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The Role of Social Media in Human Trafficking Victimization

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by
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Abstract

The Role of Social Media in Human Trafficking Victimization. Alicia Marie Terwilliger, 2021: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: human trafficking, social media, victimization, forced labor, debt bondage, organ harvesting, sexual exploitation, pimps, johns

Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, and receipt of people. Humans are one of the only global commodities that can be sold and used repeatedly (Jones et al., 2007), helping to make trafficking a multi-billion-dollar industry worldwide. There are several types of trafficking, including forced labor, debt bondage, organ harvesting, and sexual exploitation. Often, trafficking includes threats, the use of force, coercion, abduction, and fraud for exploitation, labor, harvested organs, or sex. Human trafficking occurs domestically and across international borders, with over 45 million victims globally (Bonilla & Mo, 2019). Every state in the United States is affected by human trafficking. Victims can be any age, gender, race, or nationality, and are often misled and coerced into servitude and modern-day slavery. They are mentally and physically manipulated and left with the belief they have no chance of escape. Those with low income, low education levels, and high debt are more likely to become targets of traffickers (Mo, 2019; Colby, 2011). Young people are also more likely to become trafficking victims, as they tend to be more gullible and naïve (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019).

The lack of awareness of human trafficking, coupled with the increase in technology and social media has facilitated the increase of exploited victims. There are currently over 4.66 billion people who use the Internet and more than 4.2 billion social media users worldwide (Kemp, 2021). The large number of social media users and the nearly universal presence of social media allows human traffickers to recruit and exploit victims to whom they would not previously have had access. Social networking sites, although not inherently harmful, allow traffickers the ability to recruit and exploit victims anonymously with very little risk of being discovered (Kunze, 2010). Individuals who spend greater amounts of time on social media sites are more at risk of becoming human trafficking victims, as they are able to be contacted by anonymous traffickers to whom they would typically not have access without social media. Young social media users are also at higher risk of human trafficking victimization than older users because they spend more time on social media than older users and are more likely to share personal information about themselves with traffickers. This willingness to share private information with predators online makes them easier targets for human traffickers. Traffickers take advantage of young social media users and groom them to gain their trust and, eventually, isolate them from their friends and family and manipulate them (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019).

The research conducted in this study reveals a need for increased education and awareness regarding the dangers and risks of social media use, especially by younger users. Increased awareness and precautions in social media use are critical to reducing the threat of human trafficking victimization in social media users.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Human trafficking, or modern-day slavery, is a multi-billion-dollar industry that affects countries worldwide. It is estimated there are over 45 million victims of human trafficking globally (Bonilla & Mo, 2019), and the United States alone was home to nearly 11,500 trafficking cases in 2019 (Polaris, 2019). Worldwide, it is estimated the industry has generated nearly $150 billion ("The Facts," 2018), with victims, perpetrators, and consumers consisting of all genders, races, ages, and nationalities. Human trafficking is the third largest profitable endeavor in the world, only after illegal weapons and drugs (Stone, 2005). Human traffickers make "more money than Google, Nike and Starbucks combined" (Wright, 2013, p. 99). The reason human trafficking has such massive financial implications is because of the unique commodity it sells – people. Unlike drugs, which cannot be sold once they are used, humans are reusable. Because humans are one of the only commodities that can be resold repeatedly, the profitability of human trafficking is massive (Latonero, 2011). For example, it is estimated a sex trafficking victim can be sold up to forty times in one single day ("Sex Trafficking," 2012). Traffickers consider human beings one of the only global commodities that can be sold and used repeatedly (Jones et al., 2007), and the increased value of trafficked humans is quickly being realized.

Nature of the Research Problem

The lack of awareness of human trafficking, coupled with the increasing use of social media, creates a hotbed for human traffickers to lure victims. Nearly 90% of 18- to 29-year-olds use some form of social media (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Further, 95% of teenagers have access to a smartphone, and 45% of teenagers report being online on a near-constant basis (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). The nearly ubiquitous presence of social media allows human traffickers to recruit and lure victims to whom they may never have previously had access. In a

survey of human trafficking survivors, Polaris discovered 26% of participants were exploited by their traffickers via their own personal social media accounts, and over 75% of survivors used internet platforms while they were being trafficked (Polaris, 2018). Human traffickers use social media to recruit victims into commercial sex through a variety of ways, including posing as romantic interests, presenting bogus modeling jobs, and offering assistance to struggling individuals (Polaris, 2018).

