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## “No one ever forced them to”: law enforcement perceptions of and experiences with human sex trafficking

Chloe Parker

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“No one ever forced them to”: law enforcement perceptions of and experiences with human sex trafficking.

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science  
in Sociology  
in the Department of Sociology

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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In this thesis, I explore how law enforcement officials in Mississippi and Alabama make sense of and respond to human sex trafficking cases. The central questions guiding this research project are: *How do law enforcement officials perceive sex trafficking and what does this mean for victim identification and treatment?* By conducting 20 interviews with law enforcement officials, I offer insight into how the training, or lack of training, officers receive impacts victim identification, labeling, and treatment. Further, I examine how perceptions, experiences, and training work to influence officer responses to those that do not fit a typical victim narrative, such as sex workers, immigrant, and migrant populations.

## DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Joe Wayne, the first person to tell me I would be an author. I know you would be as proud of this as you were of my scribbles at three-years old.

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I want to begin by thanking my committee members, Dr. Rachel Allison, Dr. Stacy Haynes, and Dr. David May for their invaluable advice and support. I am extremely grateful for your guidance and mentorship throughout my career in graduate school. Thank you so much for your help and for believing in this project!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the United States government passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act (TVPA), which allocated special resources to law enforcement agencies in order to identify victims and to combat human sex trafficking. The TVPA was first in a series of subsequent federal legislative advances designed to put an end to trafficking in persons. Under the TVPA, sex trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” (TVPA Section 102:12). However, state anti-trafficking laws and definitions differ extensively from each other and from federal definitions. Both state and local responses to victims and perpetrators also exhibit much variance (Farrell, Owens, and McDevitt 2014). There are no universally agreed upon definitions of human trafficking (Arnold and Bertone 2002; Farrell and Pfeffer 2014), nor are there any standardized ways to classify or investigate human trafficking cases (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). This lack of precision directly influences the successfulness of identifying, investigating, and prosecuting human sex trafficking cases. For example, one study based on a survey of local law enforcement personnel found that officers gave various definitions of human trafficking, many of which conflicted with statutory definitions in their state (Newton, Mulcahy, and Martin 2008).

Imprecise definitions of trafficking at times broaden the scope of who is a victim and at other times narrow it. Definitions of trafficking in general have been highly contested, with many scholars arguing that definitions were created under Western assumptions and are rooted in race and gender discrimination (e.g., Desyllas 2007; Kapur 2005). Researchers, as well as representatives of state and federal agencies, use “trafficking” interchangeably with other complicated concepts such as immigration, migration, and prostitution (Desyllas 2007). One of the earliest examples of this can be seen in a law that is still in use today. The White Slave Traffic Act, most commonly known as the Mann Act, was passed by Congress in 1910. The Mann Act prohibited unmarried women from crossing state lines for “prostitution, debauchery, or any other immoral purpose” (The Mann Act of 1910). This act also criminalized interracial couples regardless of their age or level of consent (e.g., Saunders and Soderlund 2003). White women during this time were considered victims of the “animal lusts of the dark races” (Doezema 1998:44). Despite these concerns, a criminal investigation into white slavery occurring in New York City revealed the organized trade of white women to be nonexistent (Saunders and Soderlund 2003). These definitions and characterizations of trafficking pose challenges when conducting research and reporting statistics on the prevalence of sex trafficking.

Definitions of trafficking are further complicated when human smuggling, or illegal immigration and migration, is conflated with human trafficking. It should be noted that individuals may willingly move from one country to another for many reasons, including to seek medical treatment, to find work, or to improve the lives of themselves and/or their families. Their willingness to travel consensually from their home country to another country does not preclude them from becoming human trafficking victims. Likewise, illegalities in their migration do not

automatically make them victims of human trafficking. In other words, giving consent to travel with someone does not mean that consent was given for other activities.

Further, the act of entering a country illegally does not make one a victim of trafficking. The act of human smuggling usually occurs with the consent of those illegally entering a country, and the “relationship between the transporter and the smuggled individual ends once the target destination is reached” (Logan, Walker, and Hunt 2009:5). It is also important to recognize that while these terms (i.e., human trafficking and human smuggling) are differentiated legally, there is often overlap among both concepts (Logan et al. 2009). Misconceptions about human trafficking and human smuggling can occur because of a misunderstanding of how these concepts are legally separated. For example, an officer may believe that people must be transported from one place to another to meet the definition of human trafficking. However, current legislation does not require the transportation of individuals for the crime of human trafficking to have occurred (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime 2004; National Institute of Justice 2019). For example, some victims of sex trafficking may never leave their own homes. Intra-family sex trafficking happens when the victim is controlled by members of their family who sell them in exchange for money, housing, narcotics, etc.

Given the complexities and misconceptions that surround this crime, is it important to engage those individuals who are often the first state actors to encounter and evaluate possible trafficking scenarios. Law enforcement officers can provide the researcher with a critical baseline for studying the crime of human trafficking. Rural law enforcement officials in Mississippi and Alabama have been an underutilized source of information regarding this crime. Their understanding of and perceptions about human trafficking can provide insight into rural policing methods and victimology. Through detailed interviews with officers, information is

gathered which can help shape the approach to trafficking crimes that occur, particularly within the vast rural areas of the country.

## CHAPTER II

### HUMAN SEX TRAFFICKING POLICY

#### **Defining Human Sex Trafficking**

Difficulties in defining trafficking and differentiating its various forms are often exacerbated by the media. Previous research suggests that various media sources, from Hollywood films to non-profit public awareness campaigns, often combine these inaccurate or convoluted statistics with depictions of women and girls in ways that misrepresent or exclusively sexualize the crime. This effectively limits the public's awareness of trafficking crimes to only certain types of victims to the exclusion of others. The use of survivor narratives, which are first person accounts of the trauma that an individual has experienced, can offer insight into the immense horrors of human trafficking, which can occur across a wide number of settings. However, certain types of narratives, like those that sexualize victims or describe sex trafficking as white slavery, are used by media outlets far more often than others. These are typically preferentially chosen and widely utilized throughout various forms of media. They are often highly dramatized or retold to fit a specific agenda and/or to represent a stereotypical sex trafficking victim (e.g., Bergquist 2015).

#### **(Mis)identification of Human Sex Trafficking**

Due to ambiguity in defining and investigating this crime, estimates of the extent of human sex trafficking vary widely and many statistics regarding the crime have proven to be inaccurate. For example, in 2006 the Government Accountability Office (GOA) found that

estimates of the frequency of trafficking used by the United States in the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report were developed by one person who failed to thoroughly document their work (Melito 2006). The GAO reported that the failure to document their methods called into question the project's reliability and replicability (Melito 2006). The GAO also reported that country level data was not comparable, reliable, or made available, a problem that in many ways persists in today's Trafficking in Persons Report (Grover 2018; Melito 2016). Reasons for this inaccuracy include significant gaps in reported data and weak methodology, making it extremely difficult to measure the true scope of the trafficking problem (Kapur 2005; Tyldum 2010).

Critics of human trafficking policies in the U.S. argue that estimates of the crime are grossly overblown, as evidenced by the disparity between predicted estimates of victims made by the government and the actual number of victims identified by law enforcement (Markon 2007; Weitzer 2011; Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). For example, the U.S. government reported that for the year 2004, the number of people trafficked across U.S. borders was estimated to be between 600,000 and 800,000 (US Department of State 2004). However, the actual number of trafficking victims identified by law enforcement between the years 2000 and 2011 was only 9,014 (Trafficking in Persons Report 2018; Farrell and Pfeffer 2014).

Between 2000 and 2006, less than 10% of law enforcement agencies reported that they had identified human trafficking (Farrell et al. 2010). Literature suggests that law enforcement personnel in both local police and sheriff's departments are acutely unaware of human trafficking's existence in their jurisdictions. The low numbers identified by law enforcement have also caused much debate. Farrell and Pfeffer (2014) analyzed cases identified by law enforcement and found several issues with identification, which they believe contribute to the disparity between cases identified by police agencies and cases reported by federal and state

agencies. For example, law enforcement officers are typically reactive rather than proactive, meaning they focus on cases brought to their attention by members of the public and surrounding community rather than proactively pursuing cases (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014).

Law enforcement agencies that have a dedicated anti-trafficking unit may proactively identify more victims. However, recent data suggest that even specialized officers do not show substantially higher identification rates than non-specialized officers. Furthermore, undercover operations typically focus on online advertisements for prostitution where the listed individuals appear underage (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). While this method may identify minor victims, it does little to identify other victims. Most states define minors as those aged 16 years and under. Although prioritizing underage victims may be essential, it effectively limits the recovery of non-minor victims.

Difficulties with identification may also arise because police officers regularly use vice tactics to identify human sex trafficking cases (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). These tactics are not usually successful as they are designed to investigate such crimes as illegal gambling, prostitution, and illegal narcotic use and abuse (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). Lastly, law enforcement agencies often wait for victims of trafficking to self-identify despite the surmounting evidence that trafficked persons are extremely unlikely to seek police help (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014; Logan et al. 2009; Macy and Graham 2012). In this way, law enforcement officers most commonly take a reactive, or at times restrictive, approach to identification, which may cause many cases to be overlooked or ignored.

Studies also suggest that law enforcement personnel lack the training necessary to identify victims, assess their needs, and investigate the crime (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014; Farrell et al. 2010; Gallagher and Holmes 2008; Newton et al. 2006). For example, data collected from law

enforcement personnel working on federally funded anti-trafficking task forces show that 80% of victims identified between 2007 and 2010 were exclusively victims of sex trafficking (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011; Kyckelhahn, Beck, and Cohen 2009). However, data from the victim service providers associated with these same task forces reported that “64% of the victims served by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) were identified as victims of labor trafficking only, 22 percent as victims of sex trafficking only, and 10 percent as victims of both labor and sex trafficking” (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011:7).

Local police officers are the frontline of enforcement. They are most often the first officials to be made aware of a human trafficking case. Local officers also exercise great discretionary powers. They regularly make decisions regarding what crimes to investigate, whether to arrest the offender, how to describe the crime and its victim(s), and which cases to pass on to prosecutors or state law enforcement. In this way, local law enforcement officials (LEOs) are responsible for properly assessing a scene and correctly identifying a victim.

Perhaps the most critical factor to the accurate identification of human trafficking victims may be LEOs’ perceptions of the crime. Like the general public, LEOs can be influenced by the misrepresentations and stereotypes seen in public awareness campaigns, television, and film. These representations tend to conflate sex work with sex trafficking, which exacerbates the difficulties surrounding victim identification and sex worker safety. An officer’s perceptions of sex work versus sex trafficking are essential to his discretionary ability to label one scenario as prostitution and another as trafficking. The influence of inaccurate media portrayals, along with deficiencies in training, may prevent police from recognizing a broader range of trafficking cases, victims, and perpetrators. The role of law enforcement is key and the stakes for human



trafficking victims are high. Any obstacle that clouds or limits an officer's understanding of this crime can have grave consequences. For example, police may readily question why a young woman is in the company of older men, particularly if the men are of a different race, but if the circumstances are reversed, police may not view a young boy in the company of older women with any suspicion if the officer accepts the stereotype that boys are not trafficking victims.

Law enforcement practices and policies across cities, suburbs, counties, and rural areas are not universal. Inconsistencies across definitions and the varied ways law enforcement personnel perceive sex workers and immigrants adds to the complexity of a uniform national effort to combat human trafficking. Officers unprepared for the realities of trafficking may fail to properly identify a victim or may create a situation where a victim is less likely to cooperate with authorities. Law enforcement personnel may also be unprepared for the trauma that victims of trafficking suffer. Trauma cases typically require more time and services than law enforcement personnel are equipped to provide. Although officers may be sympathetic, they are heavily reliant on the information provided by the victim. Consequently, officers often resort to the same tactics used to get information from suspects, which include detainment, arrest, and interrogation (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014.) Victims exposed to this type of treatment are significantly less likely to cooperate with authorities or to participate in the investigation process.

The central questions guiding the current study are as follows: *How do law enforcement officials perceive sex trafficking and what does this mean for victim identification and treatment?*

This question will broaden our understanding of the complex relationships among victim identification, victim recovery, and law enforcement decision making. In order to gain insight into how LEOs make sense of their training and experience with human sex trafficking, I

conducted interviews with active duty law enforcement personnel across Mississippi and Alabama. Few studies have discussed the role of local law enforcement personnel in dealing with human sex trafficking or the way in which law enforcement agencies perceive and respond to the crime. Even fewer have offered a qualitative approach specifically designed around the perspectives and experiences of police officers. The goal of this study is to highlight how law enforcement perceptions and experiences influence the way human sex trafficking cases are identified and investigated.

### **Addressing Sex Work**

This paper takes a sex workers' rights approach and, as such, I write from the view that sex work is a viable work option and, therefore, sex workers have the same right to safe labor conditions and to safely migrate for work whenever and wherever they choose (see Outshoorn 2005). To better delineate between sex trafficking and sex work, it is important to understand that sex work is first a form of labor undertaken by those who "have not been rescued, do not wish to be rescued, or who have returned to sex work after being rescued" (Bergquist 2015: 317). As an occupation, sex work happens under fair working conditions in a consensual context between consenting adults. In contrast, sex trafficking occurs when sex is sold and/or promised irrespective of an individual's consent. Consent in this context is extremely important, as it allows for the inclusion of situations where individuals may initially consent to travel and/or consent to perform work, even if no use of force, threat of force, or deception was involved. In these situations, individuals who may subsequently be trafficked or entrapped should not be denied the status of victim because their initial actions were consensual.

Research conducted by sex worker rights organizations show that anti-trafficking legislation, such as the Trafficking Victims Reauthorization Act, has created more dangerous

situations for sex workers and has increased opportunities for law enforcement to exploit, harass, extort, and brutalize them with limited repercussions for the officers involved (Bergquist 2015; Overs and Longo 1997; Soderlund 2005). Sex workers are an extremely valuable asset in the fight to end sex trafficking as they are often at the center of trafficking discourse. Sex workers have firsthand knowledge of and experiences about sites, groups, and practices that are exploitative (Bergquist 2015). Further, many sex workers have direct experience with law enforcement tactics, such as raids and undercover operations, which could increase the effectiveness of such operations if their specific insights were considered (e.g. Bergquist 2015; Soderlund 2005).

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a brief summary of the existing scholarship relating to human sex trafficking, as well as the law enforcement response to the crime. I begin by discussing the prevalence of sex trafficking and the issues surrounding how trafficking estimates are collected. Next, I outline the history of policies relating to sex trafficking. I then discuss the problems with labeling and misidentification of victims, specifically immigrant and migrant victims, as well as a description of the potential negative outcomes for individuals. Next, I provide an overview of the challenges faced by the criminal justice system in combating the crime, which includes an examination of the role of law enforcement resources and training. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion of the use of law enforcement discretion as it relates to the recovery and treatment of victims, especially those who do not fit sexual assault victim stereotypes.

#### **Prevalence of Human Sex Trafficking**

It is extremely difficult to determine the true scope and prevalence of sex trafficking for many reasons. There is the incongruity across definitions of trafficking, as some relate it to human smuggling and migration, while others relate it to prostitution (Kangaspunta 2003). The conflation of migration with trafficking, as well as the failure to distinguish prostitution and sex work from trafficking, is central to the confusion that surrounds discourse on this topic. As a result, the estimates reported across studies is dramatically varied, even when researchers use the same source of information (Nawyn, Bridal, and Glogower 2013). For example, the U.S.

Department of State reported in 2008 that the number of annual trafficking victims was 600,000-800,000 (Fry 2008). In 2011, the Department of State reported that number had risen to 900,000 (Tverdova 2011). However, just one year later, in 2012, the State Department placed the number of annual trafficking victims at 12 million (Avadan 2012). However, other reports by the U.S. Department of State from 2012 claim that 27 million individuals are trafficked at any given time (USDS 2012; USDS 2013; Weitzer 2015). It is interesting to note that these large estimates by the U.S. Department of State are actually far lower than what is commonly reported by anti-trafficking NGOs. The wide disparities in numbers of victims often stems from the fact that these reports use terms like slavery and trafficking interchangeably, and also rely on sources that make no clear distinction between trafficking, slavery, smuggling, or migration (Weitzer 2015).

Discussing migration as if it is synonymous with trafficking may lead to unrealistic solutions rooted in gender and racial biases (Kapur 2005). For example, Ratna Kapur (2005) writes that the Burmese government, concerned with growing trafficking rates, restricted young women aged 16-25 from traveling without legal guardianship (Kapur 2005; Belak 2003). This restriction is a clear illustration of gender bias as it prohibits young women from carrying out daily activities or from earning a living.

Anti-trafficking campaigns may also illustrate racial bias by reinforcing images of white, U.S. born victims who are young and virginal, while foreign born victims are portrayed as ignorant and poverty stricken (Doezema 2000; O'Brien 2013). Using terms like slavery or white slavery to describe trafficking further reinforces these images. Hoyle, Bosworth, and Dempsey (2011) argue that this language “oversimplifies our understandings of the range of causes and

experiences of trafficking” (314). These images and language, along with the misunderstandings they produce, fail to capture the complexities within the scope of trafficking.

Further, the way trafficking cases are framed by law enforcement and anti-trafficking organizations also influences our understanding of the scope of sex trafficking. Statistical representations of victims can be easily skewed when the focus is on specific types of victims (e.g., women and children) or trafficking scenarios (e.g., those that involve romantic relationships). Statistics on trafficking overwhelmingly focus on women and girls (UNODC 2011), but researchers believe this data is skewed because of how service providers respond to victims. Services are sometimes offered only to women and girls, leading to an under-representation of men and boys in official statistics (Di Nicola 2007). Many cases that do involve men and boys are reported as labor exploitation rather than human trafficking (Laczko 2007). In addition, men and boys who report their victimization as sex trafficking are largely ignored, as they do not fit the ideal victim narrative (Dennis 2008). Research suggests that those who are perceived as ideal victims are those who are weak and overpowered by a bigger and stronger offender (Christie 1986). Media depictions of men and boys most commonly cast them as violent sexual predators, which effectively removes them from discussions of victimhood (e.g., DiBennardo 2018; Zvernia, Stam, and Babins-Wagner 2011).

### **A Brief History of Human Trafficking Policies**

In 1994, the International Organization for Migrants (IOM) organized a global conference where it was decided that actions would be considered trafficking if “money changes hands, a facilitator is involved, an international border is crossed, entry is illegal, the movement is voluntary” (Laczko 2005:10). By 2000, an expanded definition of trafficking was adopted by the United Nations that added requirements such as “threat or use of force.” This subsequently

narrowed the lens used to define trafficking (UN Protocol 2000:2). That same year, the U.S. Congress enacted the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which also used the language “use of force” (U.S. Department of State 2001). The addition of language regarding force relates back to the problem of dichotomizing victims as “guilty” or “innocent.” A victim may be perceived as “guilty” for voluntarily agreeing to travel to another state or country. Additionally, victims may initially give consent to work in the sex industry, but subsequent abuse, violence, or unsafe working conditions may lead them to seek a means of escape where none exists. In these examples, we see individuals shift from behavior defined as “voluntary” to behavior that is “forced.” However, under TVPA standards where “threat or use of force” is used to define trafficking, victims are left bearing the burden of proving that they were forced, coerced, and/or threatened and may be discounted as victims if voluntary consent was given at any point.

