stated that the lack of a centralized database is a barrier to success when combatting human trafficking.

“There needs to be a shared database of victims and offenders. This would be a huge step toward combatting human trafficking.

LEO 6

LEO 6 is an African American male between the ages of 40 – 49. He has been a law enforcement officer for 20 – 24 years. He defined human trafficking as someone being transported by an individual or individuals for gain. When asked what his experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, he stated, “younger females being transported for sex and for monetary gain.” Accordingly, LEO 6 strongly agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 6 made this statement as he has witnessed human trafficking as forced labor. Because of this, he further agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach is essential.

LEO 6 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. He is a member of ALEA – Alabama Law Enforcement Agency. He has served in highway patrol for five or more years. He presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to deter and interdict human trafficking. LEO 6 was neutral when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, he was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 2 answered, “there needs to be more educational classes that help law enforcement officers identify human trafficking.”

LEO 6 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. LEO 6 has experienced challenges with insufficient “manpower” or people trained to investigate this crime. Nevertheless, he identified the following characteristics of human trafficking: victims’ answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed, victims appear to be under 18, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Wherefore this can be attributed to his training. LEO 6 has received training in highway interdiction and identification of human trafficking. LEO 6 stated that lack of training and data in affected areas are barriers to success when combatting human trafficking.

LEO 7

LEO 7 is an African American female between the ages of 30 – 39. She has been a law enforcement officer for 1 – 5 years. She defined human trafficking as the trafficking of humans for slave labor and/or sexual exploitation. When asked about her experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking, she stated, “I have had many experiences with persons under the age of 25, of all racial backgrounds. The most common are those without family or those whom the family sells for financial gain.” Accordingly, LEO 7 agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 7 made this statement as she has witnessed human trafficking as forced labor in one or more forms: domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage business, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, and/or peddling and begging. Because of this, she further agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach is essential.

LEO 7 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. She serves as a school resources officer and social worker for Jefferson County School System. She is not

sure why the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was created. Therefore, LEO 7 remained neutral when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, she was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 7 answered, “law enforcement officers must stop blaming the victim during investigations. For example, victims are often blamed or said they deserve what happened to them because of what they wear. This question is unnecessary and irrelevant when we look at the totality of the situation.”

LEO 7 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. LEO 7 has experienced challenges with victims being fearful and not coming forward because they fear exposing their traffickers or family members. Nevertheless, LEO 7 was able to identify the following characteristics of human trafficking: victims living with an employer, multiple people in a cramped space, victims’ answers appearing to be scripted and rehearsed, victims appearing to be under the age of 18, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Wherefore this can be attributed to her training. LEO 7 has received sensitivity training for interviewing victims of human trafficking. She stated that the lack of resources for victims is a barrier to success when combatting human trafficking.

LEO 8

LEO 8 is an African American male between the ages of 30 – 39. He has been a law enforcement officer for 10 – 14 years. He defined human trafficking as the unlawful transportation of a human being for undesirable purposes. When asked what his experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, he stated, “mainly minority women and individuals with an economic hardship.” Accordingly, LEO 8 strongly agrees that

human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 8 made this statement as he has witnessed human trafficking as forced labor in one or more forms: domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage business, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, and/or peddling and begging. However, he disagrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision.

LEO 8 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. He is a Senior Probation Officer for the Alabama Department of Probation, Pardon, and Paroles. His role involves supporting defendants and ensuring they adhere to their sentence provided by the judge. He presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to combat sex trafficking in West Alabama. LEO 8 disagreed when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, he was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 8 answered, "law enforcement officers must monitor the dark web and social media." This alludes to the fact that LEO 8 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime.

LEO 8 has experienced challenges when speaking to victims of human trafficking. Often times, when investigating this crime, victims fail to provide information that can assist in stopping others from being trafficked. Nevertheless, he identified the following characteristics of human trafficking: multiple people in a cramped space, victims' answers appearing to be scripted and rehearsed, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Wherefore this can be attributed to his training. LEO 8 has received multiple training on

combatting human trafficking from the Attorney General's Office. LEO 8 stated that the lack of resources for victims is a barrier to success when combatting human trafficking.

LEO 9

LEO 9 is an African American male between the ages of 30 – 39. He has been a law enforcement officer for 10 – 14 years. He defined human trafficking as forcing individuals, particularly women and children, to participate in labor and/or unlawful sex acts. When asked what his experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, he stated, "I've witnessed older males with much younger females; that seems to be extremely corrupt." Accordingly, LEO 9 strongly agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEO 9 made this statement as he may have witnessed human trafficking as forced labor in one or more forms: domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage business, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, and/or peddling and begging. Because of this, he somewhat agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking often experience trauma, causing them to present disruptive trauma responses that are not conducive to investigation or service provision.

LEO 9 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. However, he is a member of the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office. He has served as a deputy detention officer and deputy patrol officer. Currently, LEO 9 is an investigator assigned to the criminal division unit. He presumes that the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to raise awareness about human trafficking while providing advocacy for human rights. LEO 9 remained neutral when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership. Subsequently, he was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 9 answered, "there

needs to be more training for law enforcement members. So they can better understand the updated methods used for human trafficking.”

LEO 9 agrees that human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime. LEO 9 has experienced challenges identifying victims of human trafficking. Nevertheless, he identified the following characteristics of human trafficking: multiple people in a cramped space, victims’ answers appearing to be scripted and rehearsed, victims appearing to be under the age of 18, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Wherefore this can be attributed to his training. LEO 9 has attended various classes to help better understand human trafficking. Furthermore, LEO 9 stated that sometimes language barriers and lack of training can hinder success when combatting human trafficking.

LEO 10

LEO 10 is an African American male between the ages of 20 – 29. He has been a law enforcement officer for less than a year. He defined human trafficking as the transportation of people, adult and/or children, for sexual exploitation or labor. When asked what his experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking has been, he stated, “mostly teenage girls, between the ages of 12 and 18, who lack social safety.” Accordingly, LEO 10 agrees that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. Due to the length of experience, LEO 10 has not witnessed human trafficking as forced labor. This caused him to be neutral regarding victims/survivors of human trafficking and their experience of trauma.

LEO 10 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. He serves as a deputy assigned to patrol. He is unsure why the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established. LEO 10 disagreed when asked if law enforcement agencies can successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership.

Subsequently, he was asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO 10 did not provide an answer due to the length of experience.

LEO 10 does not consider human trafficking to be a hidden crime. Again, due to the length of experience, LEO 10 has not experienced any challenges identifying victims of human trafficking. Nevertheless, he identified the following characteristics of human trafficking: victims' answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed, victims appear to be under 18, and victims tend to display fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone. Wherefore this can be attributed to his training. LEO 10 has attended training that allows him to recognize the signs of a person participating in human trafficking. Furthermore, LEO 10 stated that the lack of knowledge hinders success when combatting human trafficking.

Results

Each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, survey, and semi-structured interview to develop themes. All data collection methods focused on the research question, which guided this study to describe the experiences of law enforcement officers and the challenges they face in combatting human trafficking. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) modification of Van Kaam's method of analysis of phenomenological data for each data collection method, with the expectations of the demographic questionnaire.