Background and Significance

There are several ways by which traffickers advertise and exploit their victims, and one of the most popular is via the Internet and social media, as mobile devices are extremely prevalent, and nearly all traffickers use them to increase their trafficking business (Konrad et al., 2016). While human trafficking is not a new occurrence, the Internet is a fairly new resource for human traffickers to find and sell vulnerable individuals while simultaneously concealing their identities (Kunze, 2010). Research thus far has shown human traffickers often exploit their victims through the use of the Internet and social media; however, very little research has been conducted on the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization and recruitment. In fact, only one prior research study has focused on the role of social media in human trafficking, and it limited its participants to anti-trafficking professionals in Ohio (Kunz et al., 2018).

Despite increased attention on human trafficking in the United States, many states have seen only minimal developments in the fight against human trafficking. The actual number of trafficking victims and the financial implications of human trafficking are virtually unknown. Human trafficking researcher Mark Small has explained that because many states have "only recently passed legislation criminalizing human trafficking" (Kieve, 2015, para. 7), data collection regarding its prevalence is just now beginning. There is a gross lack of public

awareness regarding human trafficking in most states, allowing human trafficking to remain an extremely lucrative industry.

With the vast majority of teenagers having access to a smart phone and many being online on a near-constant basis, research must be conducted on the role social media plays in recruiting and grooming human trafficking victims. The research in this study will apply grounded theory to assist in developing a theoretical framework to explain the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization to, ultimately, assist in the development of proper precautions for potential human trafficking victims relating to their use of social media.

Barriers and Issues

The primary barrier to this study will be the inherently clandestine nature of human trafficking. Another barrier to this study includes the ethical considerations that must be made because of the topic's sensitive nature. When contemplating the ethical considerations of this study, the risk to the participants must be examined. While this research study will be designed with minimal risk for participants, it will be important to keep their identities confidential due to the inherently dangerous nature of human trafficking. To keep the participants' identities confidential, their names and other identifying information will not be requested or published. There will also be a potential for slight emotional risk to participants, as they will be asked to reflect on potentially risky and harmful behavior. To minimize this risk, participants will be able to withdraw from the study at any time. Only willing subjects will participate in the study. The results of the surveys will be kept on a password protected computer accessible only by the researcher.

Purpose Statement

The overall purpose of this study will be to examine the role social media plays in luring potential human trafficking victims. Ultimately, this study will seek to identify precautions potential human trafficking victims can take relating to their use of social media. The goal of this study will be to identify the role of social media in human trafficking victimization.

Definitions

Debt bondage: The act of workers borrowing large sums of money to cover the costs of their recruitment and transportation fees to be placed in jobs (U.S. Department of State [DOS], 2015).

Forced labor: Recruiting, harboring, providing, or obtaining people through force, coercion, or other deceptive means, for the purpose of compelling them to work (DOS, 2015).

Human trafficking: The illegal practice of procuring or trading in humans for the purpose of prostitution, forced labor, or other forms of exploitation (Dictionary.com, 2020).

Involuntary servitude: Occurs when a worker believes he has no viable alternatives but to perform service work for a master because of the use or threats of physical force or when he uses fraud, deceit, or coercion to obtain a minor, immigrant, or mentally incompetent victim's services (Kim, 2007).

Organ harvesting: The practice of trafficking in people for the removal of their organs, the commercial sales of organs, the forcible removal of organs, and traveling across state borders to purchase organs (Columb, 2015).

Sexual exploitation: The recruitment and/or movement of someone within or across borders, through the abuse of power with the intention of forced sexual exploitation, commercial or otherwise (Winterdyk et al., 2012).

Social media: Websites and other online means of communication used by individuals to share information and develop contacts (Dictionary.com, 2020).

Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA): Created by the U.S. Department of State "to combat trafficking in persons, especially into the sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude, to reauthorize certain Federal programs to prevent violence against women, and for other purposes" (DOS, 2000, para. 6).

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

According to the U.S. Department of State (2018), human trafficking is the recruitment, harbor, transport, provision, or receipt of a person for compulsory labor, commercial sex acts, or other exploitation through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. The United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol expands the definition of human trafficking to include the means of abduction, deception, and abuse of power of another person to exploit him or her (Winterdyk et al., 2012).

While the actual definition of human trafficking varies among agencies, there are three basic elements that define human trafficking, as shown in the table below.