In 2003, President George W. Bush’s administration “renewed and enhanced” TVPA, now known as the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), and authorized more than \$200 million to allow the U.S. Government to fund public awareness campaigns (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2004). However, this reauthorization refused to fund any organization or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocated sex work as a form of gainful employment. Along with this act, the U.S. provided a way to support and protect “non-citizen victims” of trafficking through the creation of T nonimmigrant status, commonly known as a T visa (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2004). The T visa allows “certain victims of a severe form of human trafficking to remain in the United States for up to four years if they have assisted law enforcement in an investigation or prosecution of human trafficking” (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services 2017).

Again, this law contributes to an already narrow definition of trafficking by further limiting a “severe form of trafficking” to trafficking of sex and labor. It also places the burden on migrants to prove their innocence, to prove coercion, and to help law enforcement with their own investigation. Additionally, at one point, victims were required to prove they had good moral character in order to have the chance to obtain permanent residency in the United States. While the right to waive this requirement is now up to the discretion of the Attorney General of the United States, it still places victims who engaged in prostitution and/other criminal actions at serious risk of visa denial (United States Department of Homeland Security 2008).

Undocumented immigrants are already living illegal lives and are often subjected to working and living conditions that make them extremely vulnerable. This vulnerability is often magnified because of their fear of deportation. When undocumented immigrants are sex trafficked, their status often becomes doubly criminal as they are both undocumented and perceived as willingly working in the sex industry in a country where prostitution is illegal (Desyllas 2007). In this context, “the T visa appears to be designed, not so much to meet the needs of migrants who have been sex trafficked, but as a device to assist prosecutors in closing down trafficking networks” (Desyllas 2007:68; Chapkis 2003). By implementing anti-trafficking policies like the TVPA and having such strict guidelines for T visas, the government has further marginalized, isolated, stigmatized, and criminalized many victims of sex trafficking (Desyllas 2007).

### **Problems with Labeling and Identification**

Efforts to identify trafficking cases are often hampered by the focus on typical trafficking scenarios or ideal trafficking victims. Research suggests that those perceived as ideal victims are those who are weak, who are very young or very old, who participated in respectable activities



before their victimization, and who were in a location where they could not be blamed for being (Christie 1986). Children and young women who are kidnapped by a stranger and then sexually assaulted are perceived as ideal victims, whereas adult sex workers who agree to specific sexual activity with a client but are then raped are not considered ideal victims (Hoyle et al. 2011).

Expounding on the theory that labels are social constructs, human trafficking researchers conclude that using the ideal victim and typical trafficking scenario labels can be harmful to the treatment and assessment of victims (Hoyle et al. 2011). Regarding the ideal victim, Hoyle et al. (2011) emphasized that although some trafficking situations have certain similarities, “It will not be the same to all people in situations externally described as being the ‘same’” (p.315). The authors go into great detail about the problems that surround constructing a typical narrative of trafficking. They believe that “a victim’s failure to experience or frame her experience in terms of a typical trafficking narrative may deny her the status of an ‘ideal victim’ and the credibility that attaches to it” (Hoyle et al. 2011:322). For example, victims may find it difficult to admit they knew they were being trafficked into prostitution for fear they do not fit the criteria constructed by anti-trafficking policies, campaigns, and law enforcement (Hoyle et al. 2011).

Public awareness campaigns and the media often present narratives of trafficked victims in narrow contexts. Men and boys are commonly depicted as victims only of labor trafficking, while older women are shown as trafficked only for domestic labor, thus reinforcing the idea that certain types of trafficking are restricted to certain types of victims. (O’Brien 2013). The representation of victims of sex trafficking in many of these campaigns describes them as weak, vulnerable young women who are forced into prostitution. However, these depictions of human sex trafficking victims can, and do, exclude individuals who do not fit into such a restrictive

narrative. In particular, origin stories, or how individuals became victims, are frequently represented in the images and texts of anti-trafficking campaign materials.

These origin stories primarily depict sex trafficking victims as women and girls, to the exclusion of men and boys, but also show the victims as seeking work in a respectable industry, but ultimately being forced into the sex industry (O'Brien 2013). In order to be perceived as the ideal trafficking victim, and thus deserving of all the assistance the status of victim implies, it is essential that there be a complete lack of consent from the individual to participate in sex work or to be in any way complicit in their victimization. Christie's (1986) work regarding the construction of an ideal victim narrative is important to this argument.

Christie (1986) argues that "being a victim is not an objective phenomenon" (p.21). Instead, the experience of victimization varies dramatically for each individual and is often influenced by the perceptions and biases of those with greater agency and authority. For example, if law enforcement personnel do not believe that men can be victims of sex trafficking, they are more likely to arrest a victim than to offer support. Further, law enforcement and prosecutors have the right to deny services, such as a T visa, to victims if they do not believe that the victim cooperated enough during the investigation and prosecution. Christie (1986) argued that individuals presented as ideal victims are merely those who have the status to be heard, due to the attention focused on them by the media. Subsequently, members of more marginalized groups who may appear less interesting to the media will fail to be heard because they do not fit the ideal victim or trafficking narrative. In this way, preference for one type of victim group is given over another victim group, even though the overlooked victim group may be a more accurate representation of actual trafficking victims.

Public awareness campaigns can generate a platform for victims to tell their stories. However, these campaigns can also contribute to the false belief that there is a typical or ideal trafficking scenario. This type of scenario includes descriptions of the victim as a weak person engaged in innocuous activities in respectable locations where no possible blame could be attached (Hoyle et al. 2011). Ideal scenarios apply to offenders as well, portraying them as unknown to the victim and as big and bad (Hoyle et al. 2011). The scenario in which the ideal offender is one who is unknown to the victim excludes many who have been victimized by family members, friends, or persons who are known to them (Christie 1986).

In many stereotypical scenarios, offenders are men who have been deemed evil and irredeemable, profiting from the sexual assault and abuse of women and girls by selling them into prostitution. The establishment of this false narrative of the ideal offender, as one so closely associated with the sex work industry, reinforces the blameworthiness of women and girls, making it extremely difficult for assaulted sex workers to be recognized as trafficking victims (O'Brian, 2013). Still, Christie (1986) argues that shifting the focus to what society perceives to be the worst type of offender means that “other acts, not quite that bad, can escape attention and evaluation” (p.29). Placing the blame on a socially undesirable “other” allows public awareness campaigns, law enforcement officers, and social service providers to sidestep their own complicity in human sex trafficking when they deny victims the status of victim.

### **Consequences and Implications of Mislabeled and Misidentification**

Inherent in the failure to properly identify victims is the extreme harm that may come to the trafficked individual, as well as to overall efforts to combat the crime as a whole. Correct identification of entrapped victims may not only help to reduce human sex trafficking, but also greatly improve the after-care treatment victims receive (Hoyle et al. 2011). These after-care

services include meeting immediate needs like medical care, mental health care, and access to basic living needs such as food, housing, and clothing (Logan et al. 2009). Long-term after-care services for victims include job training, employment, court advocacy, and T visas (Logan et al. 2009). Research in this area has found that failure to identify and label victims, or misidentification of victims as criminals, contributes to the perpetuation of sex trafficking and to the suffering of victims, while also hindering efforts to capture the actual number of victims (Hoyle et al. 2011; Macy and Graham 2012).

The consequences of misidentifying sex trafficking victims as criminals are harsh, and may result in deportation, imprisonment, or prolonged victimization. Furthermore, a victim label that denies agency can also contribute to the underreporting of trafficked individuals (Hoyle et al. 2011). This is seen in the frequent use of the terms coercion and use of force, as required elements in identifying a trafficking victim. An individual who has made uncoerced and voluntary choices about travel or about participation in sex work can subsequently become a trafficking victim, although such individuals are frequently overlooked as victims. Denying victims' agency ignores decisions they initially made about leaving their country or working in the sex industry. Restricting the identification of trafficking victims to those who are easily identified as being forced and coerced throughout the entirety of their experience conceals the true number of trafficked individuals and perpetuates their entrapment. For example, victims may consent to traveling with a person who later traffics and/or victimizes them.

The victim's decision to travel with their subsequent abuser should not negate the abuse they later experienced. In this way, victims are not coerced into travel, but they are still victims of trafficking. Policy makers, law enforcement officers, and social service providers, "tend to deny that trafficking occurs along a continuum of 'limited autonomy to complete bondage'"

(Hoyle et al. 2011:326). However, it can be difficult to establish where victims fit on this continuum (Hoyle et al. 2011). For the purposes of the current study, sex workers who engage in consensual sex work become trafficking victims when their consent is taken away. Sex workers unquestionably can be victims of sex trafficking, but not all sex workers who cross borders are victims of sex trafficking (Outshoorn 2005; Desyllas 2007.) Just as not all victims of human trafficking are forced into sex work, not all sex workers are forced into trafficking.

A failure to correctly assess the status of an individual often means that victims are never able to receive critical social services, nor are they able to escape from the horrors of trafficking. As previously discussed, when entrapped victims are forced into criminal behaviors, law enforcement may label these individuals as criminals, setting aside the circumstances of their entrapment and leaving them open to further suffering and potential revictimization (Logan et al. 2009). Additionally, research has found that there is often a problem with the way in which victims are identified by law enforcement and other protective agencies (Macy & Graham 2012). Proposed changes to identification procedures have led researchers to believe that asking very specific questions, having a strong knowledge of trafficking indicators, and utilizing certain victim interaction strategies can help improve the gap between agency and victim (Macy & Graham 2012).

Along with this issue of identification, problems may arise through labeling. While the status of victims may be correctly assessed in an initial encounter with law enforcement, victims are often subsequently labeled in other damaging ways (Hoyle et al. 2011). Researchers have noted that, “Rather than being ‘rescued’ many women often found themselves caught up in the more mundane policing matters of crime and offending” (Hoyle et al. 2011:324). Citing the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, Hoyle et al. (2011) reported that “more than 10 percent of the

adults and children whose cases were referred to the National Referral Mechanism were detained and treated as criminals” (p. 325). Many trafficking scenarios have similar outcomes for victims. Problems with labeling may arise because, over the course of their entrapment, trafficking victims are forced by their abductors to commit criminal acts (Logan et al. 2009).

Similarly, Reid (2014), highlights the issues that arise from labeling victims as criminals. For trafficking victims who committed crimes during their entrapment, the failure to offer legal protection against prosecution is especially harmful. It may deter the victim from wanting to cooperate with law enforcement, it may prolong the victim’s exploitation, and it ultimately hinders accurate victim identification (Reid 2014). While studies have noted that mislabeled victims are subject to continued exploitation (Reid 2014), it is not clear the extent to which victims, who are forced into prostitution and labeled as criminals, continue in a similar lifestyle after being freed from their entrapment.

### **Unique Problems among Immigrant and Migrant Populations**

A victim who is an undocumented immigrant or a victim who is forced into prostitution is most at risk of misidentification and mislabeling. These individuals, because of their inherent illegal status or actions, live isolated and invisible lives (Sanghera 2012). This increases their vulnerability as they are denied the rights and freedoms that most people in the United States are given. As Logan et al. (2009) noted, “Thus, law enforcement officials often do not look past the criminal activity to see whether or not it is part of a larger problem such as human trafficking, leaving some victims of human trafficking identified only as criminals” (p.6). The failure to correctly identify undocumented immigrants and migrants as trafficking victims is especially concerning. Due to their undocumented status, immigrants who have any encounters with law enforcement are more likely to be identified as criminals than as victims. Such individuals add to

an already large number of people within the criminal justice system who are arrested, detained, and incarcerated for non-violent crimes (Bhattacharjee 2002; Lindsley 2002; Dewey 2008).

Occasionally, migrants who are accurately classified as trafficked victims are able to remain in the country through a “stay of deportation” as long as is required for criminal proceedings to move forward against the person who brought them into the country (Pearson 2002). A stay of deportation, or continued presence, is granted by the U.S. Attorney General to a trafficked person who agrees to assist in prosecution and is found to be a victim of severe forms of trafficking (Pearson 2002). Subsequent after-care and assistance is then conditional upon cooperation with local, state, and federal law enforcement officials (Dotteridge 2007). However, as Kempadoo et al. (2012) write, this situation is rare. Most commonly, trafficked individuals find themselves forced to stay in the country they were trafficked to, also known as their destination country, through arrests, detainments, and incarcerations. Once labeled as victims and “rescued,” they are most often deported as criminals or undocumented “illegals.”

While data suggests that the number of illegal border-crossers remains at an all-time low (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2017), the ideology that undocumented immigrants and migrants pose a threat to our national security remains constant (Kapur 2005). Analogous to this issue is that of unreliable human trafficking victim data created by government institutions regarding other countries and their citizens. Government institutions like the U.S. Department of State have been found guilty of using questionable data collection methods when studying human trafficking, placing the accuracy of the data in doubt due to “methodological weaknesses, gaps in data, and numerical discrepancies” (Melito 2006). As previously stated, the GAO reported that the methodology used to collect human trafficking data was not documented (Melito 2006). Additionally, the GAO reported a number of discrepancies between estimated

human trafficking rates and observed human trafficking rates (Melito 2006). In more recent reports, the GAO instructed the Department of State to be more specific in their tier ranking criteria for countries as well as their explanations for why countries receive upgrades or downgrades (Melito 2006).

The annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) compiled by the U.S. Department of State has faced significant criticism for the way it addresses different countries, with many researchers and organizations stating that the reports are too political in nature (e.g., skewed against countries like Saudi Arabia and Mexico, GAO 2006). Many countries that received bad rankings are especially concerned with how they are represented in the TIP reports. The TIP report rates each country's progress on eliminating human trafficking by using a tier system. Tier 1 represents sufficient efforts to combat trafficking, while Tiers 2 and 3 represent countries that have not adequately demonstrated efforts to end trafficking. Countries that receive a ranking of Tier 3 are subject to restrictions and/or sanctions by the United States, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (Patton 2016). Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), the President of the United States is sometimes allowed to waive these sanctions and restrictions. However, this action is not well understood (Grover 2018; Melito 2016; Melito 2006.)

Countries often have sanctions and restrictions waived, or are upgraded and downgraded, in conjunction with important political events. For example, in 2015, Malaysia was upgraded around the same time that President Obama traveled to Hawaii to meet with members of the Malaysian government, along with 10 other Pacific nations, to secure one of the largest regional trade agreements in history (Weisman 2015). In the same year, Cuba was upgraded a week after



the United States and Cuba reopened embassies in each other's capital cities and re-established diplomatic ties (Patton 2016; Oppmann 2015).

Although dated, the TIP report of 2002 indicated there were eighteen countries given Tier 1 status, seventeen of which were categorized as destination countries for trafficking victims, with Colombia being the only origin country assigned to this tier (Marshall and Thatun 2005). Several of the countries given Tier 1 status at this time had few to no services for trafficking victims (Marshall and Thatun 2005). Further, there is a concerning parallel between countries given Tier 3 status and their poor political relationships with the United States (Mezler 2005). For example, countries like North Korea and Venezuela have repeatedly been given Tier 3 rankings. Scholars believe Venezuela's ranking may be more of a punishment directed at the country's refusal to follow TIP protocols by promoting and regulating sex work than with its anti-trafficking efforts (Mezler 2005).

Countries that have also been placed into Tier 3, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, highlight the role that the United States has given itself, one that Cynthia Enloe (2000:16) calls the "global policeman." This works to reproduce a "First World" versus "Third World" dichotomy where the "civilized" West works to save a "seriously battered, culturally constrained, and oppressed" Global South (Kapur 2005:30). Scholars like Ratna Kapur (2005) and Jo Doezema (2001) argue that governmental and non-governmental initiatives, such as the TIP report, reinforce images portrayed in the media that contribute to the harmful stereotype claiming trafficking victims are simply ignorant foreigners (e.g. Kapur 2005; Doezema 2001).

The Trafficking in Persons report (TIP) is widely dispersed to law enforcement and victim services organizations. It continues to inform and shape stereotypes about immigrants and

trafficking victims by othering non-white immigrants and victims. The process of othering involves individuals who portray those outside their in-group as inherently different and, therefore, inferior. Othering is especially dangerous when government entities begin to equate trafficking with migration. It has been noted that policies often use the term trafficking interchangeably with migration (Desyllas 2007). This vagueness may exist in many countries because there is no clear conceptual and operational distinction between voluntary and consensual migration and trafficking and, in fact, trafficking definitions often combine women's consensual migration with trafficking (Kapur 2005; Desyllas 2007).

Anti-trafficking work quite frequently involves the limiting of voluntary migration. This method of combating trafficking is primarily aimed at managing the movement of women and is heavily promoted by the International Organization for Migrants (IOM) (Andrijasevic 2007). However, this type of migration management fails to acknowledge that migrations, particularly of women, can and often does involve legitimate reasons that are wholly unconnected to trafficking. Equating trafficking with migration thus leads to overly simplistic attempts to solve the trafficking problem, as governments create policies that consciously or inadvertently limit those who are deemed vulnerable from migrating (Kapur 2005). The United States' immigration policies, for example, have historically been known for their racist and discriminatory stances rooted in a fear of the other (Desyllas 2007). However, limiting or stopping migration will not stop trafficking. Rather, it will force sex trafficking further underground and create more dangerous situations for migrants (Kapur 2005).

Both governmental and nongovernmental agencies reinforce the socially created differences that create the other by using assimilation and criminalization strategies to deal with migrants and immigrants. Assimilation strategies have been used for decades as a way to deal

with those who are different (Kapur 2005). In 2002, the British Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Act was enacted, which created “new cultural, emotional, and citizenship criteria” by requiring potential UK citizens to take an exam on British culture that included such topics as British institutions, life, and society (Kapur 2005:32). Through this act, the UK attempted to foster social cohesion and a stronger sense of British identity. Another example of assimilation strategies can be seen in the proposal to ban headscarves throughout France (Kapur 2005). Through assimilation strategies, the other is given the opportunity to become recognizable, familiar, and subsequently non-threatening.

If the other does not embrace this opportunity to assimilate, they are often criminalized. In this context, the other is declared a threat to national security. We see these responses illustrated throughout the West and Global South. In Australia, asylum-seekers and refugees are detained and incarcerated indefinitely (Kapur 2005: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission 2017). The space for immigrants and migrants is becoming more restricted through the discourse on trafficking and through the discourse on border security. By criminalizing those who fail to meet the standards of the ideal victim, they remain vulnerable and stigmatized.