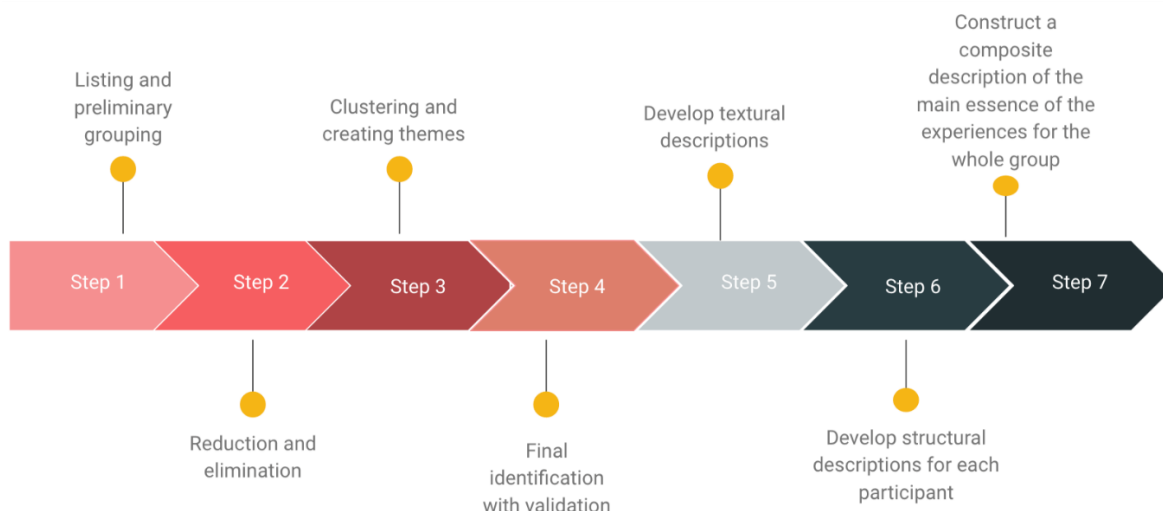
Theme Development

Using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis indicated significant themes relating to the research questions. After sorting the significant statements, the researcher transferred the information into spreadsheets and coded it

by color. Following the steps in Table 4.1, themes emerged to answer the questions asked during this study.

Table 4.1

Data Analysis



Moustakas' (1994) Modification of the Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data

Steps 1 and 2. The first step of Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis includes listing and preliminary grouping of expressions relevant to the experience. Surveys and semi-structured interview transcripts were coded using memoing and color-coded sticky notes at the individual level first. After all surveys and semi-structured interviews were coded, each memo/code faced reduction and elimination by asking if the expression was relevant to the research question and/or if the expression was detailed, not vague, or ambiguous. After completing steps one and two, 12 initial codes were identified. They were used in steps three and four: sex (male, female), race (African American, Caucasian), age (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50+), years as a law enforcement officer (1-5, 10-14, 15-19, 20-24), West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force member, role as a law enforcement officer, training, human trafficking definition, identification of human trafficking (hidden crime,

connected to other crimes), characteristics of human trafficking (age, race, gender, vulnerability, economics, social stability), collaboration, and experience (forced labor, investigative methods, challenges faced, barriers to success).

Steps 3 and 4. Grouping the codes from steps one and two by common specific, and consistent expressions created clusters that were listed together. Expressions that did not represent the group were eliminated, and the remaining codes were validated through at least one data collection point. At this point, 1 code were eliminated, the role as a law enforcement officer. The remaining codes identified core themes: definition of human trafficking, characteristics of human trafficking, identifying human trafficking, efforts to combat human trafficking, challenges faced, barriers to success, and the lived experience. Table 4.2 shows codes, frequency, and themes.

Table 4.2

Coding and Theming Development

Code	Frequency	Theme
Sex		Lived Experience
Male	6	
Female	4	
Race		Lived Experience
African American	7	
Caucasian	3	
Age		Lived Experience
20 – 29 Years Old	1	
30 – 39 Years Old	5	
40 – 49 Years Old	3	
50+ Years Old	1	
Years as a Law Enforcement Officer		Lived Experience
Less than a year	1	
1 – 5 Years	1	
10 – 14 Years	3	
15 – 19 Years	1	
20 – 24 Years	4	
WAHTTF Member		Lived Experience
Not a member	7	

1 – 2 Years	1	
5+ Years	2	
Human Trafficking Training		Lived Experience
Minimal (Basic Training)	5	
Multiple Trainings	5	
Definition of Human Trafficking		Definition of HT
Forced Labor	5	
Transportation of people	3	
Enslavement	2	
Characteristics of Human Trafficking		Characteristics of HT
Gender (girls and boys)	5	
Age (under 18)	6	
Vulnerability	4	
Economic hardship	6	
Minority	4	
Drugs	1	
Identification		Identifying HT
Living with an employer	3	
Multiple people in a cramped space	6	
Scripted and rehearsed answers	7	
Under 18 years of age	5	
Fearful behavior & the inability to speak alone	10	
Hidden Crime		Challenges Faced
Yes	9	
No	1	
Connected to Other Crime		Lived Experience
Strongly Agree	7	
Agree	3	
Strongly Disagree	1	
Collaboration		Efforts to Combat HT
Purpose of the WAHTTF		
Combat human trafficking	6	
Raise awareness and provide resources to victims	2	
N/A	2	
Rescue victims without collaborations		
Strongly Disagree	1	
Disagree	5	
Neutral	4	
Victim-centered and Trauma-informed approach		Efforts to Combat HT
Yes	6	
No	2	
Maybe	2	

Experience			Lived Experience
Labored Force			
Yes	6		
No	2		
Maybe	2		
Victims are exposed to other forms of violence			Lived Experience
Strongly Agree	7		
Agree	2		
Strongly Disagree	1		
Investigative Methods			Efforts to Combat HT
More collaborations with the school system	1		
Monitor the dark web and social media	2		
More training/educational classes	2		
Don't jump to conclusions/respond to victims	4		
N/A	1		
Challenges Faced			Challenges Faced
Identification	2		
Resources	2		
Victims	5		
N/A	1		
Barriers to Success			Barriers to Success
Lack of training	1		
Lack of resources	4		
Lack of knowledge	2		
Lack of Data	2		
Language Barrier	1		

Steps 5 and 6. To produce and direct the unique textual and structural descriptions of the experiences of each participant, which can be found in Chapter Four of this study, core themes from steps one through four were utilized. The individual textural and structural descriptions focused on specific participants' quotes and perceptions from their individual experiences.

Step 7. A final composite description of the participants was created using individual textural and structural descriptions. The question under which the codes and main themes most closely matched were listed. Following their listing, the codes and core themes were consolidated and condensed to create the final composite descriptions and main themes. These represented the participants as a group and could answer the research questions: lived

experience, the definition of human trafficking, characteristics of human trafficking, identification of human trafficking, efforts to combat human trafficking, challenges faced, and barriers to success.