Table 1

Components of Trafficking in Persons

Process / The Act	**Way / Means**	**Goal / Purpose**
What is done?	How is it done?	Why is it done?
Recruitment	*Threat*	*Sexual exploitation*
or	*or*	*or*
Transportation	*Coercion*	*Forced labor*
or	*or*	*or*
Transferring	*Abduction*	*Involuntary servitude*
or	*or*	*or*
Harboring	*Fraud*	*Slavery*
or	*or*	*or*
Receiving	*Deceit*	*Removal of organs*
	or	
	Deception	
	or	
	Abuse of power	

(Winterdyk et al., 2012)

The first of these elements is the act, or what is done, and can include recruitment, transportation, transferring, harboring, or receiving individuals (Winterdyk et al., 2012). The second element of human trafficking is the method, or how it is done, and includes abuse, coercion, abduction, deceit, fraud, deception, and threats (Winterdyk et al., 2012). The final basic element of human trafficking is the goal, meaning why it is done, and can include forced labor, debt bondage, organ removal, involuntary servitude, prostitution, or sexual exploitation (Winterdyk et al., 2012). According to Winterdyk et al. (2012), "it is generally recognized that if one component from each of the three elements is present then the result is human trafficking" (p. 8).

Types

Human trafficking deprives victims of their rights and freedoms and causes physical and emotional harm. Although human trafficking can exist in many forms, there are four primary types of human trafficking. Those types are forced labor, debt bondage, organ harvesting, and sexual exploitation.

Forced Labor. Forced labor can encompass a wide range of activities, including recruiting, harboring, or obtaining people through force, coercion, or other deceptive means, for the purpose of compelling them to work (DOS, 2018). Once a person becomes a victim of forced labor, any prior consent to work for an employer is no longer relevant, as the employer takes the role of a trafficker and the employee becomes a trafficking victim (DOS, 2018). Victims are often recruited into forced labor through deception and end up working as slaves in repressed conditions and labor-intensive positions.

The estimated numbers of forced labor victims vary widely. For instance, one source estimates there are over 12 million people currently working as international and domestic labor

trafficking victims (Kunze, 2010); whereas, another source estimates the number of victims can reach as high as 30 million (End Slavery Now, 2015). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] (2020), forced labor comprises about 18% of human trafficking. According to the DOS (2015), there are specific industries that have a higher likelihood of global labor trafficking, including agriculture, construction, mining, textile manufacturing, transportation, forestry, healthcare, and hospitality. Other common labor trafficking industries include sweatshops and restaurants (Ngwe & Elechi, 2012). Labor trafficking often includes domestic and field laborers and other physical labor jobs that are "referred to as the 3-D jobs: dangerous, dirty, and degrading" (Winterdyk et al., 2012, p. 27).

According to the Federation for American Immigration Reform [FAIR] (n.d.), up to 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked into the United States annually. They are lured to the United States with false promises of well-paying jobs and, instead, are forced or coerced into prostitution, domestic servitude, farm and factory labor, and other types of forced labor (DOS, 2013). Once these victims arrive in the United States illegally, their travel and identity documents are often taken by their traffickers, who threaten to harm them or their families if they attempt to escape (DOS, 2013). Then they find themselves unable to communicate, as they cannot speak English. These illegal immigrants are highly vulnerable to trafficking because of their lack of legal status and protections and their limited language skills and employment options (FAIR, n.d.). Further, traffickers take advantage of them by exploiting working conditions because they know their victims do not understand their rights and the laws that protect them, and they know the illegal workers do not want to risk deportation should they be discovered working in the country illegally (Freedom Network USA, 2013).

Debt Bondage. One of the primary methods by which workers can be exploited is debt bondage, wherein they borrow large sums of money to cover the costs of their recruitment and transportation fees to be placed in jobs (DOS, 2015). These fees can reach tens of thousands of dollars, and workers may borrow money from their family or friends or even mortgage their homes or ancestral lands with the belief they can easily pay back their debts shortly after their employment begins (DOS, 2015). The problem, however, is the fees are often combined with excessive interest rates in addition to job finding fees, broker payments, room and board costs, medical insurance, and protection fees for hiring guards to protect the victims from police and abusive customers (Farr, 2005). Thus, victims may work for years for very little or no wages to repay their debts (DOS, 2015), and the debt amounts are inflated far above the actual costs acquired by their traffickers (Farr, 2005). Debt bondage victims are often convinced by their recruiters the jobs they are offered are legitimate, and many are even offered contracts (Farr, 2005). The recruiters will help their victims obtain passports or visas and make the travel arrangements for them (Farr, 2005). Victims believe they are being recruited and hired for jobs such as nannies, restaurant workers, dancers, or entertainers; however, the majority of them do not know they have actually become trafficking victims who will be prostituted and enslaved (Farr, 2005). It is not until after they arrive at their destinations that they learn they must work as prostitutes or in dangerous conditions for little to no pay.