The media often portray immigrants as criminals while simultaneously characterizing “Third World” countries as backwards, oppressed, constrained, and in need of help from countries like the United States (Kapur 2012; Mohanty 1991). While there is no question that migrants are vulnerable populations, conflating trafficking with migration only makes situations for trafficking victims more dangerous. Limiting migration will not limit human trafficking, but will, instead, create new, more invisible avenues for traffickers. This displacement, also known as the push-down pop-up (PDPU) effect, describes a “phenomenon whereby the problem is

reduced or pushed down in one place, only to emerge somewhere else” (Marshall and Thatun 2017:44). PDPU manifests itself in a variety of ways, such as with the removal of Backpage and Craigslist’s personals, or with restricting migration in an effort to combat sex trafficking. Backpage, a former online classified advertising service, had a vast adult services section. This was also true for Craigslist’s adult classified section, which was similar in content and operation to the adult sections offered by Backpage. On Backpage, advertisements were grouped by region, and then further categorized by type, such as “escorts,” “adult jobs,” and “strippers and strip clubs” (e.g., Jarrett and O’Brian 2018). With the removal of Backpage.com, a plethora of other websites have emerged to offer similar services, and more obscure websites have gained popularity in its absence (e.g. McKay 2019). Law enforcement now struggle to navigate newer sites, as some require membership fees or feature chat boxes that make users, and subsequently officers, believe they are communicating with a real person (Goebel 2019).

Empirical evidence also suggests that actions taken to restrict the movement of individuals actually assists, rather than prevents, trafficking (Marshall and Thatun 2017). Marshall and Thatun (2017) provide an excellent illustration of this point by providing evidence from around the world. Specifically, they discuss the U.S.-Mexico border, where the flow of migrants has been diverted from established migration routes to more isolated and dangerous areas, such as the desert of Arizona, or to more organized forms of smuggling usually operated by the cartel (Marshall and Thatun 2017). This situation has led to higher rates of organized crime and resulted in a substantial increase in border crossing-related deaths (Marshall and Thatun 2017).

Law enforcement and service providers often work to send trafficking victims back to their home countries as quickly as possible, but this is not always the best option. For

international trafficking victims, after-care treatment, once they have returned to their home country, does not always exist. Furthermore, attitudes towards trafficked victims from their family and their community are not always supportive. A victim's misidentification as a sex worker or prostitute, rather than as a trafficking victim, along with the label assigned to them in their destination country, often creates shame and humiliation. There is also fear that once victims are labeled as sex workers or prostitutes, they will be rejected by their communities and families because of their presumed association with criminalized events and stigmatized activities (Frederick 2017). Frederick (2017) found that young women "rescued" from brothels, once returned home, were then routinely institutionalized or forced to stay indefinitely in safe houses or special homes. Frederick also found that these women were denied adequate psychological, physical, and social after-care, which would have enabled them to return to a somewhat normal daily life within their families and communities. The labels associated with human sex trafficking victims in their destination countries clearly follow them both physically and emotionally once they are rescued and returned to their home countries.

### **Criminal Justice System Challenges**

The criminal justice system has had to adapt to a quickly changing legal and social environment in its efforts to stop human sex trafficking. For local law enforcement officials (LEOs), human sex trafficking has added another level of complexity to the difficult area of policing sensitive crimes with traumatized victims. Over the years, law enforcement has struggled with identifying the role it plays in enforcing certain laws. For example, domestic violence was initially viewed as a personal or family problem, rather than a crime (Farrell, McDevitt, and Fahy 2008). Officers were hesitant to become involved in family matters until our legal and social worlds evolved to recognize domestic violence as a matter for police. Their

resistance may have stemmed from a lack of understanding of the complexities of domestic violence. This lack of knowledge, combined with insufficient tools and training, created an environment where law enforcement did not feel equipped to deal with domestic violence-related crimes. The difficulties associated with identifying victims and investigating human sex trafficking cases are similarly compounded by definitional ambiguity and operational confusion. The discretionary powers of police officers can often be impacted by new legislative guidelines and updated policing strategies. However, in the effort to combat human trafficking, the most critical area in the exercise of police discretion is the assumptions they may make about victims. Research shows that extralegal factors can greatly impact officers' perceptions and discretion regarding investigation of a crime (Kerstetter 1990; Tasca, Rodriguez, and Spohn 2012).

Ambiguity and confusion are also present within the legal system and can lead to further challenges for law enforcement when identifying and investigating trafficking cases. Prosecutors are often hesitant to invest time and resources in human trafficking cases (Farrell et al. 2012), in part because human sex trafficking convictions are notoriously low (see Trafficking in Persons Report, U.S. Department of State 2018); without a high likelihood of conviction at trial or through a plea deal, the decision to accept and go forward with a trafficking case is extremely low. Many challenges do exist when the decision is made to prosecute a case. Local prosecutors and law enforcement officers may lack a working knowledge of their state and federal trafficking laws. Additionally, there may be little guidance on how to use state anti-trafficking laws and little training that is specifically related to the prosecution of sex trafficking cases, such as giving instructions to a jury (Farrell et al. 2012). Due to this ambiguity and lack of specialized training, prosecutors are more likely to prosecute cases using existing laws, such as rape, kidnapping, or

promoting prostitution, which they, and their juries, are more likely to understand (Farrell et al. 2012; Newton et al. 2008). This prosecutorial decision making directly affects law enforcement investigation and case referral.

Currently, law enforcement personnel rely heavily on victim cooperation and testimony during an investigation. These victims, who have suffered severe trauma and are often not given access to victim's services or shelters, are often unable to provide reliable and consistent information about their entrapment (Bales and Liz 2007). "Ultimately, victim centered approaches to the problem of human trafficking do not need to rely exclusively on victim centered investigative strategies" (Farrell et al. 2008:118). Expanding investigations to go beyond a sole reliance on victims, as well as including specific guidelines about how to speak to victims and collect evidence, can greatly improve the success of future investigations and prosecution efforts.

Prosecutors may fail to offer guidelines about what evidence is needed to prosecute such cases. Without a clear sense that sex trafficking cases will be prosecuted, police are commonly instructed to prioritize other types of crimes, such as those related to drugs and homicide (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). Law enforcement personnel are also more likely to identify cases reactively and use strategies more commonly practiced in the investigation of narcotic and prostitution offenses. Additionally, officers do not develop the skills necessary to identify and investigate sex trafficking cases since they lack the incentive to be proactive in their investigations. Proactive investigation techniques include looking for information from other ongoing investigations and creating typologies of behavior specific to sex trafficking victims (e.g., not having control of their identification documentation and exhibiting signs of multiple traumas) (Farrell 2008).

Without guidelines, incentives, or encouragement to prioritize these cases, officers are often left

ill-equipped to conduct interviews and collect data that would support further identification, investigation, and prosecution of sex trafficking (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014).

### **The Role of Law Enforcement Resources and Training**

When law enforcement officers do not understand what human trafficking is, they do not prioritize its identification. Officers' conflation of sex trafficking and prostitution can be partly explained through anti-trafficking laws and media portrayals. In rural areas where resources cannot feasibly be devoted solely to investigating human sex trafficking (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014), officers rely heavily on anonymous tips from the community about persons or situations they find suspicious. In fact, Farrell and Pfeffer found that among the human trafficking cases they reviewed for a 2014 study, 39 percent came to the attention of the police through community tips. Of the few labor trafficking cases included in their study of human trafficking investigations, 65 percent were also made known to police by anonymous community tips (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014).

Without adequate training or resources to educate members of the public, many law enforcement entities frame the problem of human sex trafficking in language they believe the public can understand. Often, this simply transfers misperceptions believed by officers to the surrounding community. Law enforcement officers use terms like "exploitation" and "prostitution," which impart a greater focus on child and women victims (e.g., Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). This prioritization of children and women is a framework more easily understood and supported by the media and local communities. Law enforcement personnel and the communities they police are often unsympathetic to victims who are men or who are undocumented immigrants/migrants (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). A reluctance to investigate cases involving these



populations, combined with a general ambiguity about what human sex trafficking is, has resulted in the prioritization of some cases and the misidentification of others.

The perception that human sex trafficking is rare or non-existent in the communities that officers police also contributes to the prioritization and misidentification problems. In a study of local, county, and state law enforcement, between 73 and 77 percent of this population believed human trafficking to be rare or non-existent in their jurisdiction (Farrell et al. 2008). If human trafficking is perceived to be non-existent in a jurisdiction, it can be difficult to convince departments that devoting time and resources to training for this crime is necessary. Presently, much of the training curriculum that exists for human trafficking is based on anecdotes or large multi-victim cases that may not accurately reflect the experiences of a rural, local law enforcement agency (Farrell et al. 2008). Further, human sex trafficking is often discussed in conjunction with training related to narcotics, crimes against women and children, and prostitution (e.g., Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). While often seen in tandem with many of these crimes, identifying and investigating sex trafficking requires a unique set of tools and resources not commonly used with narcotics and prostitution. Additionally, when sex trafficking is only associated with women and children, it puts other victims at risk for misidentification. The typical procedures, such as vice-related tactics, used by rural, local law enforcement agencies to identify and investigate potential victims may not be particularly useful for human sex trafficking cases without specialized training in this area.

The current study focuses on human trafficking in two states: Mississippi and Alabama. Mississippi has six full-time academies and sixteen part-time academies, while Alabama has nine full-time academies. In Mississippi, the full-time academy curriculum consists of four-hundred and eighty hours whereas part-time academy curriculum consists of three-

hundred and seven hours. In Alabama, the full-time academy curriculum consists of five-hundred and twenty hours.

Mississippi academies operate under the policies and procedures of the Board on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Training (BLEOST). This Board standardized and required training for all law enforcement officials (LEOs) in 1981(BLEOST 2006). Officers serving full-time positions before this date were “grandfathered,” or made exempt from meeting the new training requirements. In 1993, BLEOST added new courses and lengthened existing courses to increase the total hours required in the training curriculum to four hundred (BLEOST 2006). In Alabama, individuals must complete five-hundred and twenty hours of training as defined by the Alabama Peace Officers’ Standards and Training Commission (APOSTC) (APOSTC 2020).

While the training curriculum has been expanded in both states, there is a definite lack of standardized training on the crime of human trafficking. However, as Deborah Grubb and Katherine Bennett (2012) illustrated, a lack of training does not affect the authority of LEOs to arrest. States like Mississippi and Alabama have made efforts to require training for a variety of different crimes and scenarios, including active shooter training, HIV/AIDS-specific first aid, and mental health awareness (BLEOST 2006; APOSTC 2017). However, there is no mandatory training in the academy for human sex trafficking. Other states, including Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Tennessee, now require law enforcement to receive sex trafficking-centered training (Teigen 2018).

Research has also noted that law enforcement officers on the streets tend to investigate cases and solve problems based on their established routines. While routines allow street officers to establish more of a relationship with the public and to efficiently solve problems they frequently encounter, routines can also make officers inflexible and ill-equipped when

responding to new problems. These routines may also limit an officer's ability to distinguish sex trafficking victims from offenders involved in crimes that officers frequently encounter, such as prostitution or the distribution of narcotics. These officers are also less likely to be familiar with a trauma response and the service needs necessary for sex trafficking victims. Additionally, as officers encounter new problems (i.e., sex trafficking), the adoption of new techniques and language can be difficult to put into practice on the street (Greene 2000).

Law enforcement agencies and department supervisors are generally focused on well-developed and previously established models of policing such as community policing or problem-oriented policing (Farrell et al. 2008). To help in the transition from routine policing methods to those more focused on the specific issues of sex trafficking, LEOs are encouraged to identify connections between local crimes they commonly see (i.e., street-violence or domestic violence) and human trafficking (Farrell et al. 2008). In this way, officers may be able to adapt older methods, such as community policing, to dig deeper into unusual activity and to more closely examine the newer problems of sex trafficking.

### **Law Enforcement Discretion**

Law enforcement officers are the gatekeepers to the criminal justice system (Clawson et al 2003; Srikantiah 2007; Tasca et al. 2012). Police have a great deal of discretion in deciding what crimes to investigate, what offenders to arrest, how to describe a case and/or victim in their report, and what cases to pass on to state law enforcement agencies or local prosecutors. Understanding the factors involved in police discretion is important. The initial decisions made by law enforcement officials (LEOs) in the investigation process may be based on both legal and extralegal factors (Tasca et al 2012; Tellis and Spohn 2008).

The legal factors of a crime are dictated by legislative and judicial statutes. Crimes are defined by the act(s) that violate judicial statutes and the variables associated with them are often referred to as offense elements (Kerstetter 1990.) Factors that may compound offense elements, such as the use of a weapon or a victim's sustained injuries, can also contribute to how a crime is perceived by police. These aggravating variables (Kerstetter 1990,) can have legal relevance and can increase the punishments associated with the crime. However, the absence of aggravating factors can lessen the attention given to victims and can increase focus upon legally irrelevant victim elements, such as mental illness and substance abuse. For example, if an individual is sexually assaulted, but there are no aggravating variables, such as an injury to the victim's sex organs, the case is more likely to be viewed as less serious (e.g. Kerstetter 1990). Further, a lack of aggravating variables combined with information used to discredit the victim, such a history of mental illness or substance abuse, increases the likelihood a case will be dropped or taken less seriously. Extralegal factors, such as an individual's race, socioeconomic status, or their conformance to gendered expectations, can heavily affect the investigation, identification, and arrest process (Kerstetter 1990; Tasca et al. 2012).

There can also be overlap among legal and extralegal factors. When LEOs depend too greatly on physical evidence and victim cooperation, they can move beyond what is legally relevant to the case and focus on victim and offender characteristics that imply a heightened victim culpability. Investigations often hinge on an availability of physical evidence, which in cases involving sexual assault, requires some form of victim cooperation. When a victim does not cooperate, a lack of forensic evidence can be enough to declare a case unfounded without further police action (e.g., Tasca et al. 2012). Even when physical evidence is collected, some officers depend more on the availability of the evidence and the victim's cooperation in the

collection process, rather than on the results of DNA analysis (Tasca et al. 2012). Further, cases may be seen as unfounded by LEOs if they are suspicious of the victim's credibility, even after they have secured physical evidence (e.g., Kerstetter 1990; Spears and Spohn 2006; Tasca et al. 2012).

### **Victim Characteristics and Impact on Discretion**

A victim with a history of substance abuse or criminality is more likely to be seen as unreliable (e.g., Reskin and Visser 1986; Tasca et al. 2012; Tellis and Spohn 2008). These factors are especially important when the victim is labeled a prostitute (e.g., Tasca et al. 2012) or when the victim is not a citizen. Law enforcement officers often makes distinctions between victims they believe to be innocent (i.e., non-sex workers) and victims on whom they place at least partial blame on (i.e., sex workers) (e.g. McClintock 1992). When LEOs describe victims using the context of their criminal history first, they enhance the narrative that these victims are less deserving of legal help and protections. For illegal victims especially, the process of being “rescued” by law enforcement (i.e., detainment in a federal facility, lengthy interviews, or denial of victims’ services) may greatly mimic their previous entrapment. The treatment of these victims by LEOs, coupled with the specific trauma they have experienced as trafficking victims, makes them the least likely to cooperate during an investigation (Srikantiah 2007).

A victim's willingness and cooperation during the investigation process is arguably one of the greatest contributing factors in an LEO's decision to move forward. However, extralegal factors relating to the victim also play a significant role. Victims, particularly women and girls, who engage in risk-taking behaviors, such as hitch-hiking or substance use, are less likely to be taken seriously by LEOs (LaFree 1981; Tasca et al. 2012). This behavior is often viewed as a refusal to conform to the meanings associated with gender categories and therefore makes them

seem less stereotypically feminine (e.g., LaFree 1981; Tasca et al. 2012). A violation of this conformity not only makes victims seem less credible, but officers may also discourage them from reporting their victimization (e.g., Jewkes and Abrahams 2002; Kerstetter 1990; Morabito, Williams, and Pattavania 2019). Legal protection in these cases extends only to women deemed valuable. This protection may be most forthcoming to women who conform to gendered expectations and are viewed as being either potential or current sexual property (i.e., young girls, virgins, or already married) (e.g., Myers and LaFree 1982; Tasca et al. 2012). In this way, women and girls are also at risk of having their cases prioritized by their sexual property value.

### **Offender Characteristics and Impact on Discretion**

When building cases, LEOs will also take into consideration extralegal factors pertaining to the offender. If they discover the victim and offender were previously or are currently in a relationship, they may be less likely to believe the attack was not consensual (e.g., Kerstetter 1990; McCahill et al 1979; Tellis and Spohn 2008). While the extralegal factors under consideration may be the same for both victim and offender, the response is different. For example, while level of sobriety can discredit a victim, the same factor can seem inconsequential to officers when determining a suspect's credibility, blame, or guilt (Tasca et al. 2012). Further, a victim who reports they were assaulted by multiple people is less likely to be believed or seen as credible. LEOs often consider these types of sexual assault to be "party rapes" (p. 1160), a term that is rooted in the belief that a victim's reputation and history of risk-taking behavior is legally relevant (Tasca et al. 2012). However, in cases where the offender's reputation is of concern, LEOs may make the decision to delay an arrest, not because of the offender's credibility,

but because LEOs accommodate the offender's concern about damage to the offender's reputation (Morabito et al. 2019).

### **Sex Trafficking and Discretion**

Although police discretion is a well-researched topic, there is not a lot of research on police discretion with regard to human trafficking cases. It is important to understand how officer discretion is applied to these cases. Trafficking legislation can impact the extent to which officers may use their discretion. Similarly, officer discretion can influence the effectiveness of trafficking legislation, whether it actually helps or hinders victim identification and case investigation. As stated earlier, research suggests that police face difficulties in understanding what constitutes a human trafficking offense (e.g., Farrell et al. 2012; Pearson 2002; Ahmed and Seshu 2010). Police and prosecutors alike report feelings of uncertainty regarding human trafficking laws, especially over the elements required to prove coercion, and whether proving all three elements under federal law (force, fraud, and coercion) was necessary for conviction (Farrell et al. 2012).

Given the ambiguity of federal trafficking laws, prosecutors are more likely to prosecute human trafficking cases under pre-existing, non-human trafficking statutes such as prostitution, child sexual exploitation, rape, or kidnapping (Clawson et al. 2008). Further, local prosecutors will often turn human trafficking cases over to federal agencies (Clawson, Small, and Myles 2008; Farrell et al. 2012). Both actions work to disincentivize police from proactively investigating cases of human trafficking and deny them further opportunities to learn what makes a strong case. Additionally, seeing human trafficking cases prosecuted as other crimes can add to the confusion surrounding victim identification, especially if that crime holds a lesser degree of

sentencing than that of human trafficking or if the victim is criminalized in court proceedings (e.g., Farrell and Pfeffer 2014; Farrell et al. 2014; Farrell et al. 2008).