Theme Development Responses

Two research questions were asked during this study's data collection and data analysis. The first research question asked participants about their experience in law enforcement (WAHTTF) combatting human trafficking. Allowing the participants to describe their experiences was important to building individual textural and structural descriptions of the experience and the group's overall textural and structural composite description. Research question one focused on finding answers to how participants experienced human trafficking through their sex, race, age, years as a law enforcement officer, being a member of the WAHTTF, training, characteristics of human trafficking, human trafficking being connected to other crimes, experiencing human trafficking as a labored force, and victims being exposed to violence.

Research Question One: What is the lived experience of law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) in combatting human trafficking?

The first few questionnaire and interview questions aided in identifying the principal themes for participants' overall experience as law enforcement officers combatting human trafficking. Two themes emerged from this question, lived experience and characteristics of human trafficking.

Lived Experience. Lived experience refers to the “representation and understanding of an individual's human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge” based on one's own life (ASPE, 2022). In the case of law enforcement

officers, participants described their experience based on their sex, age, race, years as a law enforcement officer, being a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, training; and experiences of human trafficking being connected to other crimes, human trafficking being a labored force, and victims being exposed to violence.

Sex. Of the ten participants, six were male – LEOs 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 – and four were female – LEOs 1, 3, 4, and 7.

Race. Seven of the ten participants were African Americans – LEOs 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, and the remaining 3 were Caucasian – LEOs 1, 4, and 5.

Age. LEO 10 was the youngest ranging from 20- 29 years old. LEO 2 was the oldest ranging from 50 – 59 years old. LEOs 1, 3, 7, 8, and 9, ranged from ages 30 – 39. LEOs 4, 5, and 6 ranged from ages 40 – 49.

Years as an LEO. LEO 10 was the youngest law enforcement officer, he also had the least amount of experience – less than a year. Although LEO 2 was the oldest law enforcement officer, he shared a maximum of years of experience (20 – 24 years) with LEOs 4, 5, and 6. LEO 3 had been a law enforcement officer for 15 -19 years. LEOs 1, 8, and 9 have been law enforcement officers for 10 – 14 years. LEO 7 has been a law enforcement officer for 1 – 5 years.

WAHTTF Members. Moreover, while each participant was a sworn law enforcement officer, not each of them were a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Force. LEOs 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 are not members of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. However, LEO1 has been a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force for 1 – 2 years. Additionally, LEO 2 and LEO 6 have been members of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force for five or more years. To that respect, in LEO 1's 1- 2 years as a

member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, she has worked undercover operations. In LEO 2's five-plus years as a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, he has worked to support cross-departmental initiatives. In LEO 6's five-plus years of a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, he has worked highway patrol. Yet, it should be noted that although LEO 3 is not a member of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, she has worked as the sole physical and sexual abuse investigator for the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office for three years.

Training. Of the ten participants, 5 have received minimal (basic training), and 5 participants have received extensive training. LEOs 1, 2, 4, 7, and 10 have received basic human trafficking awareness training. However, LEOs 7 and 10 basic training included recognizing the signs/how to identify human trafficking. LEOs 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 have received extensive training. LEO 3 has attended several schools for sexual abuse for children, domestic abuse, and sexual abuse victims. LEO 5 has attended several classes on how to identify the signs associated with human trafficking and how to investigate human trafficking. LEO 6 has received human trafficking training in highway interdiction and identification of human trafficking. LEO 8 has received multiple trainings by the Attorney General's Office. The Attorney General collaborates with the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. Additionally, the Attorney General's Office is a part of the Blue Campaign.

Connected to Another Crime. Human trafficking is rarely a crime that stands alone. Often it is connected to other crimes, such as prostitution, drugs, kidnapping, and drugs. The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force has conducted several prostitution stings at various hotels in Tuscaloosa, AL. During that time, law enforcement officers arrest several persons on the charges of prostitution and drugs. Moreover, some of the persons arrested have

been charged with human trafficking. There have been instances where girls were rescued from the hotel, as they were in transit to another city and state. Thus, LEOs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 strongly agree that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. LEOs 7 and 10 also agree. LEO 4 strongly disagreed that human trafficking is connected to other crimes. “This is a stand-alone crime. Although it can be connected to other crimes, I have not experienced it.”

Labored Force. Forced labor is similar to slavery. It is often coerced, physical, and done without pay. Some examples of forced labor include domestic servitude, child labor, bonded labor, and forced sex. Additional examples of forced labor include illicit massage businesses, health and beauty services, door-to-door sales, peddling, and begging. LEOs 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 have all witnessed human trafficking as forced labor. LEOs 1, 2, and 3 have experienced human trafficking via door-to-door sales. These LEOs have worked together during prostitution stings. During these stings, law enforcement officers post an ad on Backpage posing as prostitutes. Solicitors of prostitution respond to the ad and meet the alleged prostitute at the hotel.

LEOs 6 and 9 may have witnessed human trafficking as a labored force. LEO 6 is a member of ALEA, and part of his job duties is to patrol the major interstate and highways in Alabama. LEO 9 is a member of the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office; part of his duties is to patrol the highways and roads within Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. There have been times when these law enforcement officers pulled over vehicles for road violations, and there have been younger females in the vehicle with older men. However, due to their training, the younger females do not exhibit signs of human trafficking. Yet sometimes, it does seem suspicious. Nevertheless, these law enforcement officers must use their training and discretion to make the correct call. LEOs 4 and 10 have not witnessed human trafficking as a labored force.

Victims are exposed to other forms of violence. Research has proven that populations who tend to be at risk for human trafficking are often exposed to other forms of violence, such as child abuse, sexual assault, runaway and homeless youth, and community and gang violence. There was no doubt that law enforcement officers agreed, LEOs 6 and 10. However, LEOs 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9 strongly agree. LEO 4 strongly disagreed. LEO 4 stated, "That was an error. I strongly agree because people who are vulnerable tend to become victims of human trafficking and being exposed to other forms of violence before being involved in human trafficking, can cause them to become a part of that lifestyle."

Characteristics of Human Trafficking. Anyone can become a victim of human trafficking. It can occur in any city, state, or region in the United States or abroad. Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which victims are subjected to force, fraud, coercion for commercial sex, debt bondage, or involuntary labor (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). Victims of human trafficking can be young children, teenagers, and adults (all male and female). Minors (persons under the age of 18) also tend to be victims of human trafficking. In conjunction, The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report identified several populations particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking in the United States. The most vulnerable population involves homeless and runaway youth, children involved in the child welfare and foster care systems, youth who have made contact with the juvenile justice system, other ethnicities, migrant laborers, people with disabilities, and those who are LGBTQI. Furthermore, persons who are impoverished, isolated, addicted to drugs, and have a history of sexual abuse are also vulnerable to human trafficking.

Gender. LEOs 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 have experience with human trafficking victims who tend to be female. LEO 9 has experienced older male individuals with much younger females.

Age (Under the age of 18). LEOs 2, 5, 7, and 10 have experience with human trafficking victims under the age of 18. LEO 7 stated, “I have had experience with persons under the age of 25, of all racial backgrounds. The most common being without family or sold by family for financial needs”. LEO 10 has experience with mostly teenage girls between the ages of 12 and 18 who lack social safety.