Organ Harvesting. According to Columb (2015), the organ trade involves practices of trafficking in people for the removal of their organs, the commercial sales of organs, the forcible removal of organs, and traveling across state borders to purchase organs. Up to 10% of the 65,000 organ transplants that happen each year are performed using illegally sourced organs (Columb, 2015). The most popular organ harvested is the kidney, and because there are waiting

lists for transplants in many countries, the exploitation of potential donors and recipients is significantly increasing (Interpol, 2015). Because of the lengthy waits for essential organs, transplants are often carried out in underground facilities with no proper medical follow-up (Interpol, 2015). Although the United States is the chief receiving country of trafficked organs, it is the only country not to recognize organ trafficking as a legitimate form of human trafficking (Winterdyk et al., 2012).

Sexual Exploitation. Sexual exploitation is the most popular form of human trafficking, comprising 79% of the illegal trade (UNODC, 2020). Sex trafficking can be defined as the recruitment or movement of an individual within or across borders through an abuse of power with the intention of forced sexual exploitation (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Sexual exploitation is one of the most, if not the most, rapidly growing forms of human trafficking (Farr, 2005), and it is increasingly networked with the drug, organ harvesting, prostitution, Internet pornography, mail-order bride, and sex tourism trades (Stone, 2005). It is estimated one in six endangered runaways who are reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children are sex trafficking victims (National Organizations for Youth Safety, 2019). One in seven children under the age of 18 will run away, and 17% of runaway and homeless youth report being forced into sexual activity (Colby, 2011). One of every three teenagers who run away from home will be recruited into the sex trade industry within 48 hours (Ngwe & Elechi, 2012).

Parties

There are several parties involved in human trafficking, including the victims and their perpetrators. Often overlooked, however, are the consumers. Without all three of these groups, human trafficking could not continue.

Victims. Victims of human trafficking are not limited to one race, nationality, age group, or gender. Rather, they come from nearly every country and have different backgrounds. Often, however, the most vulnerable victims are those who have limited earning opportunities, and the promise of work may lure them into the arms of traffickers who will exploit them in the commercial sex trade, for their organs, or for work and involuntary servitude (Kunze, 2010). Initially, many victims of human trafficking are willing participants, as they are vulnerable and hope to improve their lives through financial improvements, educational opportunities, and job prospects (Nnadi, 2013). It is widely believed human trafficking victims are forcefully abducted; however, that is only realistically the case for a very small percentage of victims (Mo, 2018). The vast majority of victims are persuaded to leave their homes and families for purposes of employment opportunities or romantic interests (Mo, 2018). Regardless of the specific reason many individuals are coerced into trafficking, one characteristic is common to most of them – their desire for some form of betterment leads them to make risky decisions that generate the possibility of being trafficked (Mo, 2018). According to Mo (2018), when given an upside, certain individuals are willing to risk potential exploitation.

Trafficking victims often do not try to escape their situations for several reasons. These reasons include intimidation, shame, and fear of punishment, police, courts, or retribution (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Ironically, many victims also feel a sense of responsibility to pay their "debt" and have a sense of loyalty and obligation to their traffickers (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Many of them also suffer from language barriers and geographic isolation (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). The common factor amongst the clear majority of trafficking victims is they do not know where to turn for help in escaping from their situations (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Thus, they shut down, go blank, and stop feeling, which are "all hallmarks of trauma, shock, and

depression" (Bales & Soodalter, 2009, p. 24). They are indoctrinated through violence and threats and soon become completely dependent upon, and at the mercy of, their traffickers and are unable to leave (Bales & Soodalter, 2009).

The victims of sexual exploitation, the most common form of human trafficking, are numerous. Nearly 300,000 people are forced into sexual exploitation every year ("Sex Trafficking," 2012). Victims of sexual exploitation are often lured by promises of financial security or better futures (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Though not a requirement within the legal definition of human trafficking, many of the victims travel across international borders from developing countries to more prosperous ones where they believe they will have the chance to better their lives (Interpol, 2015). Their travel documents, including passports, drivers' licenses, and birth certificates are taken from them by their traffickers (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Sex trafficking victims do not usually have the opportunity to make enough money to support themselves or their families, so they jump at the chance to work for people who offer them financial security (Winterdyk et al., 2012). They are then told they are owned by their traffickers (Farr, 2005) and are made to feel dependent upon them, as they are "beaten, raped, and drugged to break their will, their desire to escape, and make them compliant" (Winterdyk et al., 2012, p. 85). As explained by Farr (2005), the low cost of controlling people and low risk of being identified makes sex trafficking an incredibly profitable industry.