Research to date suggests that law enforcement agencies have done little to create an institutional response to guide local police working on the frontlines of enforcement (Farrell et al. 2008; Newton et al. 2008). Everyday routines for police are institutionalized and structured in a way that makes law enforcement resistant to adopting new policing strategies and practices (LaFave 1965; Lipsky 1980; Crank and Langworthy 1992). This attitude of resistance is magnified when police view new legislation of crimes, and subsequent new policing strategies, as a means to placate politicians and take away from police authority (Jenness and Garrett 2005). Additionally, without a standard method of response to trafficking, law enforcement discretion is substantially increased, often times resulting in laws going unenforced (Farrell et al. 2008). One example of this is when local law enforcement agencies take the position that illegal immigration is not their concern by refusing to ask about an individual's immigration status during an interview. This position can have the unintended consequence of misidentifying or overlooking victims who could have been identified by fake or fraudulent identification.

In an effort to foster an institutionalized response to human trafficking, law enforcement agencies have created specialized units and/or roles for more senior officers. Through this specialization, designated officers usually receive additional training to become experts in the investigation of a certain crime (Farrell et al. 2008). However, few agencies have created specialized units or roles for officers or implemented guidelines to coordinate a response to trafficking cases (Farrell et al. 2008). Further, training, especially in rural areas, is limited (e.g., Farrell et al. 2008; Farrell et al. 2010; Newton et al. 2008). When departments do utilize specialized units, research shows that they are not necessarily more effective than non-



specialized units (Farrell et al. 2008). While they may be more empathetic towards victims of sex trafficking, they shared similar patterns of arrests and charges to units without specialized training (Farrell et al. 2008).

Even with an effective institutionalized response, police discretion is still affected by attitudinal barriers towards new legislation and policing strategies. Perhaps most important to understanding police discretion is examining the assumptions they make about victims. Law enforcement often give special attention to particular victim characteristics that are legally irrelevant to human sex trafficking cases (e.g., Farrell et al. 2008). These characteristics, which are largely stereotypes about ideal victims, include the victim's behavior during the event, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, and the victim's background and occupation (e.g., Farrell et al. 2008; Kerstetter 1990; Spear and Spohn 1997). Even the physical aspects of a victim's entrapment can be used to dismiss a case of sex trafficking if officers believe those circumstances are not severe enough (e.g., Kerstetter 1990; Srikantiah 2007). In a study concerning the response of police and prosecutors towards victims of sexual assault, Wayne Kerstetter (1990), found that when victims had a history of substance abuse or mental illness, police were more likely to say that a crime had not occurred. Law enforcement believe these instances to be "nonsexual discrediting information," and liken both to false accusations (Kerstetter 1990:297).

Further, when victims did not report that they had sustained injuries to their sex organs, law enforcement were likely to re-categorize the crime as something less serious (Kerstetter 1990). In cases where the perpetrator was known to the victim, law enforcement officers were more likely to pay serious attention to sexual assaults that happened to: 1) married women or young single women and 2) to women who reported their victimization in the company of their

husband or father (Kerstetter 1990). As previously noted, this grouping of certain kinds of women, those married or still under their father's protection, is referred to as the sexual property value of a woman (e.g., Kerstetter 1990). In cases where these factors do not apply, such as when the victim had a history of mental illness or did not behave in a manner that individuals perceive to be appropriate, officers invariably used their discretion to minimize the incident. Thus, officer reports described the crime in terms that resulted in prosecutors aiming for a lesser charges or in no charges being filed at all.

### **Discretionary Response to Sex Workers**

Violence against sex workers, especially women and those of color, takes place within a criminal justice system that provides little legal recourse or protections to them. In a 1997 study, thirty-five percent of sex workers reported they experienced violence on a weekly basis, while seventy-six percent reported they had experienced violence at some point during their sex work career (Pearce 1997). A 2004 study examining violence against sex workers found that almost seventy-six percent of women surveyed had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence within the past ninety days (Kurtz, Surratt, Inciardi, and Kiley 2004). In a 2009 study, fifty-seven percent of sex workers reported they had experienced violence over an eighteen month period (Shannon, Terr, Strathdee, Shoveller, et al. 2009). To further illustrate these dangers and the law enforcement response, Kinnell (2000) analyzed fifty cases involving murder, manslaughter, and abduction of sex workers. In this study, only sixteen of the fifty cases analyzed received convictions. Eight of those sixteen cases involved men who had previously been convicted for violent crimes including manslaughter, murder, rape, and assault (Campbell and Kinnell 2000; Kinnell 2000). Using this data, Rosie Campbell and Hilary Kinnell (2000)

highlight how important it is that law enforcement take violence against sex workers seriously, especially since those who abuse sex workers typically have a history of abuse.

Research has shown that sex workers who engage in consensual sex are not taken seriously by law enforcement when they report they have been raped (Miller and Schwartz 1995; Page 2008). Because sex workers and the characteristics of their victimization do not adhere to the ideal victim or ideal victim scenario, law enforcement officers often do not believe them to be credible victims (e.g., Page 2008). Given the discretionary nature of police work in general, sexual assault involving sex workers is especially concerning. For law enforcement officers who do believe that sex workers can be raped, there are still issues with their perceptions of victim credibility (Page 2008).

In a 2008 study of law enforcement and rape myth acceptance, Amy Page found that forty-four percent of law enforcement officers surveyed would not believe a sex worker who claimed they were raped. It is important to note that Page (2008) also found that only five percent of law enforcement officers were unlikely to believe a virgin's claims, and two percent were unlikely to believe the claims of a working, professional woman. The results of this study show law enforcement perhaps pay more attention to the "type" of victim reporting their victimization than to the type of crime. While sex workers are not always victims of sex trafficking, this particular victimization does occur. When sex workers do become victims of sex trafficking, it is important for law enforcement to be proactive against stereotypes that may hinder the same kind of rigorous investigation accorded to a different type of trafficking victim.

### **Summary of the Relevant Literature**

A review of the literature shows that law enforcement personnel face great challenges when presented with the crime of human sex trafficking. It can be difficult for law

enforcement to accept and adapt quickly to a new model of policing, especially when they are unfamiliar with the crime. These difficulties are exacerbated when facets of the criminal justice and legal systems are not harmonious. When the federal government passed the TVPA in 2000, they allocated over \$64 million dollars to support the law enforcement response to human trafficking in an effort to prioritize prosecutions (Farrell et al. 2010). However, research shows that law enforcement agencies lack protocols and policies related to the identification of and response to human trafficking cases (Farrell et al. 2010; Newton et al. 2008). Further, prosecutors' offices have done little to guide police towards more successful techniques and procedures that are necessary for a strong human sex trafficking case (e.g., Farrell et al. 2010).

Governmental and non-governmental organizations have tried in many ways to combat sex trafficking, but often fail to adequately equip local law enforcement with the tools to properly identify and investigate this crime. Consequently, sex trafficking often becomes confused with sex work and immigration (Kempadoo 2000; Kapur 2012). Additionally, the shifting definitions of trafficking and their narrow emphasis on an ideal victim and ideal trafficking scenario further adds to the incongruity within the current trafficking discourse. Previous scholarship shows that these ideal victim constructions matter for how law enforcement responds to victims and how these victims view themselves (Dennis 2008; Hoyle 2011). Law enforcement officers and the decisions they make regarding victims offer unique insight into the perpetuation of the ideal victim narrative.

As previously noted, sex trafficking awareness among the general public has been largely framed and informed by media depictions that are often flawed. Law enforcement officers' perceptions of this crime may also be shaped by these biased portrayals. However, officers' experiences with sex trafficking, along with specific training on this subject, may produce a

deeper understanding of this complex issue and ultimately lead to more positive outcomes for victims of this crime. The current study seeks to examine how law enforcement officials understand, and subsequently act upon, any training they have received concerning human sex trafficking. This study also investigates how officers' training, or lack of training, affects victim identification and impacts the treatment of victims. This will add to the literatures on human sex trafficking identification and misidentification, victimology, and policing.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the methodology used in this research project to answer my central research question: “How do law enforcement officials perceive sex trafficking and what does this mean for victim identification and treatment?” In this chapter, I explain my research design by discussing my epistemology, or the process of how and why the relationship between myself and this project influenced my findings. Further, I discuss the methods used, including participant selection, sampling techniques, and recruitment strategies. Next, I detail my interview process, including how I worked to build rapport with my participants. Lastly, I outline my data and transcript analysis and discuss my positionality as a researcher.

#### **Qualitative Research Approach**

Qualitative research seeks to understand how social experience is created, shaped, and given meaning. The study of a phenomenon through qualitative research can yield rich and illuminative data, getting at the “why” and “how” of human interactions (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Agee 2009). In-depth interviews, a key qualitative research method, allow researchers to “explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience” (Marshall and Rossman 1995:17). In-depth interviews also capture direct quotations, which can help explore people’s perceptions, lived experiences, the meaning individuals attach to these experiences, and yield what Holloway (1997) called “thick description.” This type of description allows for a better understanding of the unique perceptions, emotions, and experiences held by participants

by paying special attention to their culture, their social world, and how they make meaning of both (e.g., Holloway 1997; Ponterotto 2006).

Further, qualitative methods are appropriate when researchers are attempting to better understand how specific perspectives and lived experiences shape, or are shaped by, individuals' decision-making processes (Becker 2001). Given that the purpose of this study is to better understand the training law enforcement officials (LEOs) receive about human sex trafficking and how this training shapes their ideas about victims, a qualitative design and methodology will best help me answer my research questions.

By interviewing LEOs, I explored the types of training they receive, how they perceive their training, and how this training, or lack of training, contributes to their perceptions and attitudes towards sex trafficking. I also examined how their perceptions and attitudes, both towards sex trafficking and sex trafficking victims, are shaped by understandings of race, gender, and immigration. Qualitative methodology allows for rich data and insight into the experiences and perceptions of LEOs, which could not be fully understood using quantitative methodology.

### **Epistemological Approach**

Within qualitative research, data collection and analysis are an immersive and intuitive process that require a special empathic neutrality. I took a feminist approach that pays special attention to my situated knowledge and positionality as a researcher (Haraway 1988). This approach concerns itself primarily with understanding the unique perspectives and lived experiences of women. It is not the purpose of feminist methodology to separate oneself from one's values, experiences, opinions, and knowledge in the research setting. Rather, when attempting to better understand the struggles of women and minority groups under the patriarchy, I believe it is important to first listen to how they frame these struggles. Then, it is important to

listen to how their struggles are understood and framed by those in positions of power. Both majority and minority groups speak from their own situated knowledge. Each may believe that their knowledge is complete; however, they typically hold only a partial knowledge that is dependent upon the other groups' unique situated knowledge for a more complete understanding. Both groups hold partial knowledge that is vitally important to engaging the other in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the completed whole.

As interviews and collecting interview data involve the positionality of the researcher and of the participants, it is important to practice reflexivity and critical self-evaluation throughout this research project in order to take continuous responsibility for how my situatedness affects the questions I ask, the people I study, and the interpretation of the data I collect (Berger 2015; Lincoln and Guba 2003). This practice of reflexivity is a crucial component of feminist method, methodology, and epistemology. To understand the position of and claims made in this project, it is important to be open about the links between what I, the researcher, know and how I gather information (Latherby 2003).

### **Data Generation**

In this research, I was aware that data is not something that exists independent of the researcher and participant (Holstein and Gubrium 2011). It is important to understand interviews in their own social context, rather than as “a tool for collecting data in isolation” (Qu and Dumay 2011:242), and interviewees as individuals who detail their own unique, situated accounts (Qu and Dumay 2011). Further, I began this study acknowledging that the interview is an empirical setting through which a researcher can obtain new insight into phenomena (Kvale 1996). With this in mind, I used semi-structured interviews to develop understanding of the ways law enforcement make sense of and create meanings out of their everyday lives and experiences,



which then inform their decisions regarding human sex trafficking. Semi-structured interviews produce different responses and insight depending on the traits of the interviewer and response of the interviewee (Qu and Dumay 2011). This method lends itself well to the feminist approach and situatedness I ascribe to. It is not the goal of a semi-structured interview to uncover hidden truths, but rather to yield a situated understanding of specific, unique interactions based on characteristics of the interviewer and interviewee, such as sexuality, gender, race, and socio-economic standing (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Further, conducting semi-structured interviews allows for a deeper understanding of the way LEOs perceive their lived experiences by using their own words and voices.

### **Aim of the Study**

This study seeks to contribute to the victimological literature on human sex trafficking (mis)identification and the policing literature on decision making. Specifically, the current study will focus on police and sheriff's departments in Mississippi and Alabama, paying special attention to rural areas. As research has noted, rural law enforcement personnel often lack training in a variety of crimes for reasons that can include a lack of funding, lower police officer retention, and less access to equipment (Weisheit, Falcone, and Wells 1994). Through this study, I hope to better understand the training experiences that LEOs have (or do not have), as well as how this training combines with individual perceptions to influence the decisions LEOs make regarding the identification of human sex trafficking victims. The central questions guiding this research project are as follows: (1) How do LEOs perceive sex trafficking? (2) What does this mean for victim identification? (3) What does this mean for victim treatment? These questions will broaden our understanding of the complex relationships among victim identification, victim recovery, and law enforcement decision making. Researchers have shown that LEOs are more

likely to criminalize a victim and deny them access to victims' services if they associate prostitution only with illegal behavior and delinquency (Macy and Graham 2012).

### **Participant Selection**

To better understand how LEOs perceive human sex trafficking and how this perception may be informed by factors such as racial or gender stereotypes, I conducted a qualitative study of LEOs throughout Mississippi and Alabama. This study consisted of in-depth interviews with police officers, police chiefs, and sheriff's deputies. To participate in this study, LEOs must be active duty police officers, police chiefs, sheriffs, or sheriff's deputies.

### **Sampling**

I used snowball sampling techniques (Glaser and Strauss 2004) to recruit twenty LEOs who worked in police and sheriff's departments across Mississippi and Alabama. Snowball sampling, which has also been referred to as chain referral sampling, (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981), is a useful technique to find research participants who are members of special, or hard to reach populations. An initial participant, or node, gives the researcher the name of another potential participant they know, who then refers another individual, and so on (Vogt 1999). Snowball sampling takes advantage of the social networks participants are involved in to provide researchers with a cost effective and easily expanded list of potential participants (Thomas 1997). This expansion process assumes that nodes, or participants in the initial sample, share a "bond" or "link" with others in the same population, which then allows for chain referrals (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Berg 1988).

As previously stated, this method of sampling is particularly suitable when attempting to interview a population that is difficult to access, or not fully visible to the researcher (Babbie

1995; Tansey 2007). Research has shown that a culture of policing exists where male officers, who dominate the field, are resistant to those they deem as outsiders (Rabe-Hemp 2008). Because of this law enforcement “boys’ club” (Rabe-Hemp 2008; Franklin 2005), access by an “outsider” may be difficult to obtain, especially if researchers do not already have “insider” status (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Hunt 1984; Warren 2000). I began this sampling technique by identifying several nodes located in a small, rural police department where I previously worked.

### **Recruitment Strategies**

After I received IRB approval, I began to recruit participants through the use of either an email recruitment script or through verbal recruitment. I introduced this study as part of my master’s thesis, which concerns law enforcement officers’ experiences with and perceptions of human sex trafficking. This recruitment email contained my contact information, along with information regarding my status as a graduate student within the sociology department at Mississippi State University, and informed officers that if they participated they would be entered in a raffle at the end of data collection to win a \$50 gift card as a small token of appreciation. I also asked that participants sign an informed consent form for participation in my study. Further, my recruitment script guaranteed confidentiality for participants (Weiss 1995) and stated that all interviews would be recorded unless the participant objected.

Locating initial nodes was not difficult, as I started by verbally recruiting an investigator at the small police department where I previously worked. After completing an interview with this officer, he referred me to another investigator, a patrolman, and the Police Chief. All of these men worked in the same police department. I emailed each of these participants and later interviewed them separately. The data collected in these early interviews varied widely. Some

participants had no training in human sex trafficking while others had completed some form of additional training outside of their police academy experience. One participant had never received law enforcement training from an academy or through this police department when he was hired several years ago. Only two participants, both investigators, admitted to being directly involved in a case where they suspected sex trafficking had taken place, but did not investigate it as such.

After transcribing these interviews, I emailed these two investigators and asked if they could refer me to anyone they knew who had/has direct experience in sex trafficking cases. Both men referred me to the same officer located in Southern Mississippi. I sent him my recruitment email and after his interview, he referred me to three other LEOs in Mississippi and Alabama who he believed had varying degrees of experience in sex trafficking cases. Surprisingly, most participants did not refer me to other police officers. Rather, the majority of participants would give me contact information for their local assistant district attorney or someone who worked at a local non-profit organization.

Even when I asked specifically to be referred to another police officer, many participants felt I would learn more about human trafficking if I interviewed another group. For example, one officer would only refer me to his local assistant district attorney because, “You need to talk to them people that actually know something about this stuff if you really want to learn anything about it. They see it day in and day out. We don’t.” This sentiment was common among participants. As a result of this issue with snowball sampling, I also emailed multiple police and sheriff departments in Mississippi and Alabama that appear on a collected list of state agencies on PoliceOne.com, the Alabama Association of Chiefs of Police website, the Mississippi

Association of Chiefs of Police website, and the Mississippi Sheriffs' Association website in an effort to give those who were not recommended to me a chance to participate.

### **Interviews**

Over a period of two years, I conducted twenty interviews with law enforcement officials (LEOs) throughout Mississippi and Alabama. The majority of participants worked for city police departments, with one officer working for a sheriff's department and one working throughout the entire northern half of the state of Mississippi as a state trooper. Of these, 80 percent were white men (n=18). I interviewed two women, one Hispanic and one African American. All but one officer interviewed, a chief, went to a police academy. Of those officers who had been to an academy, 19 attended a full-time academy, and one officer, an investigator, graduated from both a part-time and full-time academy. The average age of participants was 44 years old.

I conducted all interviews at a time and place most convenient for LEOs, which ended up being at their office within their departments or in an empty meeting room at their departments. However, I had considerable difficulties with scheduling interviews with officers. Five were late to our scheduled interviews by at least 45 minutes. I drove all over the state of Mississippi and Alabama to meet officers at their departments, often traveling two to three hours one way. This made it difficult to leave and come back if an officer was late. In all but one of these cases, officers said they simply forgot about our meeting. One detective told me his secretary, who was a woman working in dispatch, forgot to remind him he had a meeting. The average length of interviews was 51 minutes, with the longest interview lasting two hours. I contacted over 130 different police departments, sheriff's departments, highway patrol stations, and tribal police departments in both states. Only three departments declined to participate and excluding those that I interviewed, the others did not get back in touch about participating.