Vulnerable. LEOs 2, 4, and 5 have witnessed vulnerability in human trafficking victims. LEO 4 stated, “human trafficking seems to be targeted to people who are vulnerable and are afraid to report it, because of fear of retaliation.” LEO 5 went on to say, “becoming a victim of human trafficking has more to do with their particular vulnerabilities than any other factor. Some of the victims do not consider themselves victims until someone or something shines a light on their situation from an outside perspective”.

Economic hardship. LEOs 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8 have experience with human trafficking victims facing economic hardship. LEO 3 stated, “Research has proven that, although any social class can become a victim of human trafficking, the majority of victims come from lower socioeconomic classes.” LEO 6 stated, “I have experienced younger females being transported from sex for monetary gain”.

Minority. LEO 3 stated, “Minorities, people living in poverty, children from single-parent homes, and neglected/abused youth, make up the greater number of trafficking victims”.

Drugs. LEO 1 has experienced human trafficking from persons from all walks of life. She stated, “often times they are involved in various crimes, including drugs”.

Research Question Two: How do law enforcement officers perceive and describe their challenges in combatting human trafficking?

The utilization of several interview questions, along with the survey, established the factors that participants described as challenges in combatting human trafficking. Five themes emerged under this question: definition of human trafficking, identification of human trafficking, challenges of human trafficking, efforts to combat human trafficking, challenges faced, and barriers to success.

Definition of Human Trafficking. Each participant provided a different definition for human trafficking. LEO 3 provided the most detailed definition. LEO 3 stated, “human trafficking is the sexual enslavement of a person or persons against their will. including those who cannot lawfully give consent because of their age, relationship to the abuser/trafficker, or mental capacity”. Other LEOs generally define human trafficking as a person who is forced to commit sexual acts or the transportation of people for sexual labor or sexual exploitation.

Identification of Human Trafficking. There are several different ways law enforcement officers can identify human trafficking. Each participant was asked to mark which factor(s) were used to identify human trafficking: living with the employer, multiple people in a cramped space, answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed, under 18 years of age, and fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone.

Living with an employer. LEOs 2, 5, and 7 identify victims of human trafficking because they live with their employer,

Multiple people in a cramped space. LEOs 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 are able to identify victims of human trafficking because often times there are multiple people in a cramped space.

Scripted and rehearsed answers. LEOs 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 identify human trafficking victims because their answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed

Under 18 years of age. LEOs 2, 6, 7, 9, and 10 recognize that victims of human trafficking are often under 18 years of age.

Fearful behavior & the inability to speak alone. Each LEO (participants 1 – 10) used fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone as a characteristic for identifying human trafficking.

Challenges of Human Trafficking.

Hidden Crime. Human trafficking can be considered a hidden crime, as there is not a lot of information readily available. Additionally, many victims do not self-report for various reasons. Subsequently, each participant, except LEO 10 agreed that human trafficking is a hidden crime. LEO 10 stated it was not a hidden crime because he has not experienced human trafficking, he has minimal training, and he has been a law enforcement officer for less than a year.

Identification. LEO 1 stated she experienced challenges identifying human trafficking at the surface; it requires thorough investigation. LEO 2 stated he experienced challenges identifying victims of human trafficking. LEO 9 has experienced challenges in knowing which individuals are truly victims of human trafficking.

Resources. LEO 5 has experienced challenges with time and resources needed to conduct a thorough investigation. LEO 6 has experienced challenges with not having enough “man power” and training.

Victims. LEO 3 stated, “any type of sexual abuse is usually hidden by the victim for many reasons; fear, shame, trauma, etc. Many people (adults and children) do not disclose abuse when it occurs. This is because they do not feel safe identifying their traffickers.” LEO 4 has experienced challenges with trying to get victims to cooperate. LEO 7 has also experienced

challenges with victims, just as LEO 3. LEO 7 stated, “victims are fearful of coming forward because of fear of exposing the captors or family.” LEO 8 has experienced challenges in how to properly speak to victims of human trafficking. “An officer needs to know how to speak with a victim of human trafficking so that the victim will provide information to stop other victims from being trafficked.”

Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking

Collaboration. The primary purpose of a multi-disciplinary team is to facilitate the communication and collaboration of all the victim services being provided and to support the investigative and prosecutorial efforts. Additionally, community partners consist of law enforcement officers (for protection), social services (for provision), and advocates (for presence) (Lim & Trull, 2020). Each participant was asked, “can law enforcement agencies successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming collaborative partnerships? LEOs 1, 6, 7, and 9 were neutral. LEOs 2, 4, 5, 8, and 10 disagreed. LEO 3 strongly disagreed.

Additionally, participants were asked, “why was the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force established?” LEOs 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8 expressed that it was established to combat human trafficking in the area (Tuscaloosa and/or West Alabama). LEO 3 stated, “it was established to provide investigative and prosecutorial resources for the victims. LEO 9 asserted that it established awareness about human trafficking while providing advocacy for human rights. LEO 6 voiced, “The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to combat human trafficking in the Tuscaloosa area and to provide resources for the victim.”

Trauma-Centered and Victim-Centered Approach. According to Lim & Trull (2020), a trauma-informed approach to human trafficking involves agencies and individuals recognizing the signs and indicators of trauma in individuals and their families. A victim-centered approach

prioritizes the victim's safety and well-being in all matters and procedures. Additionally, The Blue Campaign and the Department of Homeland Security use a victim-centered approach to combat human trafficking, which places equal value on identifying and stabilizing victims and investigating and prosecuting traffickers. Each participant was asked, "do you believe the trauma-centered and victim-centered approach is an effective effort to combat human trafficking?" LEOs 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 stated Yes. LEOs 3 and 8 stated no. LEOs 9 and 10 stated maybe.

Investigative Methods. Investigating human trafficking cases is usually outside the realm of traditional police roles. Thus, participants were asked what types of traditional law enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement officers change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking. LEO1 stated, "law enforcement officers should be immersed in the culture and trends such as social media used in involvement". LEO 3 expressed, "More collaborative efforts with local school systems in educating youth about human trafficking. Trafficking victims can age out (their age makes them more desirable). Young children and young adults (under 25) do not necessarily understand that they are being trafficked. This age range makes up the greater number of victims, and because of their immaturity, they may realize something is wrong but do not understand the severity". LEO 4 affirmed, "law enforcement officers need to be more open to listening to victims and understanding that they may not be willing to be truthful the first time".

LEO 5 stated, "law enforcement officers need to change their view. Just because someone is engaged in an illegal activity doesn't mean the investigation ends with that individual. The investigator must put some time and effort into finding out why the illegal

activity is happening. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to continue to pursue cases due to management concerns and staffing shortages”.

LEO 6 voiced the need for more education classes to be able to identify human trafficking. Additionally, LEO 8 expressed the need for more training for law enforcement members so that they can have a much better understanding of the updated methods used for human trafficking.

LEO 7 stated, “law enforcement has got to stop victim blaming during the investigation. Certain questions, such as, “what the person was wearing” is not needed”. LEO 8 expressed the need for law enforcement officers to monitor the dark web and social media.

Barriers To Success. According to Lim & Trull (2020), the two primary barriers to addressing problems associated with human trafficking are the lack of data and the limited ability of systems to communicate between agencies.