Victims of sexual exploitation are often forced to work six or seven days per week, up to 20-hour days, all while suffering from physical and social isolation, excessive controls, the lack of proper medical attention, and physical and psychological abuse (Farr, 2005). Many sex trafficking victims are forced to have sex with as many as thirty men each day (Farr, 2005). The victims are punished for offenses such as sharing their telephone numbers, gaining weight, failing to do the

laundry, failing to be animated with customers or getting them to buy drinks, not wearing provocative clothing, not applauding during strip shows, and failing to please the customers (Farr, 2005).

The victims at special risk of sex trafficking include runaways, victims of physical and sexual abuse, drug users, members of sexual minority groups, and illegally trafficked children (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Individuals who are ethnic minorities, are poorly educated, and live in rural areas are also more likely to become victims of sexual exploitation (Klimley et al., 2018). Approximately 75% of survivors of sex trafficking have a history of foster care involvement (Mostajabian et al., 2019). Homeless youth are also at high risk for being trafficked (Mostajabian et al., 2019). Almost 20% of youth in U.S. homeless shelters report being trafficked, with 76% of them reporting being sexually exploited (Mostajabian et al., 2019). Essentially, individuals in these groups are "ready-made targets" (Colby, 2011, p. 7) for human traffickers. According to Detective Charles Benton of the North Charleston Police Department, they are often raised in homes without fathers or by individuals other than their parents (personal communication, January 30, 2017). These individuals have few options for shelter, education, or employment, leading them to look for alternative ways to survive (Colby, 2011). Initially, these victims depend on their traffickers for financial security, attention, and protection; however, they often quickly discover they are not going to achieve the better future they hoped for and will be beaten, raped, and potentially killed if they attempt to escape. Victims are conditioned by their traffickers to distrust law enforcement (C. Benton, personal communication, January 30, 2017). Fear of law enforcement and other authorities is a significant reason human trafficking victims are difficult to identify and detect (McGaha & Evans, 2009). Consequently, they become part of a "hidden population" (Ngwe & Elechi, 2012, p. 110); therefore, in the rare event of escape,

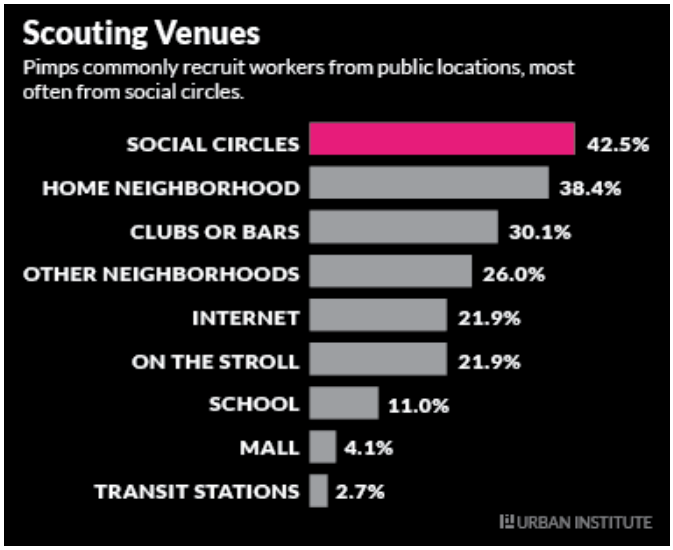
victims believe they have nowhere to turn for support, recovery, or justice. As a result, they suffer from poor physical and mental health effects (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017). Personal effects of human trafficking include physical injury, psychological morbidity, and social, legal, and financial harm (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017). There is a high frequency of psychological issues that result from being trafficked, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Ottisova et al., 2016). Other symptoms, such as headaches, back pain, sexually transmitted infections, and memory loss are common in victims, as well (Ottisova et al., 2016). Sexual abuse, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted infections were all found to be higher in victims of human trafficking (Ottisova et al., 2016). The global health effects of trafficking include infectious diseases, occupational injuries, psychological morbidity, financial insecurity, and hazardous labor (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017). The effects of human trafficking are far-reaching and affect more than just the victims themselves.

Perpetrators. As with victims of human trafficking, perpetrators are not limited to a certain race, nationality, age group, or gender; they, too, come from multiple countries and backgrounds. Most sex traffickers, however, are male and can be categorized into four groups (Carpinteri et al., 2017). These groups include the child trafficker, consumers of sex trafficking, producers of child sexual abuse images, and travelers who exploit minors (Carpinteri et al., 2017). Regardless of these characteristics, however, perpetrators do have power in common. Power is a key variable in that gaining and maintaining control over someone can be intoxicating and addictive, and many abusers have their own sense of powerlessness (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Perpetrators are “master psychological manipulators” (C. Benton, personal communication, January 30, 2017) who find out what is important to their victims and use those people or items against them to threaten or harm the victims. They recruit trafficking victims in

schools, at malls, at transit stations, in group homes, and online via social media ("A Guide for Parents," 2019).