As I conducted semi-structured interviews, participants were allowed to bring up topics and address concerns as they arose. I was able to ask follow-up, probing questions as I felt necessary, which allowed interviews to feel more like a conversation. The questions I asked were designed to prompt information about the individual experiences, ideas, perceptions, and attitudes of participants surrounding human sex trafficking. I assured many of them throughout the interview that I was genuinely interested in hearing how they as an individual felt about a topic. Many officers I interviewed seemed to really need this reassurance as they were worried they were rambling, not making sense, or were afraid they were telling me something far outside what I was studying.

Among the officers I interviewed, the majority were nice and expressed an eagerness to tell their side of things and share concerns and complaints. I did have a few encounters with participants that left me unnerved. In one interview, an officer asked me multiple times to sit closer to him even though we were sitting in a traditional boardroom with a long table and multiple chairs. Further, another officer was scheduled to join us to participate in the interview. I did move until there were only two chairs separating myself and the officer. I refused, after he asked twice more, to move down any further. In a similar instance, an officer refused to leave the door to his office open after I requested he do so. I then asked if he would be comfortable moving to an area more open, but where colleagues wouldn't be able to hear his responses. He told me that he didn't care who heard what he had to say, he just didn't like to leave his door open.

### **Building Rapport**

Qualitative methodology hinges on the ability to build rapport and establish trust between the interviewer and interviewees. My prior work history enabled me to gain insider status and to

secure interviews. However, I believe using my outsider status as a student researcher and as a young woman was also been beneficial. As I am not and have never been a police officer, my ignorance about the ins and outs of policing helped participants tell me how things were from their point of view. To make participants more at ease with discussing their experiences and potentially sensitive topics, I began with simple, introductory questions in order to get to know the officer and to start the conversation. These warm-up questions include asking about their previous work experience, their current role in the department, their age, and what they normally do during the day. To further build rapport and trust, I worked to practice empathy, to have a capacity to listen, to understand, and to maintain a positive relationship with my participants (Qu and Dumay 2011; Shensul et al. 1999).

I used semi-structured interviews in this project, as this type of qualitative inquiry works best with the goals of my study. I utilized an interview schedule with a list of questions and topics to be covered in each interview. While I had this schedule prepared so that I could obtain similar information from each participant, I was still able to probe and explore freely within each predetermined topic. My interview schedule was designed so that interviews started by making participants feel at ease with demographic questions, then slowly worked up to more potentially sensitive topics about sex trafficking identification and immigration. The interview schedule is provided in Appendix A.

### **Positionality**

I remained aware of my positionality throughout my study. My status as a young, white woman studying law enforcement possibly limited my ability to build and maintain rapport with my interview participants. The field of criminal justice, especially in Mississippi, is dominated by white men predominantly from lower to middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds

(Ganuchau 2015). My age, gender, and the subject of my study possibly made participants uncomfortable or hesitant to see me as a researcher (Cerwonka and Malkki 2008). However, my perceived whiteness and my position in the working-class allowed me to fit in. In working to build rapport, I mentioned my background and experience working in various aspects of the criminal justice and legal systems. I previously worked in a small, city police department and in the office of a district attorney. In these roles, I not only became familiar with criminal and legal proceedings, but I also became familiar with the culture of policing (Chan 2004). Further, my interest and experience in various fields of the criminal justice system have exposed me to casual sexism and racism, whether overt or coded, and, as such, I was able to appear neutral and to maintain composure when these topics arose in interviews. My life experience in the rural South was also beneficial, as I am familiar with the nuances of dialect, culture, and complexities of life in the rural South.

It is equally important to note that while the demographics of law enforcement in Mississippi and Alabama in most respects match my own, the privileges I possess through my race did not always match that of all participants. I worked to remain cognizant of my whiteness while interviewing and interacting with officers of color. Their situatedness is especially unique and I worked to ensure that I capture their perspectives, attitudes, and experiences accurately.

### **Data Analysis and Transcript Analysis**

As I conducted this study through the implementation of Donna Haraway's (1998) concept of situated knowledge, I was careful to remain reflexive in acknowledging my positionality throughout the data collection process, analysis, and writing of my findings. Conducting qualitative research and semi-structured interviews requires careful planning and care before, during, and after the interview process. The interview setting, my own perspective,



the perspectives of my participants, as well as current events, came together to create an environment that is unique to this study and to each interview.

My personal characteristics, such as my gender, age, race, and personal experiences, informed my research and interactions with my participants in many ways (Berger 2015). As I have work experience in the field of law enforcement, respondents were willing to share their own experiences with me in ways they might not feel comfortable doing with others (De Tona 2006). Further, these characteristics and my background affected the way I presented questions, made meaning of gathered information, and subsequently shaped my findings (Kacem and Chaitin 2006). When introducing myself to my participants, I always began by discussing my role as a student researcher. Participants were accepting of this role and seemed eager to “teach me” about their lives as police officers. Many participants asked about my plans after graduate school, offered their assistance in helping me find a job, and gave me advice on working in the criminal justice system as a young woman. One participant spent time congratulating me on my research and told me how proud he was of me for taking time to interview law enforcement. I rarely had to use my previous work experience as a way to gain respect with participants as most welcomed me into their offices and seemed eager to share their knowledge.

Initially, I was concerned about being a young woman going alone into male dominated spaces. While I had uncomfortable moments, most participants treated me more like a daughter. I began data collection at age 21, while the average age of those working as police officers in the United States is 39.1 for men and 38.5 for women (American Community Survey 2017). The majority of my participants were older men, certainly old enough to be my father, and as such seemed to see me as a daughter or even granddaughter. When interviewing younger participants, I initially struggled in navigating my role as a researcher. Younger participants seemed more

awkward during interviews and frequently referred to me as “ma’am” when meeting me, something older participants did not do. I felt that participants who were closer in age to myself spent a lot of time during interviews trying to figure out what I was; an authority because of my researcher status, or a student. To counteract this, I changed how I dressed when interviewing different age groups. If I knew I would be meeting an older officer, I wore more business casual clothes and carried my recorder, consent form, and notepad in a laptop case. If I planned to interview younger officers, I wore jeans and carried my materials in a backpack. I also talked more about my life as a college student.

The lens I use for filtering information (Berger 2015:200) from participants is formed by the experiences I have working with law enforcement, but also with exchanges I have had with law enforcement outside of a work environment. These influences are inherent in this type of qualitative work (Drake 2010), but by remaining cognizant of the “tension between involvement and detachment of the researcher and the research” (Berger 2015:221), I enhanced the trustworthiness, rigor, and ethics of my study. By being reflexive, I made a deliberate effort to monitor the reactions and thoughts I had when doing interviews, and the way I constructed this account in my memos, to help maintain awareness for myself as a part of the world I study (Berger 2015; Mason 1996; Porter 1993).

I allowed participants to select the location of the interview and have some control over the direction the interview took. In other words, I allowed officers to ramble when answering questions as they often brought up more controversial and sensitive topics on their own. At the end of interviews, I gave participants the opportunity to ask me questions and talk about things they would like the community outside law enforcement to know. Most participants were more interested in why I wanted to talk to law enforcement than they were the details of my study.

Usually, the participants shared concerns with how they were portrayed in the media, with many taking time to tell me how wrong these depictions were and why. I made sure to include these discussions in my memos, as some officers only expressed these concerns when they knew I had turned off my audio recorder.

I used MAXQDA software to transcribe and analyze all interviews. I began the coding process by using a combination of basic, first cycle coding methods to first get familiar with my data (e.g., Saldaña 2016). As using only one coding method did not help me capture the complexities within my data, I decided to employ a few methods that I felt could be easily “mixed and matched” (Saldaña 2016:69). Some of my coding decisions were made after I finished my initial set of interviews, as I felt applying other methods would yield a more substantive analysis of the data. Others, however, were decided upon before conducting interviews as a critical part of my research design. For example, I use In Vivo codes, or direct quotes from my participants, throughout all interviews, as it is important to me that I capture the direct language of my participants. LEOs have unique voices and using In Vivo codes helps to ground my analysis in their perspectives and experiences. Further, there are terms, concepts, and language that are specific to policing that participants frequently use. By using In Vivo, I can capture meanings inherent to the experiences and perspectives of my participants (e.g., Stringer 2014). In analyzing In Vivo codes, I check to see if I, as the researcher, am understanding what is significant to my participants (Charmaz 2003; Saldaña 2016). Through this analytic process, In Vivo also helps capture how participants work through or process issues raised in interviews (Strauss 1987).

After using In Vivo codes, I then read back through my interviews and employed process codes. Process coding, or action coding, highlights the processes that are embedded in the

“psychological concepts” that people actively do (Willig 2008: 164), like prejudice and discrimination. By using gerunds, nouns functioning as verbs by using the ending “-ing,” these process codes connote action in the data (Saldaña 2016) and, in my analysis, show more conceptual action (e.g., struggling, manipulating, denying). This type of coding works well with In Vivo as many process codes help further define direct quotes captured through In Vivo. This method, in turn, works to create more evocative memos (Saldaña 2016).

As part of my first cycle codes, I also employed versus codes. These codes are commonly used to identify dichotomies and sites of conflict among concepts, individuals, and institutions (Saldaña 2016). For example, when officers gave conflicting or inconsistent statements about who they believe to be a victim and who they believe to be a suspect, the code “suspect vs. victim” was used. Versus coding lends itself well to data that highlights conflicts among and between groups, as well as competing goals, ideologies, and practices (Saldaña 2016). When researching institutions and groups that hold positions of power and privilege in society, versus coding can be a useful analytic tactic for examining how that power supports unjust societal patterns.

I take an open-ended approach to first cycle coding as an opportunity for reflection, but also to allow time and space for exploration of the direction this study takes. First cycle codes are fairly direct and happen during the initial rounds of coding data. Initial codes are temporary and subject to revision. During analysis, these initial codes are sometimes synthesized into tentative themes or categories as I have had time to reflect on and evaluate the data. These patterns, themes, and categories can be used as building blocks for further exploration and analysis. My approach to coding works best with line-by-line coding, which requires meticulous attention to the data (Corbin and Strauss 2014).

During analysis, I employed a few techniques to help focus the direction of my study. After completing the coding process, I began the process of code charting to help summarize and compare my initial codes. In this process, I created a table with one column dedicated to a short summarization of each interview and another column dedicated to the major codes used in that interview. This process was extremely helpful in seeing emerging patterns amongst participant interviews. I took this process a step further by qualitatively ranking each interview from those that were most receptive and most experienced to those that were the least experienced and held the most stereotypical views.

Further, in an effort to remain grounded in my data, I wanted to transition from the many process codes I used to more meaningful themes. While the shorter process codes I used were helpful in highlighting the processes involved in the action of my participants, I wanted to deepen my understanding of the consequences of their actions and interactions (e.g. Saldaña 2016). To theme this data, I created a list of process codes and added the verbs “is” and “means” where necessary to create full sentences. This allowed for broad terms to become more refined and substantive. For example, a commonly used process code from my transcription analysis was “pressuring.” To expand on this code, I added “is” and “means” to create the sentences “pressuring victims is victim blaming” and “pressuring victims means treating victims like criminals.” These themes better reflect the consequences involved in the action of participants.

### **Limitations**

As previously stated, there will be limitations in my situatedness as a white woman, researcher, and graduate student. The field of criminal justice, especially policing, is particularly difficult for women to navigate (Rabe-Hemp 2008; Langan, Sanders, and Gouweloos, 2019). This difficulty only increases when an outsider attempts to navigate various insider

statuses within the field of law enforcement (Emerson et al. 2011; Hunt 1984; Warren 2000). As a researcher who is not an active duty police officer, and as a woman, I did have some difficulty navigating my role from outsider to insider. Scheduling and conducting interviews with officers was difficult, and as a result there are few women and no officers of color included in this project. Additionally, the rurality of my participants and the unique challenges they face because of their rurality, impacts the generalizability of this study. My findings are unique to the place, setting, and experiences of my participants. I encountered officers who were hesitant to talk badly of their department, but willingly opened up when I reassured them about confidentiality. Further, my situatedness and my positionality shaped the way participants interacted with me and subsequently shaped the data that I produced, as well as how I interpreted it.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

In an effort to explore how law enforcement officers make sense of and react to the crime of human sex trafficking, this work was guided by my central research question: “How do law enforcement officials perceive sex trafficking and what does this mean for victim identification and treatment?” I first explore the training that participants received related to sex trafficking. Of particular interest is the number of training hours related specifically to trafficking as opposed to training hours related to general topics. I took note of how officers perceived their training. Most officers believed that their training was minimal. Some expressed frustration with their lack of training on the subject. Some officers felt that they did not need trafficking training since they were able to deal with other similar crimes.

Secondly, I examine LEO’s beliefs and perceptions related to sex trafficking. There were three common elements that emerged from this area of inquiry. The prevailing beliefs and perceptions included the idea that any victim of sex trafficking would readily self-identify and cooperate with law enforcement, that victims who engage in risk-taking behaviors are responsible for their own victimization, and finally that immigrants who do not promptly assimilate into the local culture should be viewed with suspicion for involvement with trafficking. Officer training is shown to be importantly related to LEO’s beliefs and perceptions. I explore how a lack of training, or training that officers perceive as insufficient related to sex trafficking, contributes to a climate where officers use their own beliefs and

assumptions to inform their policing decisions about victims. Finally, I examine the topic of victim identification and treatment by exploring how officers have handled actual situations in the field and how their interactions with potential trafficking victims are influenced by the prevailing beliefs and perceptions previously described. I further explore how officers explain their use of discretion and their policing decisions when deciding to arrest or assist a potential sex trafficking victim. Throughout this chapter, I refer to all participants by aliases.

### **Training**

The training made available to LEOs in Mississippi and Alabama is similar. In Mississippi, the Board on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Training (BLEOST) develops the curriculum and establishes standards for both full-time and part-time academies throughout the state. Similarly, academies in Alabama are guided by the Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (APOSTC). Both entities require officers to complete a set number of curriculum hours that are divided up between topics. The topics that are covered, as well as the hours devoted to each topic, vary by state and academy type. In Mississippi, both full-time and part-time academies require officers to complete a two-hour credit course entitled, “Homeland Security,” which includes an introduction to homeland security, human trafficking, and the incident command system (ICS). In Alabama, officers must complete a two-hour credit course on human trafficking when they enter basic training, and one hour if they are completing requirements for re-certification. In this study, each participant was asked if they felt their training at the academy, both general training and training related to sex trafficking, was sufficient. Of those who attended a police academy, almost all participants responded that it was insufficient in both areas.



Officers who received police academy training a decade or more ago have had to rely on supplemental classes on trafficking if they wanted to further their knowledge. Several LEOs indicated that the topic of trafficking had not been specifically dealt with at all during their time at an academy. More recent graduates indicated that it had only been briefly covered during their academy training. 54 year old school resource officer (SRO), Jordan Berry, working in Alabama, graduated from the Birmingham Police Academy in the mid-80's. He said his full-time academy did not address human trafficking because they were not truly aware of the crime.

SRO Berry: In the academy? They did not touch on that at all. It wasn't hit on, like I said, it wasn't hit on at all. We might have learned some rules about kidnapping or uh you know they might have taught us about prostitution or uh something you know along those lines, but nothing as far as trafficking. It was kind of not even thought of. I won't say it was told, 'No, we're not doing this.' It was just this wasn't even on the radar.

SRO Berry has since gone through several supplemental training courses related to human sex trafficking. Additionally, he has taught multiple classes at his department for incoming patrol officers because, "even though they just graduated they've never heard about human trafficking in their lives." SRO Berry claims that it was during these classes when he realized the curriculum at his old academy seemingly had not changed much in the last thirty years.

SRO Berry: I didn't know much of anything about human trafficking back then. We, at the time, excuse my language, but we all referred to them as whores. It was always, 'those whores at the truck stop,' or whatever. Our new patrol officers will come in and they see and say the same things. They haven't been taught, even though they just graduated, they haven't been taught that sometimes these women are victims. The biggest

thing these classes teach is getting the victim to cooperate. If these guys don't learn that they'll never know what to do with trafficking.

In Mississippi, some officers felt that while their academy touched on human trafficking, it was not addressed as thoroughly as they would have liked. Mariana Arias, a Hispanic woman working in Mississippi, told me that her area sees human trafficking frequently, but no one in her department has received any training on the topic.

Officer Arias: I went to the academy for twelve weeks. What year was it? Two, three years ago? Three. Once you go through that academy, that's not part of it. They may touch on the topic just to say that you're gonna encounter human trafficking just like you would other crimes, but that's as far as you go.

Similarly, twenty-six-year-old patrolman Chad Martin of Northeast Mississippi felt that his full-time academy simply touched on the crime of human trafficking when focusing on child related crimes.

Officer Martin: Yeah, I graduated in 2017, and we did cover it, but uh like I said earlier. It wasn't in detail, but we did talk about it. It was part of a special victim's class. That class was mostly on child related stuff.

LEOs' perceptions about their training, or lack of training, varied. Some officers indicated that their training had offered them nothing more than a mere reinforcement of what their "gut feelings" told them about a situation and they saw little value in pursuing additional training for themselves or for their department. Christina Gordon, a twenty-eight-year-old African American detective working in Southeast Alabama, discussed her training related to trafficking both in the academy and after graduating. She described how she perceives her department's stance on the crime.

Detective Gordon: In the academy we briefly learned some stuff about human trafficking through a class. I went through in 2015. I specifically remember the signs they told us to look for if you pull over a vehicle because it was just so common sense. You just be thorough. Like ask the girl if she really knows the guy she's with. A lot of it is gut feeling to be honest. They're not gonna tell you anything because they know how taboo it is, to be doin' what they're doin', but you have to ask anyway. That's all. It was brief like I said.

Chloe: If you had the opportunity to get more training would you want to?

Detective Gordon: Probably not. I don't handle sex crime cases much so I'm never gonna see it. Plus, it's swept under the rug. Maybe not completely under the rug, but pretty much. Like we'll address it if it's a serious issue, but it's really not addressed until someone calls. Like it's not a necessity to the department. We're not proactive, but I mean honestly we aren't as reactive either.

For fifty-two-year-old Detective Gilbert Smith of Northeast Mississippi, completing a supplemental course in trafficking was also not a necessity. While a detective at his department, he also was an instructor at a full-time police academy. He admitted that sex trafficking is not discussed at length at the academy, as they have other "hot topics" they need to address. When I asked if he would attend a seminar dedicated to sex trafficking, he felt it would be unnecessary because he had been working in this field for "so long."

Detective Smith: I went in 2009. After several years of doing other stuff, you know, fire and investigations. I'm an instructor at that academy now and we teach some basic stuff about it [sex trafficking]. That's been incorporated in the uh minimum standards that they teach at the training center.

Chloe: So, what does that look like? When you're talking about it in the academy?

Detective Smith: Well, it's the minimum standards requirement so we just touch the subject briefly. You know, we cover so much. We can't devote a great deal to it. The hot topics right now, like now it is interacting with the public.