Lack of Training. LEO 1 has experienced a lack of training and a lack of equipment as barriers to combatting human trafficking. LEO 6 has experienced a lack of training and lack of data in affected areas as barriers to combatting human trafficking.

Lack of Resources. LEO 2 has experienced a lack of resources for victims as a barrier to success in combatting human trafficking. LEO 3 stated, “living in Alabama, funding is a huge obstacle. Collaborating with schools and adequately funding that collaboration is an issue. More qualified school professionals are needed to partner with law enforcement”. LEO 7 has experienced a lack of access to resources as a barrier to combatting human trafficking. Additionally, LEO 8 has experienced a lack of resources for victims as a barrier to combatting human trafficking.

Lack of Knowledge. LEO 4 has experienced a lack of knowledge, training, and resources for victims as barriers to combatting human trafficking. LEO 10 has experienced lack of knowledge and not knowing the information that's needed – for identification and resources for victims – as barriers to combatting human trafficking.

Lack of Data. LEO 5 has experienced a lack of a centralized, shared database of victims and offenders. “Having a database would be a huge step toward combatting human trafficking.”

Language Barrier. LEO 9 has experienced language barriers as a barrier to combatting human trafficking. “Language barriers can be a huge problem, and I would like more training on this specific area”.

Summary

This chapter provided a thorough discussion of the research results of the lived experience of law enforcement officers' challenges in combatting human trafficking in Alabama. The results appeared in the order of research questions to illustrate a picture of themes that represent these law enforcement officers. An analysis of data collected via questionnaire, survey, and interview revealed several themes distinctly connected to this specific group of participants.

The law enforcement officers in this study all presented themselves with the tenacity and willpower to overcome challenges and barriers associated with combatting human trafficking in Alabama. The participants, on average, were African American males, ages 30-39, with 15 – 25 years of experience. Although the law enforcement officers received minimal training and experienced challenges regarding the identification of human trafficking and resources for law enforcement officers and victims, the law enforcement officers were persistent to combat this heinous crime.

Efforts to combat human trafficking, such as collaboration, trauma-informed and victim-center approaches, and non-traditional investigative methods, impacted how each participant persisted. Some law enforcement officers received more training, resources, knowledge, and data about human trafficking in Alabama. Many of the participants were glad that they were able to receive these things, as it allowed them to do their job more effectively and efficiently.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to better understand the challenges of law enforcement officers and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Previous researchers focused on the national issue of human trafficking and the experiences of a few large municipal police departments that were perceived to be most likely to encounter victims of human trafficking (Clawson et al., 2006b; Wilson et al., 2006). A gap in the literature existed in reference to local law enforcement and the challenges they experience in an effort to combat trafficking. This research study was an attempt to fill in the gap and explore the experiences of law enforcement officers and the challenges they face when combatting human trafficking in Alabama. The study further delimited to law enforcement officers who have been involved with a human trafficking incident. A review of the findings, discussion, implications, and recommendations for further research appear in the following sections.

Summary of Findings

This study consists of two research questions, 1) “What is the lived experience of law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) in combatting human trafficking” and 2) “How do law enforcement officers (WAHTTF) perceive and describe their challenges in combatting human trafficking?” The 10 participants had unique experiences during their tenure as law enforcement officers; thus, combatting human trafficking is multifaceted.

Regarding the first research question and the officer’s lived experiences of the 10 participants, six were male, four were female, seven were African American, and three were Caucasian. The majority of the officers were between the ages of 30 – 39 years of age. Years as a

law enforcement officer ranged from 10 years to 24 years. While only three participants were members of the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, each participant is a sworn law enforcement officer within Alabama.

Training is essential to law enforcement officers' experience in combatting human trafficking. Five of the participants received minimal training, and five of the participants received extensive training. In connection with their training and experiences, nine of the officers agree that human trafficking is connected to other crimes, including drugs; six of the ten participants have witnessed human trafficking as a labored force; and nine of the participants agreed that victims are exposed to other forms of violence. Additionally, participants have experienced victims of human trafficking with the following characteristics: minority, female, under the age of 18, who is vulnerable, and has economic hardship.

In reference to the second research question, law enforcement officers described challenges in defining human trafficking and identifying human trafficking (i.e., living with an employer, multiple people in cramped space, scripted and rehearsed answers, under the age of 18, and fearful behavior with the inability to speak alone). Law enforcement officers also experience challenges in combatting human trafficking because it is perceived as a hidden crime. Moreover, law enforcement officers experience challenges in combatting human trafficking due to the lack of training, resources, knowledge, and data; lack of collaboration with other law enforcement agencies; and traditional investigative methods.

Discussion

Historically, researchers of human trafficking have focused on the challenges federal law enforcement officers face when combatting human trafficking nationally. Research on local law enforcement's response to human trafficking is limited and focuses only on the experiences of a

few large municipal police departments that were perceived to be most likely to encounter victims of human trafficking (Clawson et al., 2006b; Wilson et al., 2006). Moreover, according to Ibrahim (2016), there is limited information on responding to human trafficking. There is even less known about the experiences law enforcement is tasked with addressing human trafficking to understand the meaning behind their interactions with those involved in human trafficking. The findings from this study contribute to the existing body of literature by exploring the experiences of law enforcement officers' challenges in combatting human trafficking in Alabama.

Theoretical Confirmation and Corroboration

The results of this study build upon previous research about local law enforcement officers, and the challenges they face when combatting human trafficking. Local law enforcement officers have been identified as key figures in the fight against human trafficking. Yet, training has lagged, and their preparation to fulfill this role – their experience – is unknown (Mapp, Hornung, D'Almeida, & Juhnke, 2016). This study confirmed local law enforcement officers experience challenges in combatting human trafficking due to the lack of training, resources, knowledge, and data; uncooperative victims; lack of collaboration with other law enforcement agencies; and traditional investigative methods.

The experiences of law enforcement officers affect their ability to combat human trafficking. According to Fitch (2011), many law enforcement officers enter the field with minimal experience. They often learn how to perform their jobs and recognize their peers and supervisors' organizational norms, values, and culture.

Albert Bandura proposed social learning theory and added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching others, known as observational

learning (Hammer, 2011). People naturally learn by watching the actions of others. In the case of training, law enforcement officers learn by watching the mistakes and successes of those who have done it before. Bandura identified three basic models of observational learning: 1) a live model – which involves an actual individual demonstrating or acting out of behavior, 2) a symbolic model – which involves real or fictional characters displaying behaviors in books, films, television programs, or online media, and 3) verbal instruction model – which involves description and explanations of behavior (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, Newton and Wilson et al. (2006) conducted a study. It was found that police officers have an incorrect perception of human trafficking because their understanding of the phenomenon has been acquired through the media. Therefore, law enforcement officers have difficulty inferring what they have learned about human trafficking and what they see in their daily duties.

For this study, social learning theory was used to address law enforcement officers' experience when combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Law enforcement officers are trained to do their job through the teachings and observations of peer law enforcement officers. However, every law enforcement officer's experience is different. If law enforcement officers lack training due to insufficient resources, they will suffer many challenges in combatting human trafficking.