Figure 1

Scouting Venues



(Dank & Johnson, 2014, p. 4)

Perpetrators are drawn to vulnerability (Mostajabian et al., 2019). Young people are one of the most vulnerable populations, and perpetrators of sex trafficking target young people, such as students, because they believe their age makes them more vulnerable to manipulation and control ("A Guide for Parents," 2019).

Characterizing human trafficking perpetrators has proven difficult because many of the key questions about them have not been answered, and this lack of answers is reflective of many abuse crimes (Bales & Soodalter, 2009), such as domestic abuse. In most cases of abuse, including human trafficking, victims are largely invisible to society, and the anonymity of the perpetrators is known to increase their aggression and their brutalization of their victims (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Human trafficking perpetrators are experts at their work; they use their

victims' fear to make the message clear they own their victims and control their bodies and their lives (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Traffickers look for trusting victims and can be family members, friends, foster parents, trusted adults, or boyfriends ("A Guide for Parents," 2019). Traffickers look for victims with low self-esteem, histories of abuse, and histories of prostitution (C. Benton, personal communication, January 30, 2017). "As the body is subjugated, in shock the psyche follows, leaving the victim without the will to resist. Traffickers know this" (Bales & Soodalter, 2009, p. 78), and they will unabashedly resort to violence and severe punishment if their victims attempt to resume control.

Human traffickers often take a charming approach of appearing genuinely interested in romantic relationships with their victims, while gradually coercing them into prostitution (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). They fake affection, even love, and they make promises to their victims they have no intention of keeping (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). In addition, they withhold money from the victims and pump them with addictive drugs; once their victims become addicted, they can easily control them (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Traffickers use routine violence to maintain victims' ongoing submission and obedience (Farr, 2005) and punish them for disobedience through beatings and having them raped and tortured (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Perpetrators threaten the victims and their families with serious injury or even death to implement total control over them; many even display their ownership of their victims by branding or tattooing them (Bales & Soodalter, 2009).

One of the most prominent sex trafficking roles is that of the employer, or pimp, who sells the victim, or commodity, to customers and provides a place of business for sex and a place for the victims to live and work (Farr, 2005). Over 75% of minors who participate in prostitution have pimps who take the money they receive from their customers (Ngwe & Elechi, 2012).

Some studies estimate that "as many as 98% of prostituted girls and women are controlled by pimps" (Center against Rape, n.d., para. 5). Most pimps are between 19 and 45 years old and have education levels less than ten years (Carpinteri et al., 2017). Despite pimping being illegal in all states, the laws against it are often under-enforced, allowing sex trafficking to continue growing (Elrod, 2015). Pimps earn a staggering $31.6 billion in profits from their victims (Elrod, 2015).

Consumers. Without consumers, there could be no human trafficking. Consumers are the parties who have allowed trafficking to become a multi-billion-dollar industry and the fastest growing criminal industry. Some consumers may not even realize they are supporting modern-day slavery, while others are aware and deliberate in their patronage of trafficking victims. Consumers can include large corporations that buy items made by forced labor victims because they are cheaper (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Consumers can also include individuals who are desperate to fill certain needs. For example, consumers of organ harvesting are increasing because of the insufficient number of organs available to meet the needs of patients, and thus, consumers are more likely to purchase them through transplant tourism (UNODC, 2008). For example, according to the UNODC (2008), "in the United States . . . kidney donations between 1990 and 2003 increased by only 33% while the number of patients waiting for kidneys grew by 236%" (p. 2). The waiting lists for vital organs continue to grow, increasing the number of consumers who are willing to purchase trafficked organs. According to a recent report, the United States is one of the largest consumers of sexual exploitation in the world (Fight the New Drug, 2020). The massive demand for pornography is fueling sex trafficking in the United States and around the world (Fight the New Drug, 2020).

The background characteristics, motivation, and behavior of consumers of human trafficking vary (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Research has shown johns range in age, sexual preference, and educational levels, with their occupations fluctuating from blue collar workers to professionals (Carpinteri et al., 2017). Other trafficking participants can include teachers, law enforcement officers, judges, bankers, attorneys, politicians, and doctors (Carpinteri et al., 2017). Other corrupt guardians and sector employees, such as taxi drivers and bankers, who knowingly facilitate trafficking by providing a variety of services for fees, often accept bribes to look the other way (Farr, 2005). According to Human Rights Watch, "many believe that the international phenomenon of trafficking in women for forced prostitution could not exist at any level without the involvement of such officials" (Farr, 2005, p. 77). The fact remains clear, however, without the demand for the services of victims, there would be no human trafficking. Unfortunately, the demand does exist, and it is massive (Bales & Soodalter, 2009).