Chloe: And you personally? Have you done any classes outside the academy about human trafficking?

Detective Smith: Well, I've been to some seminars with the AG (Attorney General), but they're sporadic. It's also not just that topic. It's on domestic violence or something like that. They'll mention trafficking as something you might see when doing this or that crime.

Chloe: Do you think if they offered something that was just sex trafficking you would take it?

Detective Smith: Well, no. I've done this for so long now.

Another participant mentioned his training through seminars. He told me that he had not attended any academy training, but that he had been given study materials by some of his mentors. Fifty-six-year-old Chief Howard Russell of Northeast Mississippi, when asked if he had attended any classes related to trafficking, said he had attended several seminars. However, when describing these, it seemed they were more informational sessions geared towards service providers who were unfamiliar with the crime. When I asked if the seminars provided any specific advice about investigating the crime, he said that was not part of the seminars he had attended.

Chief Russell: Now, they said it was the most committed crime in our country, in our nation. It had passed identity theft. But, no. No, that wasn't really covered as far as the

interview process goes. It's just giving overviews of definitions. Told everyone to be aware for suspicious behavior. That's all it was really. Come to think of it. Well, you know they wasn't exclusive to law enforcement. So, we didn't get into the- the investigative or the uh the arrest, the laws around it. Like I said, I'm without any formal training. I've had some interview training, but not um around a specific crime or whatever.

Chloe: So, what about something exclusively for law enforcement? Have you been to something like that? Where they went over things only cops would be concerned with. I know some officers have gone to things put on by the AG (Attorney General) or their local DA (district attorney).

Chief Russell: Well, that was all through them. Through the attorney general. Through the district attorney, you know.

Even with no training at all, some officers felt confident in their ability to deal with trafficking scenarios in the field. Forty-four-year-old Chief Tim Kelly did not learn about human trafficking in the academy and he has not attended any supplemental courses related to trafficking. Although Chief Kelly said that trafficking is something that his department sees monthly in North Mississippi, none of his officers have attended any extra training related to the crime.

Chief Kelly: I went to uh Mississippi Delta training academy in 2000. Now, as far as trafficking goes that wasn't a part of our uh curriculum.

Chloe: So, have you had any classes that dealt with sex trafficking since then?

Chief Kelly: Since the academy? Uh no, but I do my recertification when I have to, you know. I stay up to date with the law. A lot of it is so much like other stuff we see out here, I think we know how to handle it.

Sergeant Fred Taggart of Southeast Mississippi also felt he did not need training related to human trafficking because he perceived the investigation to be similar to that of other crimes.

Sergeant Taggart: No, I never had any type of classes on that. Don't think I need 'em.

I've done what they call high-profile cases using DNA advancements. You can watch a movie, a TV movie documentary about me. The murders I solve are the bad ones, and I do that fine. I've come up on 'em [trafficking situations] before and known exactly what was going on. Especially when I was in Europe. It's not hard to know what's sex related.

Even for law enforcement officers who are specifically tasked with human trafficking investigations, there is a lack of specialized training. At 49 years old, Detective Edward Walters of South Mississippi has been an officer since he graduated from the Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy in 1997. He has slowly worked his way up the ranks until he was named as the point of contact for all sex trafficking cases that occur in his jurisdiction in 2017. He stated that he is often called to help with cases that occur in the surrounding area. Detective Walters has not, however, received any training related to sex trafficking. He stated that it is not a requirement for his position.

Among the participants, a few officers had taken an extra class specifically related to trafficking, but indicated that it, too, had not seemed to go far enough. Some officers were especially concerned with how little they learned about the overlap between immigration, migration, and human trafficking. When I asked forty-one-year-old investigator Earl Frederick of South Alabama about his training, he reported that he had been to a few supplemental training

classes on human trafficking. He felt that what he did not learn about trafficking in the academy was not necessarily made up for by the extra classes he had since attended.

Investigator Frederick: When you take the extra class, we are trained that there's a lot of young girls brought up, and boys probably from Central America, Mexico, those kinds of places. And that's with the class you take, the extra class. You're only there a half day, maybe one full day. They don't get to the finer points, the ins and outs, of that side of the issue. I mean what they do talk about is very minimal. We hear from the federal, state, and local levels. We hear from the medical providers. They present over the course of that one day or less, but everyone only gets a half hour to speak. They pass out some literature and that's that.

One officer wished that she had more of an opportunity to take classes specifically on the subject. Officer Mariana Arias in South Mississippi expressed her frustration with the lack of training made available to her and her peers, especially since they saw trafficking frequently.

Officer Arias: You know, it's not like we've never seen it in this area. Maybe not everyday, but we see it. I wish there was something here local so they can't tell us the department can't afford to send us to these classes. And, you know, rather than have one person go and learn, we should all learn. We're all going to see it. I would just have that person, to come and just give a class in general to the whole department versus sending one person. I just wish there was more training of officers and law enforcement because those are the ones- We're the first ones to pull them over.

One participant's training and experience was more extensive than other officers. Forty-six-year-old Trooper First Class (TFC) Nelson Little of Mississippi had a great deal of experience with sex trafficking by working in conjunction with the Mississippi Bureau of

Investigation (MBI), and as an instructor of sex trafficking seminars for members of the criminal justice and legal systems. I asked if the seminars sponsored by MBI were different from other supplemental training classes that law enforcement could receive.

TFC Little: Ours is a sixteen-hour course. It's a full sixteen-hour course for law enforcement that teaches you what to look for, but also what to look for beyond the [traffic] stop. What happens to the sixteen-year-old from another state that you find? Who's involved in the advocacy of that child? What calls do you need to make? A lot of classes may say they're eight hours, but then you're only there for four hours and they talk about other crimes as well. We cover all trafficking. We go in MLEOTA (Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers' Training Academy), but we have our course outside that too. In academy type situations they're already under a lot of stress so they don't retain a lot of what we teach because it's so in depth. If it's not our course in the academy, it's not even half a day. You know a lot of courses mention human trafficking, sex trafficking, stuff like that, but uh but I've never had or seen a course that broke all the elements down and then also gave the contacts, and networking of what do you from here. What's the next step? Then, what's the next step? What's gonna happen to my victim? Where are they gonna be?

### **LEOs Beliefs and Perceptions**

Most participants in this study indicated that their training related to trafficking was minimal. Trafficking instruction, when provided, was largely related to other crimes such as prostitution and kidnapping. Officers' beliefs and perceptions about sex trafficking seem largely influenced by their perceptions about victims of crime in general. There were three common elements to their perceptions of trafficking. First, officers typically believe that victims of



trafficking want to self-identify and report their victimization. They also believe that victims would readily cooperate in an investigation. Second, officers typically believe that victims who engage in risk taking behaviors are, in some respects, responsible for their own victimization. Officers believe that victims would agree to change or alter their lifestyle if it seems to have contributed to their victimization. Finally, officers' perceptions of sex trafficking are strongly influenced by the belief that criminals are the only individuals who would not self-identify, not cooperate, or nor want law enforcement help. This perception is most commonly seen when officers encounter immigrant or migrant populations who do not promptly assimilate into the local culture and are subsequently viewed with suspicion for involvement in trafficking. When beliefs and perceptions such as these are present, officers often fail to recognize actual trafficking situations. When victims fail to act in ways that correspond to an officer's understanding of trafficking, officers tend to minimize the severity of a scenario as merely a bad relationship or a domestic squabble.

The issue of victim self-identification was raised when interviewing Edward Walters, a forty-nine-year-old detective located in Central Mississippi. He described a domestic violence call he responded to at a local hotel. He suspected a woman was being kept against her will.

Detective Walters: Located a female who was upset. She'd been staying there and uh we went to knock on the door and the male was in there too. He was very uncooperative and she was also very uncooperative. There was a lot of things that... both said that were obviously not true. And uh the girl- when I say girl, she was an adult in this situation I guess. I think. She had no phone of her own. She had no ID of her own. She had no car. She had no cash. She also had some old marks on her. Some new marks. Looked like she was...It was apparent that she was being beaten and uh I tried to uh talk to her. Find out

what was really going on. He wouldn't let her say much of anything. I suspected a lot of it was going on, but sometimes you needed to hear it from their own mouth before you can do anything.

Under Mississippi statute 97-3-54.4., Detective Walters was well within his authority to make an arrest. However, since the victim did not self-identify, the matter was not pursued as either a domestic violence or a trafficking crime. Under both Mississippi and Alabama law, the crime of human trafficking does not have to include physical abuse, physical force, or physical restraint. Rather, force, fraud, or coercion can include such actions as intimidation, threats of bodily harm, blackmail, or the refusal to allow someone to have or acquire a passport, government identification, or immigration documents. Detective Walters later noted in this example that the victim had been physically abused and was not allowed money, identification, a cell phone, or a vehicle.

A victim's cooperation with law enforcement and their willingness to alter their risk-taking behavior was also described by officer Patrick Irving, a forty-year-old police captain from Alabama.

Chloe: You talked earlier about designing cases, building cases around, not really pressuring victims to give you their pimp, but encouraging them to...if that doesn't happen, um, and you know trafficking is a factor, will this victim still kind of be treated as a perpetrator and charged?

Captain Irving: So we have made arrests uh um for young ladies who are promoting prostitution, but more cases than not, we have chosen not to. Um, but only if they are willing and open to receive our help.

When LEOs encounter a victim who is perceived to be uncooperative as well as a risk-taker, officers often exhibit a tendency to dismiss their victimization as a relationship gone wrong rather than as a trafficking scenario. I asked Keith Henry, a forty-eight-year-old investigator from Northeast Mississippi, if he had experience with any human trafficking cases. While he had seen several cases, he said he had not been directly involved with the investigation process. He discussed how traffickers will get “a young female that’s maybe a runaway” and treat them to new clothes, a place to live, and food. He believed that this often resulted in victims falling in love with their captor, who he said they would describe as their “boyfriend.” However, rather than view this relationship as inherently toxic, he believed their lack of cooperation was because the victims wanted to keep the “attention.”

Chloe: The victim won’t cooperate?

Investigator Henry: That’s right. A lot of times they’ll say, ‘That’s my boyfriend.’

Honestly, in my mind I think that they think that they’re in love with them.

Chloe: So that to me kind of sounds like a Stockholm Syndrome kind of thing.

Investigator Henry: A little bit. I can see that. I think a lot of it has to do with they have never been given any attention and love and they don’t know what that’s like.

Along with a victim’s presumed risk-taking behaviors, the concept of a victim’s sexual property value may also influence LEOs perceptions. Sexual property value refers to the arbitrary value placed on certain groups of women who are seen as more valuable sexually and therefore more worthy of protection. Typically women are deemed more worthy of protection when they conform to gendered expectations as well as when they are viewed as either potential or current sexual property (i.e., young girls, virgins, or already married) (e.g., Myers and LaFree 1982; Tasca et al. 2012). Researchers have noted that a victim’s sexual property value may be

an extralegal factor that impacts an officer's perception of a crime (Myers and LaFree 1982). Women who are valuable as sexual property (i.e. married women) or those who are potentially valuable (i.e. young women, virgins) are also expected to conform to stereotypes based on gender in order to be worthy of protection (Myers and LaFree 1982). Whereas women who engage in risk-taking behaviors, particularly young women who are outside the authority of a parent or a spouse, may be viewed by some as a person whose sexual property value is diminished. This concept was a recurring theme among participants. Many officers alluded to a victim's sexual property value when discussing cases where victims engaged in risk-taking behaviors. The extralegal factors that led officers to view a victim as having a lessened sexual property value included running away from home, mental illness, and a history of abuse. Participants seemed to create a dichotomy between those who were real victims and those that appeared to play a role in their own victimization.

Thirty-eight-year-old investigator Scott Douglas from Northeast Mississippi said he believed that anyone could become a victim of sex trafficking, but traffickers have a specific type of potential victim they look for.

Investigator Douglas: They go for the girls that are vulnerable, that will do anything for attention. They were homeless girls, or girls that had, you know, mental issues, or abuse issues, or run away from home.

Similarly, when asked to provide a geographic location from which many victims originated, Investigator Henry answered by bringing up children who run away from home.

Chloe: So, when it happens in Memphis or Birmingham where do you think it's coming from? Do you think that that's local to that area?

Investigator Henry: I mean it's probably mind boggling how many underage kids run away because of either- they may have bad home life. They may not actually have had a bad home life. They just don't wanna listen to mama and daddy no more and follow the rules.

The victims described by Investigator Henry are those most likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors (e.g., running away.) As research notes, these are also victims that are less likely to elicit a serious response from law enforcement officials (LEOs) (LaFree 1981; Tasca et al. 2012). Fifty-six-year-old Chief Howard Russell of Northeast Mississippi also discussed this at length when asked where he believes victims of sex trafficking originate.

Chloe: So do you think that, you know, just in your opinion that most human trafficking in the United States is trafficking victims from other countries or do you think it's-

Chief Russell: I think a lot of is, but I also think you gotta lot of uhh younger people that are runaways that are in our nation. I mean thousands every year and they go to California or they go wherever looking for this glamor or whatever, freedom to get away.

Forty-six-year-old Trooper First Class (TFC) Nelson Little of Mississippi has extensive experience investigating sex trafficking cases, as well as experience in training other law enforcement officials throughout the state on the subject. TFC Little discussed how law enforcement officials do not take women seriously if they are believed to be engaging in risk taking behaviors such as sex work or drug abuse.

Chloe: People will see a prostitute and immediately condemn her, label her whatever, but conveniently forget she has clients. People paid for this.

TFC Little: Exactly. They don't see the- You know, again, you know, when you get in the southern states... It's- I'm not saying it's not the same in more liberal states, but when

you get to the conservative states, they automatically- They don't see the victim side of it. And you have officers even that are blind. They don't wanna look and say she could be a victim. They say, 'Well, she's a dope dealing prostitute. A crackhead.' That's what they see. Uhh but uh why is she that way? Did her boyfriend do that to her? Did her pimp make her that way? You know?

Perhaps most disturbing is how some participants described underage victims who are identified as sex workers. Underage individuals cannot consent to sex with adults and therefore cannot consent to working in the sex industry. It is important to understand the concept of survival sex, which is sex that is born out of an adverse environment where each of the perceived avenues open to an individual are all unwanted or unavailable. While participation in survival sex may occur frequently among those who are underage, this does not negate their status as a minor. Jordan Berry is a fifty-four-year-old school resource officer in central Alabama. After describing what commonalities existed among traffickers and trafficking situations, I asked SRO Berry if he believed these commonalities also existed in cases involving juveniles.

Chloe: So if a juvenile is found in that situation would that mean it's automatically trafficking?

SRO Berry: As long as you can prove they're not doing it on their own. If they are doing it for somebody else, then yeah. If they're part of a sex act and you can say they were doing it to benefit somebody else then that's gonna be trafficking. But if they're saying, 'I'm just out here having a good time with this guy.' You might then get the guy, john, on some charges. You know, something. Maybe.

Chloe: Even with juveniles? With children?

SRO Berry: Yeah.

A lack of training, or insufficient training related to sex trafficking, often contributes to a climate where officers use their own beliefs and assumptions to inform their policing decisions. Mississippi Trooper First Class (TFC) Nelson Little referred to his fellow officers when he put it this way, “Don’t just say, ‘someone else will figure it out.’ Don’t make it up as you go along.” Trafficking victims who are engaging in risk taking behaviors are typically perceived differently by LEOs than trafficking victims who are not seen as risk takers. While officers believe that human sex trafficking can happen to anyone, they assume that some victims are more responsible than others. Fifty-two-year-old Detective Gilbert Smith of Northeast Mississippi believed that he had a good understanding of who would likely be a sex trafficking victim, and how they might be responsible for their own entrapment.

Detective Smith: Most victims that you see of human trafficking are of a less desirable person. Now, there’s somebody for everybody. I believe that. What I say is a less desired person may be completely opposite for the next guy. So, there is a very narrow window that you will ever get the information from a human trafficking victim for them to portray themselves as a victim. Very short time frame. The chances of getting it are very slim. A lot of times they put themselves in these situations. It goes back to the same thing that I told you at the beginning. They say, ‘Why do I want to leave this? I get all the nice clothes I want, I get fixed up pretty, makeup, all these fine amenities that they give me, all the narcotics that I want. Why do I want to get out of it?’

Detective Smith said he had attended some training on issues related to human sex trafficking but had not been to a class or seminar that exclusively covered the topic. He, however, like Detective Walters of Central Mississippi, was the main point of contact in his department for sex trafficking cases.

Another officer I interviewed seemed to share the views of Detective Smith. Fifty-seven-year-old Sergeant Fred Taggart from East Central Mississippi felt some victims of sex trafficking were, “asking for something to happen to them” if they behaved in a certain way.

Sergeant Taggart: Yeah, so... So I was in Europe for a while. I was a cop there. I'll tell you more about that later, but I seen 'em all the time. 'Course bein' a good ole southern boy, you know, I didn't know what they was at first. So I was at my hotel, at the bar there, and I smiled at this woman who was across from me. I said hello. Immediately she comes up to me. She starts talking. She's askin' me all kinds of questions. I end up figuring out she's a prostitute. She just came up to me straight away. Who does that? She ends up askin' for my room number so I, get this, (laughs) I give her some random number. Whoever the hell that was I'm sorry you had some random female come to your room. (Laughs)

Chloe: So... You just sent her to someone else's room? Do you know how old she was?

Sergeant Taggart: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah. Her age? No, no. I have no idea, but young. I was younger then too. Not as young as her though. But who the hell does that, you know? You come up to a stranger, a man you've never met before, and plan to meet him? That's why all this happens [sex trafficking.] You get these females that will approach anybody. They say they're homeless and need money for food or they say their car broke down. Then they wonder why they're in somebody's basement. I could've done all kinds of shit to her and all because she just came up to me.

Chloe: Uh huh. If you didn't, I suppose the person's room you sent her to could have as well.

Sergeant Taggart: Yeah! You see what I mean. You get it.



It seemed lost on Sergeant Taggart, who has worked in law enforcement for over twenty years, that he could have sent a young woman to the same fate that he accused her of setting herself up for.

In discussing the impact of training on LEOs' perceptions, TFC Little provided insight into this issue when he described how officers often assume that the victim is responsible for their own victimization.

Chloe: I mean I've heard of stuff before where you know officers are arresting prostitutes that have been sexually assaulted.

TFC Little: Yeah, yeah. That's another thing. Officers are blind. It goes back to what I've been saying. The victim. You know she's a prostitute and that's her line of work, that's what she does, she doesn't deserve to be raped. They don't see that victim side. They, again, just have a wall separating them and they won't move around it. You know, that's where the training is gonna come in. It's gonna break that wall down so they can realize, 'Hey she is a prostitute but she was raped.' Doesn't matter. Help her.

His frustration with his peers was evident throughout our time together. TFC Little often reiterated how attitudes could only be changed through more training and not by simply acknowledging that sex trafficking "can happen to anyone."