Thus, Bandura's theory and Fitch's theory were confirmed. As discussed in Chapter 4, most of the participants in the study have been sworn law enforcement officers for 10 to 20 years. However, only two law enforcement officers had experienced human trafficking for 5 years or more. Additionally, of the 10 participants, 5 of them had received basic training, and 5 of them had received extensive training. The basic training provided information on how to identify/recognize human trafficking. Yet, it was determined that this was a challenge because

each officer did not have the same methods of identifying human trafficking (living with an employer, multiple people in a cramped space, scripted and rehearsed answers, persons under the age of 18, and fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone). One law enforcement officer expressed the need for more educational classes on identifying human trafficking.

Furthermore, when learning from peers, collaboration is essential. According to Lim & Trull (2020), the primary purpose of a multi-disciplinary team is to facilitate the communication and collaboration of all the victim services being provided and to support the investigative and prosecutorial efforts. Of the participants, six law enforcement officers did not believe that law enforcement agencies could successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming collaborative partnerships.

In connection with collaboration, investigating human trafficking cases is usually outside the realm of traditional police roles. Thus, law enforcement officers must change their investigative methods to rescue victims of human trafficking successfully. Law enforcement officers are trained on how to do their job through teaching and observation of peer law enforcement officers. Another law enforcement officer stated, "Law enforcement officers should be immersed in the culture...."

Empirical Extensions and Contributions

Due to the rise in human trafficking cases, research question 2 allowed for examining challenges law enforcement officers face when combatting human trafficking in Alabama. The participants in this study experienced challenges in combatting human trafficking due to the definition of human trafficking, identification of human trafficking, lack of resources, lack of training, traditional investigative methods, and lack of data/knowledge.

The definition of human trafficking is a challenge because the U.S. government provides three different definitions. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines human trafficking as using force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some labor or commercial sex act (2021). The U.S. Department of Justice defines human trafficking as a crime that involves exploiting a person for labor, services, or commercial sex (DOJ, 2021). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines human trafficking as sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act 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, debt bondage, or slavery ((22 U.S.C. § 7102(9)) (DOJ, 2021). According to a study on police officers' perception of human trafficking conducted by Newton (2008), it was found that even when police officers are familiar with federal definitions of trafficking, they sometimes still have trouble distinguishing between human trafficking and smuggling. Just like the federal government, each participant had a different definition for human trafficking. However, law enforcement officers generally define human trafficking as a person who is forced to commit sexual acts, or the transportation of people for sexual labor or sexual exploitation.

The characteristics of human trafficking can include men, women, and children of any community – age, race, or nationality. Additionally, traffickers often use violence, manipulation, or false promises of well-paying jobs or romantic relationships to lure victims into human trafficking situations (DHS, 2021). Thus, they look for susceptible people for various reasons, including psychological or emotional vulnerability, economic hardship, lack of social safety net, natural disasters, or political instability (DHS, 2021). Furthermore, traffickers disproportionately

target at-risk populations, including individuals who have experienced or been exposed to other forms of violence (child abuse and maltreatment, interpersonal violence, sexual assault, community, and gang violence) and individuals disconnected from stable support networks (runaway and homeless youth, unaccompanied minors, and persons displaced during natural disasters) (DHHS, 2017). According to the participants, each of them agreed in some form (agreed or strongly agreed) that victims are exposed to other forms of violence. Additionally, the participants characterized their experience of human trafficking victims as women under 18, who were vulnerable, and experiencing economic hardship.

Furthermore, according to the U.S. Department of State (2021), recognizing key indicators is the first step in identifying victims of human trafficking. While this list is not exhaustive, these are some of the key red flags that could alert one to a potential trafficking situation that should be reported: living with an employer, poor living conditions, multiple people in a cramped space, inability to speak to an individual alone, answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed, the employer is holding identifying documents, signs of physical abuse, submissive or fearful behavior, unpaid or paid very little, and under 18 years of age and is involved in prostitution (DOS, 2021). The participants in this study were able to recognize the following characteristics: living with an employer (3); multiple people in a cramped space (6); scripted and rehearsed answers (7); under 18 years of age (5); and fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone (10).

Lack of training, knowledge, and resources is also a challenge for law enforcement officers. As cited in Farrell, Dank, Vries, Kafafian, Hughes, and Lockwood (2019), central to their public safety mission, the police have a duty to help victims feel safe, assess their immediate needs, and connect them with service providers and healthcare professionals who are

in the best position to assist, provide information about the justice process, and allow them to tell their story without revictimization or additional trauma (President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, 1982). Farrell, Dank, Vries, Kafafian, Hughes, and Lockwood (2019) reviewed human trafficking incidents investigated by police in three U.S. communities; it was revealed that the law enforcement and providers serving victims in these communities struggled to identify and respond to this new type of victim. Most of the officers were not trained on the signs to look for, how to approach, or engage with a potential victim if they were suspected of being trafficked. As researchers in prior studies have noted, without training, police are more likely to overlook victims or misclassify human trafficking cases as other offenses such as prostitution, drug activity, or driving without the proper documents (Farrell, 2014). Law enforcement officers should conduct thorough investigations when identifying victims of human trafficking. However, some law enforcement officers experience challenges because they do not have the time and resources needed to conduct a thorough investigation. Another law enforcement officer stated that law enforcement officers need to change their views; just because someone is engaged in an illegal activity doesn't mean the investigation ends with that individual. The investigator must put some time and effort into finding out why the illegal activity happened. Lastly, a law enforcement officer expressed the need for more training for law enforcement members so that they can have a much better understanding of the updated methods used for human trafficking.

It should be noted that traditional investigative methods are no longer effective means of combatting human trafficking. The increase in technology has made it harder to trace and observe crimes. Information moves through networks between different nodes or points in a larger network (Latonero et al., 2015). In the context of human trafficking, research confirms that public areas of the Internet contain traces of offline human trafficking activity (Latonero et al.,

2015). For example, numerous accounts show how human trafficking operations use the Internet to recruit victims and promote illicit activities linked to trafficking through online classifieds, review boards, and forums (Latonero et al., 2015). Yet, within these online domains, the digital traces of human trafficking may be encoded in language throughout the system. According to Pelella (2021), the key to success lies in law enforcement's ability to adapt and overcome traditional law enforcement methods. Pelella further states that the three primary factors needed to increase the effectiveness in identifying and rescuing victims of human trafficking are training, investigative methods, and multi-agency collaboration (Pelella, 2021). Many police departments have a weak information technology infrastructure, making information-sharing difficult (PERF, 2020). Therefore, law enforcement agencies must understand how to identify and disrupt human trafficking online (PERF, 2020). Law enforcement officers need the tools and skills to capture digital evidence. Participants in this study consider human trafficking to be a hidden crime because many law enforcement officers have minimal training and inadequate resources (technology). Additionally, due to the nature and the characteristics of human trafficking one law enforcement officer expressed the need for more collaborative efforts with local school systems in educating youth about human trafficking.