Exploitation Tactics

There are many tactics human traffickers use to exploit their victims. Common to all of their methods of exploitation is their desire for control. There are four primary methods by which traffickers control their victims, including the use of violence, threats of harm toward family members, financial dependency, and the confiscation of the victims' travel documents (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). Traffickers take advantage of their victims' fear of violence, legal problems, and deportation (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). They are also aware many trafficking victims lack knowledge about services that may exist to help them escape from their situations (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). This lack of knowledge may also be problematic because many human trafficking victims do not view themselves as victims; therefore, they do not believe they even need support services (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). Isolation is another tactic used by

traffickers, wherein they keep their victims from their families, other means of social support, and transportation (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). When victims feel isolated, they are more likely to stay with their traffickers. Physical and mental confinement are also powerful methods by which traffickers maintain control over their victims (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). Many victims are ashamed to seek help or try to escape from their traffickers (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015).

Human trafficking victims can be viewed by their traffickers as objects, vehicles, or persons (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). When the victims are viewed as objects, their traffickers objectify them, demeaning their worth (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). These victims are often physically controlled and abused (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). The victims are subjugated and restrained and will be physically abused if they fall out of line with their perpetrators' demands (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). The control methods used by traffickers who view their victims as objects include document confiscation, control of the victims' earning, threats and use of physical abuse, and lack of any independence (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). The victims who are viewed as vehicles are emotionally and psychologically abused by their traffickers (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). These victims are vehicles for their traffickers' desires, and the traffickers display no empathy for them (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). The means by which traffickers control their victims who are viewed as vehicles include threats to their children, witnessing physical abuse of other victims, threats of revealing pictures or information on the Internet, and threats of sexual abuse or assault (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). Victims who are viewed as persons are actually acknowledged by their traffickers as human; however, they are manipulated and controlled (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). Despite being seen as human, they are undervalued and belittled (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). The methods used by traffickers to control victims seen as persons include giving gifts to their victims, limited social contact, and intimate

relationships between the victim and trafficker (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). In this trafficking style, manipulation is the primary method by which traffickers gain control over their victims (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015).

Figure 2

Persuasion Tactics

Tactic	Features
Romantic or sexual relationships	Often used to recruit individuals not previously engaged in sex work; appeals to individuals' emotional needs
Mutual dependency	Emphasizes the benefits of a pimp/sex worker relationship; encourages concept of shared, day-to-day subsistence
Monetizing sex	Encourages women to get paid for activities they were already engaged in; often used to exploit women in economically vulnerable situations
Associated lifestyle	Verbal promises of material comforts; outward display of wealth and business profits
Reputation	Pimps build reputations around how they treat and take care of employees; generally helps attract individuals interested in or already engaged in sex work

(Dank & Johnson, 2014, p. 167)

While these victim roles have different specific characteristics, they are all methods by which human traffickers control their victims.

Traffickers also take advantage of significant conventions and sporting events, such as the World Cup, the Olympics, and the Super Bowl (Konrad et al., 2016), which according to former Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott (2011), is "commonly known as the single largest human trafficking incident in the United States" (as cited in Luttrell, 2019, para. 3).

One specific tactic of human traffickers is feigning love for their victims. The traffickers fake love and affection and promise to protect their victims (Wright, 2013). Boyfriending, or manipulating a love interest, is a common tactic used by traffickers, wherein they flatter, compliment, and promise things to their young, naïve victims (Polaris, 2019). Traffickers prey on victims' insecurities and past failed relationships and lead them to believe they can make them happy again (Polaris, 2019). These relationships usually begin with compliments and

escalate into private messages and text messages (Polaris, 2019). Traffickers play to the emotions of their victims, leading many of the victims to trust their exploiters and fall for their lies. In one case discussed by Klimley et al. (2018), one child sex trafficking victim states that despite not knowing her abuser, she ended up falling in love with him and eventually became scared to leave, fearing violence and retaliation. Often, the victims fall for these lies and begin to trust their traffickers, opening themselves up to extreme manipulation and control (Wright, 2013). The victims are essentially brainwashed into believing no one other than their traffickers love them and that they can only trust their traffickers (Wright, 2013). They eventually agree to meet them in person and end up as their property, unable to leave (Polaris, 2019).