TFC Little: But again the training- The training is gonna be the biggest thing. In my opinion, in doing criminal interdiction and working in the human smuggling side and then the human trafficking side, that uh the officers just got to be able to recognize it. The bulk of them don't. They have no idea. All they say is it can happen to anyone. And? And?! They're so focused on, you know, all your departments are stat driven so to speak.

You know, there's no written quotas or anything like that, but they want to see the officers out enforcing laws.

Officers' perceptions about trafficking are also strongly influenced by the belief that criminals are the only individuals who would not self-identify, not cooperate, nor want law enforcement help. This belief is commonly seen when discussing sex trafficking and immigrant populations, when officers assume that immigrants have something to hide (i.e. their citizenship status or criminality). When I asked Investigator Scott Douglas of Northeast Mississippi about sex trafficking occurring in his jurisdiction he immediately brought up what type of people he believed to be the traffickers and the trafficking victims. His response echoes a commonly held assumption, that immigrant communities should be viewed with suspicion since they could be hiding their criminal behaviors.

Investigator Douglas: You know I've actually questioned, well, I'm gonna say there's some uh ethnic restaurants here that if somebody wanted to go into and say, 'Y'all are basically- This meets human trafficking,' you could do it.

Chloe: So, let's say you went to [local Mexican restaurant] for lunch today. There's human trafficking there? What happens to those people if you did say it was human trafficking?

Investigator Douglas: Uhhh (long pause) I would hope that some state agencies would come in and help us out. (Laughs) Uhh I'm not sure. Not sure.

Fifty-six-year-old Chief Howard Russell from Northeast Mississippi discussed the possibility of having immigrant victims of trafficking in his community.

Chief Russell: We see 'em. We have 'em here, the Hispanic, the Orientals. You'll see them in your communities. Now how do they survive here- and we see them here today.

What are they doing to survive? They're not speaking our language and so we don't have enough- mean I guess they got friends or people that's brought them here that can speak to them, but you know we don't see them out interacting in the public. They don't ever see them at Walmart, they don't ever see them out. They don't ever see them walking around the house when they're out patrolling that neighborhood. They're always inside the house. What are they doing? Could be this [sex trafficking.]

Both of the immigrant families who own these establishments are well known in the community at large.

Trooper First Class (TFC) Little reiterated the importance of training officers to see past a presumed criminal status and look for signs of victimization. He describes how important it is for officers to set personal beliefs and assumptions aside in order to get the full picture.

Chloe: I mean I would imagine that even though this person [immigrant] is technically illegal they would still need victim services.

TFC Little: Oh without a doubt. Without a doubt. Without a doubt. That part comes first. Always. And that's what we tell everybody, just like the prostitution stuff a second ago, you know if you get your Southern Baptists (laughs) so to speak who-who, you know, who see a prostitute at the local hotel. They're very one sided. They see a prostitute and that's it. You gotta, from the law enforcement side, you gotta look at it from both sides. Yeah, she is involved in illegal activity of a sexual nature, but is she being forced into it? Is she okay? If yes... then that's not my business. So with immigrants, you know, it's the same thing. Are they willingly with whoever they're with? Do they want to be here just not with this person? You know, you just gotta start piecing the puzzle together. Get a full picture or are you missing parts? You know the human smuggling and the human

trafficking are similar, but like I said. Not the same, not the same. Although, you know, smuggling a lot of times leads to sex trafficking.

Investigator Earl Frederick of Southeast Alabama has received supplemental training related to immigrant communities and sex trafficking. He realized that some commonly held assumptions may not only be incorrect but can also have negative consequences for the communities they police. In reference to his department's view of their large immigrant jurisdiction, the Investigator stated, "I do think we believe they keep to themselves." Participants in this study demonstrated that an officer's perception of sex trafficking can be greatly influenced by the training they have received. A lack of training or insufficient training in this area may lead officers to, as Trooper First Class Little said, "make it up as [they] go along," relying on their own flawed beliefs and assumptions which can result in ineffective and potentially negative policing decisions related to the proper identification and subsequent treatment of sex trafficking victims.

### **Victim Identification and Treatment**

Victim identification and treatment is best illustrated by the actions of individual officers in real world situations. Law enforcement officials' (LEOs) understanding of sex trafficking shapes their interaction with potential trafficking victims in the field and is influenced by their own beliefs and perceptions of the crime and of the victim. Officers often have a great deal of discretion in their policing decisions. Chief among these decisions is whether to arrest or to assist. The decision to assist an individual is typically based on an officer's belief that victims of crimes want to report and identify their victimization, that victims are willing to cooperate in the investigation, and will agree to change or alter their lifestyle if it seems to have contributed to their victimization. The decision to assist an individual also hinges on the belief that criminals

are the only individuals who would not self-identify, not cooperate, nor want law enforcement help.

As previously noted in a case involving Edward Walters, a forty-nine-year-old detective located in Central Mississippi, the issue of victim self-identification was raised. He described a domestic violence call he responded to at a local hotel. Although he suspected the woman was being kept against her will, he did not offer her assistance.

Detective Walters: Located a female who was upset. She'd been staying there and uh we went to knock on the door and the male was in there too. He was very uncooperative and she was also very uncooperative. There was a lot of things that... both said that were obviously not true. And uh the girl- when I say girl, she was an adult in this situation I guess. I think. She had no phone of her own. She had no ID of her own. She had no car. She had no cash. She also had some old marks on her. Some new marks. Looked like she was... It was apparent that she was being beaten and uh I tried to uh talk to her. Find out what was really going on. He wouldn't let her say much of anything. I suspected a lot of it was going on, but sometimes you needed to hear it from their own mouth before you can do anything.

As noted earlier, Detective Walters was well within his authority to have made an arrest of the male individual at the scene or have at least detained him for further questioning.

Although the detective encountered a woman in obvious distress, he did not offer her assistance because she did not identify herself as a victim of a crime. Instead, when presented with an individual who had signs of physical abuse (i.e., marks on her body), and signs of being held against her will (i.e., no identification, money, or means of escape), he waited on her to cooperate and tell him what was going on. When the victim did not do this within the time period

that Detective Walters was at the hotel, the domestic violence aspect of this call was over. The man involved, her abuser, was arrested for having pit bulls in the hotel. Even when Detective Walters saw her injuries, and then saw her abuser become aggressive with her, no action was taken in regards to the domestic violence call.

Detective Walters: I wound up arresting him for having uh a pit bull in the hotel and when I was arresting him, he was uh real... (long pause) I-I guess assertive about what... he wanted done with his property. He had a lot of cash in his pocket and he wanted us to give her some cash, but not very much. He didn't want her to have any. Only some so that she could bond him out.

When describing sex trafficking cases he has worked, Detective Walters discussed how he knew each situation involved trafficking. He explained that there are clear signs that indicate a person is a trafficking victim, including the lack of personal identification such as a driver's license, passport, or photo ID. Further, he noted that victims will not have tools to help them escape like money, a cell phone, or their own transportation. A victim's behavior, he also explained, would be that of someone who is "terrified and brainwashed." Detective Walters explained how these clues, or warning signs, prove that trafficking has occurred under the requirements of the law (i.e. under force, fraud, or coercion.) During his interview, the detective specifically discussed ways to identify sex trafficking cases. However, he ignored these warning signs in the case that he had just described. For example, he said that, "Some of the things you look for in both situations is the uh the person uh losing control or having uhh... items kept, like passport, driver's license, umm by their perpetrator." He went on to describe how victims are controlled by their abusers and may be denied access to a phone, a car, or money. Each of these things was present in the case he described, but because the victim was "uncooperative," her

perpetrator was arrested for having dogs in a hotel room rather than a more serious crime like that of sex trafficking.

Victims who are reticent about cooperating or seeking help from law enforcement are more likely to experience negative outcomes. Patrick Irving, a forty-year-old police captain from Alabama, explained that he regularly uses his discretion to make the decision to arrest or assist.

Captain Irving: There are a few crimes where we are forced to make an arrest, but um in this particular case, it's always going to be in the best interest of the victim. And in this case it will always be the young lady, and I'm generically saying young lady, because statistically it most commonly is who is forced into this industry. So, we have made arrests uh um for young ladies who are promoting prostitution, but more cases than not, we have chosen not to. Um, but only if they are willing and open to receive our help.

Captain Irving's answer shows that when making the decision to arrest or assist victims, he usually errs on the side of assisting them. However, he also indicates that victims have a responsibility to cooperate in order to receive this assistance.

In another instance related to victim self-identification and cooperation, SRO Jordan Berry from Southeast Alabama, describes an organization where he also works as a security guard. He explained that victims at this facility are able to receive services, including a place to live, job training, and substance abuse help. When asked about the process victims must go through to stay at this facility, SRO Berry told me that victims had to meet certain requirements.

Chloe: I know a lot of places have to go through a pretty intense vetting process when accepting victims. If they've had any drug charges they won't be accepted in and things of that nature.

SRO Berry: Their only requirement is the person has to uh admit that they are a trafficking victim.

Chloe: Admit they're a trafficking victim?

SRO Berry: Yeah, they have to admit that to get any help. So, yeah. Uh, they have to say, 'Yes, I am a victim.' Uh, you know. They are a victim, but they don't see that a lot.

Chloe: They don't see they're a victim? Why is that?

SRO Berry: Uh just control from the pimps maybe, but they think that's easier than uh... than having a real job, you know.

When victims appear to be engaging in risk taking behaviors, officers are far more likely to arrest than to assist. 46 year old Trooper First Class (TFC) Nelson Little of Mississippi discussed how law enforcement officials are less likely to assist women if they appear to be sex workers or if they are abusing drugs.

TFC Little: There's a case in uh out in Colorado that we talk about during our presentation where you got a boyfriend and a girlfriend. He looks like a normal guy. She looks like a normal girl, but he trades her. He's actually a heroin addict and he trades his girlfriend to three guys. They run up to Colorado for the weekend and just assault her. Just [do] everything [to her.] Well, one of the three guys gets a guilty conscience. It ends up, he carries her to the police department there, confesses. He says, 'We traded narcotics for this female right here.' You know what the police department did? Took the female, gave her right back to the boyfriend. 'Here's your girlfriend back.' All they saw in her was a drug addict who went with three guys to get money for the weekend. They gave her right back to the boyfriend who sold her for narcotics.

Chloe: Who was also a drug addict.



TFC Little: Exactly. Who was a heroin addict.

When victims are perceived as sex workers, even if they are underage, they are still less likely to receive assistance. Detective Edward Walters described a case involving a 17 year old girl.

Detective Walters: One case where the uh the offender was about four or five years older than the victim and he was kinda like her boyfriend, but at the same time he was pimping her out and she had been actually sexually assaulted by him when she was twelve and put out on the streets when she was twelve. She was seventeen when we found out about this part of it though. She didn't think that she was a victim, which is pretty terrible. Umm.

Course there's another part of this as far as you- there's another dynamic. You've got the victim, you've got the pimp, but you've also got the john. In this case we had a john that we used as an informant to get the pimp. We found out that he had gone and met her at a hotel and kind of had a relationship with her. He was a 60 something year old white male.

Chloe: What happens in this example or in others to those johns? Are they arrested if they act as informants and charged or what happens?

Detective Walters: In the case that I investigated he was never charged because he never admitted to actually having intercourse with the girl. I'm not sure if he was ever really telling the truth. He had a story that because of his age he couldn't have sex. He actually kind of had a weird crush on her and it was kinda like he had seen her several times throughout her life. He'd even gone to Memphis to see her and uh and uh he had given her a lot of money and it was kind of like his pretend girlfriend. Uhh it was kind of pathetic. Umm... (long pause) and he didn't- I don't think he even thought about it or it crossed his mind about her being twelve when this happened.

Not only was this victim described in terms associated with being a prostitute, (i.e. “pimping her out,”) she was also allowed by law enforcement to be raped as a way to catch her pimp. After this instance, the man who assaulted her, used by police as an informant, was not arrested or charged with a crime because he did not admit to that specific act. However, he did admit to sexual acts with the victim on multiple occasions throughout her childhood since she was 12 years old when he first assaulted her. There is no statute of limitations on this type of sexual assault in Mississippi and Alabama, especially where minors are concerned. While her feelings towards her captor, either that of affection or fear, are unknown, her status as a minor being held captive by an adult and forced to perform sexual acts makes her a victim of sex trafficking.

TFC Little also expressed his frustration about a trafficking case involving a juvenile victim. Because the young woman was two weeks from her eighteenth birthday, TFC Little stated that he received push back from other officers who felt a charge of prostitution was warranted even though the young woman was in the company of two much older adults (family members) who had been routinely selling her for drugs and money as they drove across the country.

TFC Little: I had to get child protective services to actually come in and take custody of her and she was placed into a foster system. But, that’s not always what they want to do. They see she’s almost 18, they’re not thinking about trying to prove what happened to her before she was 18. They see, ‘Oh, she’s of legal age. It’s prostitution.’ Once they’re of legal age, and they’re put into this, they’re brought down here to [large area festival] and they’re prostituting them... it’s-it’s you know.. A lot of people look at that, look at that one sided. ‘She’s a prostitute.’

TFC Little went on to say that it would be simple to prosecute this case as sex trafficking even if the victim he found was older than 18. He discussed how, since there was no statute of limitations concerning this crime, officers should work to go back as far as possible into the victim's trauma to uncover "the dynamics of how it first happened." In doing so, officers can help adult victims seek justice for trauma that occurred recently, but also in their youth, which would allow their perpetrator(s) to be sentenced more harshly.

When meeting with African American Detective Christina Gordon from Alabama, I asked her about sex trafficking cases involving juveniles. While she had seen a few of these cases, throughout our interview she referred to them only as prostitution cases involving prostitutes.

Chloe: Well, when juveniles are in these situations are they treated like victims and maybe sent back to their homes if they came from a good home? Do they have to go through a court process and tried for anything?

Detective Gordon: Usually they'll go through DHR [Department of Human Resources]. They'll go to juvenile court, and they'll see about figuring out how to deter this behavior. The only time they're really not treated like victims are if other crimes are also involved. Like if they're stealing or they hurt somebody. Like that.

Chloe: What happens if they were forced to commit that crime by the person they're with?

Detective Gordon: That they run off with?

Chloe: Umm, yeah. Like you mentioned the young girl earlier who didn't really cooperate, in a situation like that, to use her case as an example, what happens to the person they're with?

Detective Gordon: It's pretty hard when you don't have information on who's doing what. It's pretty hard. There's not much that can be done cause it is hard to do it then. However, when some of them get tired and then tell, that person is then arrested and charged. Formally charged. The investigation is done to make sure that there is truth behind the allegations. It'll just be a charge of promoting prostitution, and being uh well, I think there's maybe another charge, but I'd have to look it up. There's something else involving child pornography. It could be child pornography.

Chloe: When the victims get tired?

Detective Gordon: Yeah, I mean we don't know who is telling the truth at this point. They've been lying up until they name names so they've got to be treated like any other person we arrest for prostitution.

Research has noted the prevalence of conflating sex work and sex trafficking. As a result, sex workers are frequently caught up in trafficking investigations. Their illegal activity is typically the focus of police attention and this criminality is routinely the only issue that factors into officers' decisions regarding whether to arrest or assist. Even sex workers who have been brutally victimized are often, themselves, jailed or fined, while sex workers who are not trafficking victims are forced to say that they are or face jailtime as well.

In Northeast Mississippi, Detective Smith's interrogation of two black women offers a perspective on an officer's interaction with sex workers. Detective Smith explained that one woman was a prostitute, while the other, her friend, drove her to meet her clients. In his mind, this was a clear case of sex trafficking. Neither woman said they were being forced into this activity, nor were they coerced or deceived into performing sex acts for pay. He described how since neither woman would cooperate, "Both of 'em are now involved. Both of 'em criminals."

Because he did not believe consensual sex work occurred, both women were now facing charges of sex trafficking. When speaking with him about other cases he has worked, Detective Smith told me he had worked over twenty sex trafficking cases in the last few years. However, none had made it past a grand jury.

TFC Little felt he knew why most departments were unsuccessful in getting sex trafficking convictions for their cases. Aside from relying too much on victim cooperation, he believed attorneys and investigators were too ill-informed of how best to present the crime of sex trafficking to a jury.

TFC Little: Well I hate to say it, but there's a political motivation to prosecuting these cases and to bringing awareness for a political agenda versus doing the right thing and prosecuting to help save a life and protect a victim. They know trafficking is a hot topic. It's all over the media, but they don't know anything about it. Most people always relate it to prostitution. And grand juries, when you start talking about prostitution, will shy away from 'em, the victims. DA's will shy away from 'em. They realize this isn't how they thought it was gonna be and it falls flat. They go after everybody, all the wrong people. They don't take the time to understand what is truly happening. They need votes in so to speak.

Chloe: So, do you think it's easier on investigators and attorneys to just hand out charges and sentences for prostitution than to build a sex trafficking case?

TFC Little: Easier on them, absolutely. Absolutely. And I'll tell you something else. They don't know how easy it could be to just show a little more compassion, spend a little more time getting to know these victims. A case will come together if you spend your time on it.

TFC Little, in working with the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation (MBI), feels he has had great success in getting his sex trafficking cases presented and prosecuted. Of the cases he and the criminal interdiction team he works with have investigated, he stated that, “one hundred percent of everything is prosecuted” as sex trafficking.

However, in order to have a trafficking case successfully resolved, an officer first has to be able to correctly identify a person as a victim. An officer’s perception typically indicates that a victim is either someone who self-identifies as a victim and has no issues cooperating with police to build their case, or that a victim is someone who does not self-identify initially but may need extensive victim services (including rebuilding trust in police) in order to be able to cooperate. Important to the issue of victim identification is the following question: does the treatment a victim receives from law enforcement contribute to the victim’s decision to self-identify and cooperate? Research indicates that the treatment victims receive from law enforcement is, in fact, one of the greatest contributing factors in their decision to cooperate (e.g. Hoyle et al. 2011; Logan et al. 2009; and Srikantiah 2007). At times, this treatment is notoriously bad. For example, in speaking with investigator Earl Frederick, a 41 year old officer working in the internal affairs division at a department in Southeast Alabama, he discussed the large number of immigrants in his community. When I asked if he felt this population was more vulnerable to being trafficked, he expressed how concerned he was for their safety.

Investigator Frederick: Unfortunately, I’ve certainly worked a few cases where officers have been involved in misconduct with immigrants because they thought they’d be easy victims. It’s been in the news that our agency has had a couple officers prey on immigrants financially because they generally carry large sums of cash. They were victims in that situation, but they were probably, most likely, victims of something else.

Now, we won't ever know. I do think that we believe they keep to themselves. But, our training tells us through seminars and things that there is some of that [sex trafficking] going on in those communities.