The use of multi-agency task forces has been suggested as a promising strategy for identifying and investigating cases of human trafficking (Farrell et al., 2008). In January 2020, former President Trump signed Executive Order 13903 on Combating Human Trafficking and Online Child Exploitation in the United States (DOS, 2020). Additionally, the Blue Campaign is the unified voice for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's efforts to combat human trafficking. Through the Blue Campaign, DHS raises public awareness about human trafficking, leveraging partnerships to educate the public to recognize human trafficking and report suspected

instances (ICE, 2021). The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force is comprised of approximately 35 sworn and non-sworn personnel from the Tuscaloosa Police Department, Northport Police Department, The University of Alabama Police Department, Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office, Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's Office, and Trafficking Hope (WAHTTF, 2021). The Attorney General's Office and multiple federal agencies, including Homeland Security and the FBI, also assist the task force. This task force was created to combat human trafficking in the area (Tuscaloosa and/or West Alabama). It was also established to provide investigative and prosecutorial resources for the victims. Lastly, participants believed the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force was established to bring about awareness about human trafficking and advocacy for human rights. Lastly, the Alabama Uniform Human Trafficking Initiative is a multi-disciplinary team that facilitates the communication and collaboration of all the services provided for minor victims/survivors and supports investigative and prosecutorial efforts when possible (Lim & Trull, 2020).

Implications

This study examined the experiences of law enforcement officers and the challenges they face when combatting human trafficking in Alabama. The following is an explanation of the implications of the research through theoretical, empirical, and practical lenses.

Theoretical

This study used Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which proposed that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching others. The study provided a more integral level of description for law enforcement officers who had more experience and training. The research provided new insight into how law enforcement officers are trained to do their job through teaching and observations of peer law enforcement officers. However, because of

various experiences and/or training, every law enforcement officer's experience differs due to the instructor's competence level. If the law enforcement officer received extensive training and was well versed in the topic of human trafficking, they did not experience as many challenges.

Empirical

Limited research is available on law enforcement officers combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Empirically, this study contributed to the foundational literature of law enforcement officers combatting human trafficking locally by providing rich, descriptive narratives of their experiences. No two law enforcement officers in the study had the same experience in combatting human trafficking; however, it is possible to draw parallels to help provide more foundational literature on how they experience challenges. Gaining a better understanding to their perspective also connects to theoretical and practical implications for further research.

Practical

During the semi-structured interviews, law enforcement officers discussed training. These questions allowed the participants to reflect on their experience and provide specific, first knowledge for future law enforcement officers who will be assigned to human trafficking cases. Having the answers to these questions helps better understand the implications and applications of real-world experiences of law enforcement officers combatting human trafficking in Alabama.

Training. Training is an integral part of being a law enforcement officer. Law enforcement agencies should provide training content that ensures the officer has proper and sufficient knowledge and skill to resolve situations they encounter while on duty. Not only should they receive initial training, but training in human trafficking should also be continuous. Law enforcement personnel have a responsibility to make certain that they are up to date on

modern-day training, formal education, and are knowledgeable in tactics used by the criminal element (McHenry, 2019).

Many law enforcement officers begin their careers with bare minimum requirements, such as being 21 years of age, a U.S. citizen with a valid driver's license, having a high school diploma or GED, having no felony convictions, and can pass a physical and psychological exam (Monier, 2010, para. 10). Once hired, in the state of Alabama, the officer must go through the police academy and become APOST (Alabama Peace Officer Standards and Training) Certified. A minimum number of required training hours is required for the officer to begin working, but this training does not include anything related to human trafficking. According to Borelli (2010), if law enforcement officers do not adequately train and regularly update that knowledge, then most officers will have a skill proficiency at "conscious competent" – a law enforcement officer can successfully demonstrate a skill and complete a given skill with concentration and direct thought – with very few critical skills at the higher levels. At a minimum, most of the police skills we use on a day-to-day basis must be at "conscious competent" with the critical skills (firearms, defensive tactics, ect) being at "unconscious competent – a law enforcement officer can perform and demonstrate a skill without conscious thought; the officer recognizes the need to perform the skill and does so without consciously considering each step" (Borelli, 2010). Law enforcement assigned to human trafficking cases should be unconscious competent.

The definition of human trafficking is ever-changing because the crime is hidden and ever-evolving due to technology. Thus, traditional investigative methods will not assist law enforcement officers in combatting this heinous crime. Law enforcement officers must obtain the proper training and resources to be effective. Agencies have a responsibility to put forth 100% of their effort to combat potential problems within their given geographic arena (McHenry, 2019).

Anything less than 100% results in grievances, liabilities, and a poor public profile, not to mention missed opportunities, distractions, and complacency (McHenry, 2019).

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to full-time law enforcement officers in Alabama. The study further delimited participants to those who had been exposed to human trafficking cases. One limitation existed in this current study, and that was restricting the law enforcement officers to those who were members of agencies located in West Alabama. Another limitation of this study was the inability to meet each participant face-to-face for interviews. Law enforcement officers work different shifts (7 am – 7 pm or 7 pm – 7 am), therefore, making face-to-face interviews difficult. Additionally, law enforcement officers preferred phone calls and Facetime videos to be comfortable. The ability to interview a participant face-to-face could have provided more of a connection and brought forth more significant information about their experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

A recommendation for future research emerged based on the findings of this study. The first recommendation for future scholars is to focus on law enforcement officers who have been law enforcement officers for less than 5 years. Many participants have been law enforcement officers for 10 – 20 years. However, one of the participants had been a law enforcement officer for less than a year. He knew nothing about human trafficking besides what he was taught in his college course. He recently graduated with his B.S. in Criminal Justice. If this participant were to come in contact with a human trafficking case, he would not know how to properly identify it, because he has not had the proper training to combat this crime.

The review of the literature showed there is a strong federal approach to combatting human trafficking. This study showed some correlation to the literature; however, most

combatting of human trafficking comes from federal agencies and legislation. Future researchers can specifically explore the impacts that federal policies and procedures have on local (state) policies and procedures to combatting human trafficking.

Lastly, future scholars can specifically explore the lives of law enforcement officers after they have taken extensive training. During the interviews, law enforcement officers expressed concern for having more training and resources. Once law enforcement officers obtain training and resources, how will their challenges in combatting human trafficking differ?

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study gave voice to the experiences of law enforcement officers challenges in combatting human trafficking in Alabama. Participants were able to describe their experiences through a demographic questionnaire, survey, and interview. Results of this study indicated that laws enforcement officers experience challenges combatting human trafficking due to the definition of human trafficking, characteristics of human trafficking, and identification of human trafficking. These challenges can be overcome if law enforcement officers receive proper training and resources, update their traditional investigative methods, and collaborate with various law enforcement agencies.

The results added to the body of research about the growing number of human trafficking cases and incidents occurring locally and the challenges law enforcement officers face when dealing with this type of crime. The findings show that law enforcement officers need to have the proper training to help victims and to combat human trafficking effectively.

Future researchers should focus on law enforcement officers who have not been in the field for more than 5 years to build a foundational research base for the challenges they face as a new law enforcement officers combatting this crime. The research can be delimited to various

officers in the state of Alabama. Overall, these results and later research conducted with similar criteria will assist future law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking. In addition, local, state, and federal law enforcement officers and agencies will receive guidance in providing better training and resources for law enforcement officers experiencing challenges in combatting human trafficking.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 11, 2022

Patience Johnson-Daniels
David Ojo

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-937 A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experience of Law Enforcement Officers' Challenges in Combatting Human Trafficking in Alabama

Dear Patience Johnson-Daniels, David Ojo,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Permission to Conduct Research

April 1, 2022

Phil Simpson
Captain



Dear Capt. Simpson,

As a graduate student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is *A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Law Enforcement Officers' Challenges in Combatting Human Trafficking in Alabama*, and the purpose of my research is to better understand the challenges of law enforcement officers and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking in Alabama.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research with The West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force and for permission to access and utilize de-identified copies of police incident/offense reports from 2021 to the present.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey and contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval or respond by email to pjohnsondaniels@liberty.edu.

A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Patience S. Johnson-Daniels
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

April 1, 2022

West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force



Dear West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force,

As a graduate student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of law enforcement officers in the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force in combatting human trafficking and detail the challenges faced in combatting human trafficking, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be sworn law enforcement officers assigned to the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete an online survey and an audio- and video-recorded interview. Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcript for accuracy. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the procedures listed, (e.g., 15 minutes for the survey and 30 minutes for the interview). Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click [here](#) to proceed to the survey. After you have completed the survey, I will contact you to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email and provided as the first page you will see after clicking on the survey link. Also, a copy will be given to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to type your name and the date on the form and submit it before proceeding to the survey questions.

Participants will receive a \$5 gift card to Chick-Fil-A upon completing this study.

Sincerely,

Patience S. Johnson-Daniels
Doctoral Student, Liberty University



Appendix D

Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Law Enforcement Officers' Challenges in Combatting Human Trafficking in Alabama

- Are you a sworn law enforcement officer?
- Are you assigned to the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force?

If you answered **yes** to both of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the challenges of law enforcement officers and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking in Alabama.

Participants will be asked to complete an online survey (15 minutes) and participate in an audio- and video-recorded interview (30 minutes).

(Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy).

Participants will receive a \$5 Chick-Fil-A gift card at the completion of the study.

If you would like to participate, scan the QR code below and complete the survey.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the survey.

Patience S. Johnson-Daniels a doctoral candidate in Criminal Justice, Helms School of Government at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Patience at [REDACTED] for more information.



Appendix E

Recruitment Facebook Post


Patience Daniels
 June 28, 2022 · 🌐

🔥🔥 Research Participants Needed! 🔥🔥

[#TuscaloosaPoliceDepartment](#)
[#NorthportPoliceDepartment](#)
[#TuscaloosaCountySheriffOffice](#)
[#UniversityOfAlabamaPoliceDepartment](#)
[#AlabamaLawEnforcementAgency](#)
[#HaleCounty](#)
[#GreeneCounty](#)
[#MarengoCounty](#)

Research Participants Needed

A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Law Enforcement Officers' Challenges in Combatting Human Trafficking in Alabama

- Are you a sworn law enforcement officer?
- Are you assigned to an agency in West Alabama?
- Do you have any experience with human trafficking?

If you answered **yes** to the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the challenges of law enforcement officers and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking in Alabama.

Participants will be asked to complete an online survey (15 minutes) and participate in an audio and video-recorded interview (30 minutes). Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy.

Participants will receive a \$5 Chick-Fil-A gift card at the completion of the study.

If you would like to participate, scan the QR code below and complete the survey.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the survey.

Patience S. Johnson-Daniels a doctoral candidate in Criminal Justice, Helms School of Government at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

Please contact Patience at  for more information.




👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share


 Write a comment...

Appendix F

Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experience of Law Enforcement Officers' Challenges in Combatting Human Trafficking in Alabama
Principal Investigator: Patience S. Johnson-Daniels, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a sworn law enforcement officer assigned to the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to better understand the challenges of law enforcement officers and the impact of law enforcement officers in combatting human trafficking in Alabama.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an online survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes.
2. Participate in an audio- and video-recorded interview. It should take approximately 30 minutes to complete this procedure.
3. Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include increased public knowledge and awareness on the topic.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the faculty committee will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Liberty University
 IRB-FY21-22-937
 Approved on 5-11-2022

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a \$5 Chick-Fil-A gift card upon completion of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study after beginning but prior to completing the survey, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. If you choose to withdraw from the study after completing and submitting the survey, please inform the researcher by contacting her at the email/phone number included in the next paragraph. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Patience S. Johnson-Daniels. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 205-792-3092 or pjohnsondaniels@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. David Ojo, at ddojo@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University
IRB-FY21-22-937
Approved on 5-11-2022

Appendix G

Survey/Google Form

Human Trafficking Survey

Law Enforcement Officers' Experience Combatting Human Trafficking in Alabama

Please click the link below to access the consent form. Once the consent form has been signed and dated, you must upload the signed form. Then you may proceed to the survey.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZZQHqkDKqpcf6ixUBVF0Ml4mOpf6Lt6V/edit?usp=sharing&oid=109545648829523025460&rtpof=true&sd=true>


Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

Consent Form

 Add file

 View folder

Consent to Research *

Month, day, year



What is your sex? *

- Female
- Male
- Choose not to answer

What is your race? *

- African American
- Asian/Pacific
- Caucasian
- Other
- Choose not to answer

What is your age group? *

- 20 - 29 years old
- 30 - 39 years old
- 40 - 49 years old
- 50 - 59 years old
- 60+ years old
- Choose not to answer

How long have you been in law enforcement? *

- Less than a year
- 1 - 5 years
- 6 - 9 years
- 10 - 14 years
- 15 - 19 years
- 20 - 24 years
- 25+ years

5. How long have you been a West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force member? *

Not a member of the Task Force

Less than a year

1 - 2 Years

3 - 4 Years

5+ Years

What is your role as a West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force member? *

Short answer text
.....

Why was the West Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force established? *

Long answer text
.....

What type of training have you received as a law enforcement officer regarding human trafficking? *

Long answer text
.....

How do you define human trafficking? *

Short answer text
.....

What has been your experience regarding specific characteristics of human trafficking? (e.g., age, race, gender, vulnerability, economic hardships, lack of social safety net) *

Long answer text
.....

Do you believe the victim-centered and trauma-informed approach is an effective effort to combat human trafficking? *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What types of traditional enforcement and investigative methods must law enforcement change to successfully rescue victims of human trafficking? *

Long answer text
.....

Can law enforcement agencies successfully rescue victims of human trafficking without forming a collaborative partnership? *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Is human trafficking often connected to other crimes? (e.g., prostitution, gangs, drugs, kidnapping) *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Can an at-risk population for victims of human trafficking consist of those exposed to other forms of violence? (e.g., child abuse, sexual assault, runaway and homeless youth, community and gang violence) *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Do you consider human trafficking to be a "hidden crime"? *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What are some ways that law enforcement officers can identify human trafficking? *

- Living with an Employer
- Multiple people in a cramped space
- Answers appear to be scripted and rehearsed
- Under 18 years of age
- Fearful behavior and the inability to speak alone

Have you experienced human trafficking as forced labor? (e.g., domestic servitude, child labor, illicit massage businesses, health and beauty services, door to door sales, peddling, and begging) *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Describe some of the challenges you face as a law enforcement officer combatting human trafficking. *

Long answer text

What are some of the barriers you experienced to combat human trafficking? (e.g., lack of data, lack of knowledge, lack of access to resources for victims) *

Long answer text