Immigrant and migrant victims may be among the most at risk in trafficking investigations of being mislabeled or misidentified by law enforcement. Their options for assistance are often complicated by conflicting laws, policies and jurisdictions. An immigrant or a migrant victim's fear of deportation or their distrust of law enforcement officials may lead officers to view them as uncooperative, combative, or merely as criminal. In speaking with officer Mariana Arias, I learned why many immigrants are hesitant to report victimization to law enforcement. Officer Arias is a Hispanic woman from Mexico who has a great deal of law enforcement experience working with immigrant and migrant populations. As an officer, as well as an immigrant herself, Officer Arias was able to add a unique perspective to this issue. When I asked what happened to trafficking victims who were also in the United States illegally, she described the treatment they receive.

Officer Arias: What I've seen is they get deported again. They get deported back. They say it's because it's so many, it's so many that cross over. Well, another good example, I have a nephew and a niece that work in the detention offices to the border patrol. Where, when they cross over, the little kids are... I don't know if you- I'm pretty sure you saw the news where you have the kids caged and all that. Well, that's where my nephew and my niece work. At two facilities. If they're minors that's where they get put at until it's time to deport them. They do all the paperwork, fingerprint them, and everything that gets involved before they deport them. They don't get help.

Chloe: There's not like a victim services something that they would go through?

Officer Arias: Oh no.

Chloe: So presumably that 17 year old woman who was raped by three men here in the States went to that place where minors are kept and then was processed.

Officer Arias: And then deported.

Officer Arias often felt that she was hindered from helping victims like this young woman because of the views that other officers held in her department. She said, “With law enforcement, here too, they want to see something specific. They’re not looking for a victim, you know. Not looking at all.” When I asked Officer Arias what she would like other officers to know about handling cases with illegal victims, she spoke passionately, tearing up as we talked.

Chloe: Do you have anything from a law enforcement perspective, and as a woman and an immigrant, that you wish people knew about this or learned in training?

Officer Arias: I wish people would be aware of that [referring to illegal victims needing help]. And how to deal with it when they do approach, or have a traffic stop where that have all illegals in there. Because yes, they are here illegally, but you don’t know what they just went through. They went through so much that yes, I understand you don’t want them here. I know they’re breaking the law. I know that, but (long pause) We are human beings.

Chloe: Exactly. You are. They are. And they’re also victims of a crime.

Officer Arias: Yes, right. Yes, they’re not from here, but they went through something so... I just wish there was more training on that. Where they could have more training, more knowledge. Like I said, I know you don’t want them here, but for once try to set that aside and be more compassionate of what they just went through. Just try to, you know, try to be understanding. Because the first thing that we see is they’re here breaking



the law. You believe they shouldn't be here, but on the other hand they just went through something you don't want to go through. As a human being who wants to be raped? Who wants to know you're getting sent somewhere to be sold as a prostitute? I don't think there's enough training out there and I feel there should be. Because it does exist. We are out here. It's hard, you know. They [fellow officers] make their comments saying, 'Well, they knew they shouldn't be here so there's consequences to everything.' They are human beings. We are human beings, and nobody would like to go through an experience like that.

Officer Arias, beyond her career in law enforcement, had experienced her share of tragedy with this subject. Over the years, she has listened to other officers, her peers, blame illegal victims for what happened to them because, in the minds of fellow officers, knowing the risks of coming to the United States somehow made these victims culpable for crimes committed against them. She opened up to me about her experiences with this unique type of victim blaming.

Officer Arias: My cousin (sighs).. Uh.. (long pause) She got killed.

Chloe: Mariana, oh I'm so sorry.

Officer Arias: It's-it's-it's... pretty bad. She was one trying to come over here. And they [those transporting her] raped her. (Long pause) Then (long pause) She... there was pieces. I was just like...I'm not even going to listen to this. I'm not even going to listen to it. (Long pause) But...they cut her up into pieces. They cut her up and threw her into a well. My um...My aunt had to go and identify and say yes that's her. But...it was...She was wanting to come over here and that's what happened. But that's what I mean. I've seen it. I know- even in my own family I have had it happen. So, to listen...to listen to

their [fellow officers] comments. They say the same things here, to me, that they said to my aunt.

For Officer Arias, working with peers who actively victim blame is not only part of the job, but is also extremely personal. She went on to discuss how isolated she felt, both in her day to day work within her department, but also when dealing with cases involving immigrants and migrants. She described how the atmosphere changed on her first day when she went outside for shift changes with her fellow officers.

Officer Arias: We went out, outside and waited to line up. They didn't accept me. We'd all stand out there in a circle to, you know, talk beforehand. There was no circle for me. They all stood around together but wouldn't really let me be involved.

Chloe: Has that changed now that you've been here for a little bit?

Officer Arias: A little. They treat me like a sister more now. But, the Chief, when he first hired me he warned me not to bust up any marriages. See, I'm still the only woman here. Being the only female without... (long pause.) It has not been easy.

Chloe: I hate that. I hate that for you. With your job, aside from the personal interactions, has the job been the same? Isolating?

Officer Arias: I love my job. I do. I love my job. I love helping people. But... I won't lie to you. It's been tough. They say all the time, all the things... 'Mariana, why don't you people come in the right way? This wouldn't happen to you people if you came in the right way.' Well, tell me what is the right way. What is the right way? 'Cause either way your attitudes won't change. Visa or not, legal or not, undocumented or not, what will change you?

Officer Arias felt she would be much better suited to working on a task force that dealt specifically with this crime and wanted to attend classes and seminars on sex trafficking. At her department, she had not been given the opportunity to attend any additional training courses even though she was regularly called out to assist officers when a trafficking situation was suspected to have occurred. The department, who would have to pay her overtime and pay another officer to cover her shift, felt they could not spare her for the day training she had asked to attend. Further, when she inquired about wanting to do more than a roadside interview with illegal victims, she was told they only initially need her because, “none of them speak English,” and she should just, “wait for ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] to take them.” As a result, Officer Arias said she tried to learn as much as she could about trafficking on her own as she was worried she might “mess something up” since she frequently encountered possible trafficking victims. She is currently teaching herself sign language because she realized, “if you put someone who uses it in handcuffs you have just restricted their communication.” Officer Arias continually showed she went above and beyond for potential victims, while her department seemed to discourage her initiative.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### **Recommendations**

In this project, I worked to understand what perceptions law enforcement hold about sex trafficking, and how those perceptions influence actions. I conducted interviews with law enforcement across Mississippi and Alabama to answer the research question: “How do law enforcement officials perceive sex trafficking and what does this mean for victim identification and treatment?” Participants’ responses show how important perceptions and attitudes towards victims are in influencing the identification and treatment of victims. These beliefs and perceptions contribute to how an officer uses discretion, which, in turn, has significant consequences for victims. Victims may experience negative treatment from officers which discourages them from cooperating with any current investigation and makes them less likely to report any subsequent victimization. Additionally, some victims may face criminal charges, while their abusers remain free.

I conclude this project with recommendations to improve the law enforcement response to sex trafficking. In this section, I address the concerns raised by officers, themselves, during my interviews. The following recommendations speak to law enforcement officers’ understanding of the crime, the role of law enforcement, protocol development, inter-departmental integration, and collaboration with other agencies. Lastly, I provide a recommendation for the media. These recommendations, while not exhaustive, are intended to

serve as a starting point for discussion of the unique needs of rural law enforcement in Mississippi and Alabama.

### **Law Enforcement and Sex Trafficking Training**

While many participants indicated they had worked sex trafficking cases or were familiar with the crime of sex trafficking, few reported they had received training related to the crime. Those that had received training still felt underprepared to deal with sex trafficking cases. The development of training and educational materials should, at a minimum, answer the following questions: How do I begin a sex trafficking investigation? What questions do I need to ask sex trafficking victims? At what point should I contact state and/or federal partners? What services exist for the different types of victims I encounter? Answering these questions will provide a strong foundation for updated training materials. Comprehensive materials should include a variety of trafficking case studies which contain diverse examples of trafficking scenarios involving a broad range of victim and perpetrator demographics and settings.

In addition to a lack of sufficient training, officers also discussed the issues that arise when they seek out additional training opportunities. Short staffing, departmental budget constraints and travel time out of the jurisdiction, were all cited as obstacles to attending supplemental training sessions. For these reasons, this study recommends that training be brought to individual cities and counties. Each county in the state of Mississippi and in Alabama should have an on-site training opportunity provided to the jurisdictions within their county. Further, this study highly recommends that this type of statewide standardized training manual and traveling education program be based on the current work undertaken by Trooper First Class (TFC) Nelson Little and the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation (MBI). The 16 hour course currently presented by TFC Little should form the core of the materials used to better educate

and prepare officers for sex trafficking identification and investigation. Using this curriculum as a model, a team of law enforcement personnel should be trained by TFC Little and the MBI to deliver this information to each county in Mississippi and Alabama. This standardization of methods and materials not only increases the number of officers exposed to sex trafficking training, but can also help streamline a coordinated response across jurisdictions, allowing each department, no matter size or location, the opportunity to learn the same material as their colleagues across both states.

### **The Role of Law Enforcement in Sex Trafficking Cases**

The role of local law enforcement is crucial in building a strong sex trafficking case. However, many participants seemed to be unclear about the exact nature of their role as well as what they should do to best help victims. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of updated information, investigative tools, and departmental support that they needed to correctly identify and investigate a sex trafficking case. Some officers discussed the difficulties they faced when working with a suspected victim, often citing a lack of victim cooperation as a reason the case did not progress successfully. Given these difficulties, it is important that law enforcement receive training related to the crime, but also learn how to interact with victims, understand their experiences, the role trauma plays on their behavior, and what resources exist to support the recovery.

Few participants were aware of how important their role is in supporting immigrant and migrant victims. For these victims, law enforcement play a crucial role in ensuring they are eligible to receive government resources such as a T Visa and federally funded benefits and social services. Training materials that are specific to this issue should provide detailed explanations of the process that officers must go through in order to ensure these services are

made available to victims that qualify. Partnering with organizations that work with sex trafficking victims, especially those that are immigrants and migrants, can be beneficial when developing victim focused training and educational materials. Additionally, the development and distribution of these materials can strengthen an important partnership between law enforcement and victim services organizations.

### **Developing Protocol**

While most officers cited a lack of training as a huge concern, officers also felt their departments did not have protocols or policies in place to effectively respond to the sex trafficking cases that they did encounter. Very few cases discussed by officers in this study actually resulted in a successful sex trafficking prosecution. For example, LEOs did not know at what point they should contact state or federal partners or what agencies existed that provided the most appropriate services for their victim(s). While some of these concerns should be addressed as part of the proposed standardized officer training and traveling education program, standardized protocols within each jurisdiction would increase the ability of departments throughout Mississippi and Alabama to efficiently identify and respond to the needs of sex trafficking victims.

Standardized protocols can also help the development of a more accurate and reliable system to record, track, and share data on sex trafficking cases. When officers are investigating cases in the same way, the data collected from these cases becomes more reliable (e.g. Farrell et al. 2010). The law enforcement response to crime is primarily driven by data as that determines the funding, tools, and training law enforcement receive. More systematic data collection and reporting at the local level is necessary to improve our understanding of the prevalence of sex trafficking, the needs of victims, and the success of prosecuting cases.

## **Integration**

While law enforcement may be aware that the crime of sex trafficking occurs in their jurisdiction, it does not seem that this awareness has translated into routine crime control. LEOs in this study, while concerned with their lack of training, were also unsure of how to practice proactive policing strategies to combat sex trafficking. Once officers receive training, integrating a sex trafficking response into a department's routine policing activity can make officers more confident in their ability to identify and respond to possible sex trafficking situations before they become widespread. Guidelines for integration may differ depending on the size and structure of a department, but should include information about regulating and preventing sites that enable exploitive labor practices, especially where immigrants and migrants are concerned. Further, increasing dialogue between law enforcement and local communities can greatly improve the response to sex trafficking cases.

## **Collaboration**

It is imperative that law enforcement agencies work together to address the crime of sex trafficking and the needs of victims. However, understanding that there are other organizations, outside of law enforcement and victim services agencies, that may also have a role to play is essential for effective collaboration efforts. Anti-trafficking organizations that also support the rights of sex workers can provide a wealth of knowledge and be important anti-trafficking partners. For example, in India, organizations like that of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) have worked to not only support the safety and freedom of sex workers, but have also aided in the fight to end sex trafficking. The anti-trafficking model created by the DMSC provides an excellent example of how government agencies can work together to combat sex trafficking from multiple avenues.



Their model includes information about conducting intake interviews and counselling services with those that want to enter the sex work industry in order to ensure that the applicant is of legal age and that this work is being undertaken of their own volition, without force, threat or coercion. The DMSC model also gives standardized guidelines for interviews and medical examinations. It recommends maintaining extensive documentation, including photographs, of rescued victims, in order to ensure that victims receive immediate and long-term access to services that will aid in their recovery (DMSC 2017). Organizations like this have had great success in supporting sex workers and sex trafficking victims (Kempadoo 2012). However, this type of partnership, working with and aiding organizations like that of the DMSC, can only happen when sex work is decriminalized. Therefore, its application to anti-trafficking efforts in the United States is limited.

### **The Media**

Media outlets should work to improve the accuracy of their anti-trafficking message. Media campaigns designed to educate the public should include red flags and warning signs such as individuals lacking identification, money, or transportation. Further, these campaigns should explain the differences between immigrants and migrants traveling consensually to the United States and those that become entrapped once arriving here. Describing exploitative labor practices and detailing information about sites that often enable this type of entrapment can better educate the public on the realities of sex trafficking. Media campaigns should work to end, not to perpetuate, misperceptions and stereotypes about trafficking. Chief among these are the misconceptions that sex trafficking victims fit a specific type, that sex traffickers have a typical method of operating and all use the same tactics, and finally, the fallacy that sex trafficking primarily exists in metropolitan areas. Media campaigns that utilize graphic sexualized

depictions of young women also reinforce stereotypes and limit the public's perception of the crime. A broader view of who can become a victim of trafficking as well as an acknowledgement that a variety of trafficking scenarios exist would better serve to combat this crime.

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APPENDIX A  
SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## Sample Interview Schedule

1. Gender
2. Race
3. Age
4. Years working for Police/Sheriff's Department
5. Years worked as an officer before time at current Police/Sheriff's Department
6. Year you went to a police academy
7. Where did you go to a police academy?
8. What was your training like?
  - a. Was it insufficient or do you feel it was very thorough?
  - b. Do you feel that you learned enough through training or what should you have learned more of?
  - c. Did you learn anything about human trafficking while in the academy?
  - d. Did you learn anything about prostitution while in the academy?
9. Does your department require you to go to the academy?
  - a. What supplemental training have you had if you haven't been to an academy?
10. Role in the police department
11. What type of area do you patrol when you go out on patrol?
12. How often do you make violent crime arrests?
13. What was your most recent crime arrest?
  - a. If it wasn't a violent crime arrest, can you tell me about your most reason violent crime arrest?

14. How would you describe your interactions with the public?
  - a. Can you give me an example of a time you felt respected and disrespected when interacting with the public?
15. How would you describe your interactions with those you arrest?
  - a. Do you see more arrests for one crime over another in the area you patrol?
16. Prostitution questions
  - a. How often have you seen this crime in your area?
  - b. How often have you made prostitution arrests?
  - c. Can you discuss a time you arrested someone for prostitution?
  - d. Can you describe something you see a lot when dealing with prostitutes?
  - e. What kind of questions did you ask the prostitute?
  - f. What kind of questions did you ask the person they were with?
17. Human Sex Trafficking questions
  - a. How often have you seen this crime in your area?
  - b. How often have you made human sex trafficking arrests?
  - c. Can you discuss a time you arrested someone for sex trafficking
  - d. What is something you see a lot when dealing with sex trafficking
  - e. Can you describe what you see among victims of sex trafficking?
  - f. Can you describe what you see among perpetrators of sex trafficking?
  - i. How do other crimes overlap with sex trafficking arrests?
  - j. What kind of questions did you ask the victim?
  - k. What kind of questions did you ask the perpetrator?

18. Given the current political climate, how do you feel our current immigration policies are?

Too much? Not enough?

- a. What do you feel is the biggest issue associated with immigration?
- b. How are drugs and/or trafficking a concern?

APPENDIX B  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

## Recruitment Email

I am a graduate student at Mississippi State University in the Sociology/Criminology department. As part of my master's thesis, I am conducting interviews with officers and law enforcement officials about their perceptions of and experiences with human sex trafficking. I am writing to ask you if you, or any officers you know, would be willing to participate in this research project. If you choose to do so, you can choose where and when the interview will take place. Interviews will last between 45 and 90 minutes depending on how much you choose to share. Unless you object, interviews will be audio recorded. Interviews are confidential, with no identifying information being linked to responses. Only myself and my academic advisors will have access to the data. I will raffle off a \$50 Walmart gift card at the end of the data collection. If you are willing to participate, please let me know by responding to this email. I really appreciate your time and hope you consider helping me with this research project.



APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## **Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research for Exempt Research**

Researcher(s): Chloe Parker, Graduate Student, Mississippi State University

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to understand law enforcement officials' and police officers' perceptions and experiences with human sex trafficking. This research study will involve interviews with up to twenty law enforcement officials and police officers.

Eligibility: If you are 18 years of age or older, are an active duty police officer or law enforcement official in a police department or sheriff's department in Mississippi or Alabama, and have completed training at a police academy or department program, you are eligible to participate in this study.

Procedures: If you participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take about 45 to 90 minutes. Interviews will be at a date, time, and location of your choosing. You will be asked a series of questions about your training, your experiences, and your perceptions of crimes, including human sex trafficking. Unless you have an objection, your interview will be audio recorded.

Guarantee of Confidentiality: Your interview will take place with full confidentiality. You may stop the interview at any time, or you can decline to be audio taped at all and still participate in the interview. Your name and identifying information will not be connected in any way to your responses in this study. Identifiers will be removed from the written transcription of your interview and audio recordings will be erased after transcription. Only Chloe and her academic advisors will have access to the data.

Risk and Discomfort: Participation in the study may involve possible distress and/or anxiety from answering questions. In addition, you may face loss of privacy and employability risk if others overhear your conversation or find out about your participation in this research.

Benefits: You may opt to provide your contact information for a raffle for a single fifty-dollar Walmart gift card. The winner will be chosen at random after all interviews are completed. This research will also give you a chance to share your thoughts on and experiences with crime. Both policing and law enforcement communities will benefit from the knowledge gained.

Questions: If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Chloe Parker at [cp1218@msstate.edu](mailto:cp1218@msstate.edu).

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, express concerns or complaints, request information, or offer input, please feel free to contact the MSU Research Compliance Office by phone at 662-325-2994, by email at [irb@research.msstate.edu](mailto:irb@research.msstate.edu), or on the web at <http://orc.msstate.edu/humansubjects/participant/>.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date

\*The MSU HRPP has granted an exemption for this research. Therefore, a formal review of this consent document was not required.