Financial Implications

Although the exact financial implications of human trafficking cannot be calculated because of the inherently hidden nature of the crime, it is estimated to be a multi-billion-dollar industry. Human trafficking is the third largest profitable endeavor in the world, only after illegal weapons and drugs (Stone, 2005). According to Niethammer (2020), it is estimated the industry has generated nearly $150 billion worldwide, making it one of the fastest growing and most lucrative criminal markets. The reason human trafficking has such massive financial implications is because of the unique commodity it sells – people. Unlike drugs, which cannot be sold once they are used, humans are reusable. Because humans are one of the only commodities that can be resold repeatedly, the profitability of human trafficking is massive (Latonero, 2011). For example, it is estimated a sex trafficking victim can be sold up to forty times in one single day ("Sex Trafficking," 2012). According to one convicted human trafficker, "you can buy a woman for $10,000 and you can make your money back in a week if she is pretty and . . . young. Then everything else is profit" (Lopiccolo, 2009, p. 855). Traffickers consider

human beings one of the only global commodities that can be resold and used repeatedly (Jones et al., 2007), and the increased value of trafficked humans is quickly being realized.

The United Nations predicts human trafficking will soon surpass both arms trafficking and narcotics to become the leading illicit industry in the world, due largely to its high revenue-to-risk ratio and because humans are reusable and cheap commodities (Kim, 2007). People are pushed out of underprivileged situations where there are few economic opportunities and are pulled into more prosperous situations where there are demands for cheap labor or economic opportunities (Jones et al., 2007). Poverty is the most commonly identified source of vulnerability to trafficking (Mo, 2018). Traffickers are aware of this vulnerability and take advantage of this push/pull force (Jones et al., 2007).

Globalization plays a large role in the exponential growth of human trafficking. According to Farr (2005), while trafficking is not new, it has expanded largely due to the development of a global market system. Globalization has resulted in an unparalleled flow of goods, services, capital, and labor into nearly every country in the world (Jones et al., 2007), and it has created an enabling environment wherein it is easier for traffickers to transport their victims between countries with relative ease (Nnadi, 2013). Countries with greater economic freedom have more open borders, which lowers the costs to traffic individuals and allows for an increase in the flow of people and goods (Heller et al., 2018). It has also caused a rapid increase in the varieties of goods produced by slaves that end up in shops and malls around the world (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). The demand for cheap labor is a driving force to meet the demands of this rapid increase in production of goods (Heller et al., 2018). Globalization features three economic ends that facilitate human trafficking. The first end is market privatization, wherein developing and transitional countries are encouraged to privatize their economics, causing the

state to play a lesser role in the economy and have reduced involvement in the establishment of economic security (Farr, 2005). The second economic end is market liberalization, which refers to the opening of the markets and breaking down of barriers to allow more free trade around the world (Farr, 2005). This can be achieved by opening borders, thereby making it easier for people and money to move from country to country and across international borders (Farr, 2005). The third end that facilitates human trafficking through globalization is the spread of production through foreign investment, as production is often spread around the world through the exploitation of cheap and vulnerable labor supplies (Farr, 2005). Foreign investments help stimulate production in developing countries (Farr, 2005), often garnering high returns for the investors.

Every type of human trafficking is immensely profitable. For example, the global profits of labor exploitation alone are estimated at nearly $32 billion annually (Jones et al., 2007). The trafficking of women is believed to have the highest profit margin and lowest risk of nearly every other type of illegal activity (Jones et al., 2007). In Japan, for example, Thai sex workers produce more than $3.3 billion annual gross income; of course, a tiny fraction of their earnings actually goes to them (Farr, 2005). According to Jones et al. (2007), the massive profit from human trafficking powers other criminal activities, such as drug trafficking and money laundering. An example of this can be seen in Russia, where by the end of the 1990s, the country's organized crime businesses, including human trafficking, generated nearly $10 billion per year and was believed to account for approximately 40% of the country's gross domestic product (Farr, 2005). Clearly, the profits of human trafficking are evident globally.

Solutions

According to the U.S. Department of State (2008), "measuring Human Trafficking success remains one of the most problematic and least well-developed areas of human trafficking research" (as cited in McGaha & Evans, 2009, p. 252). As a result, it is imperative potential resolutions be identified that may decrease the pervasiveness of human trafficking. There are several potential solutions that should be implemented to reduce the prevalence of human trafficking around the world and in the United States, specifically. Solutions to fighting human trafficking must begin with public education to identify victims. Those victims must then be given support so they can process and overcome their fear of traffickers, helping to isolate offenders. Once perpetrators are pinpointed, it is essential for agencies around the world to work together to intervene against human trafficking with the goal of obtaining convictions against traffickers.

Public Education and Awareness. Of the small number of human trafficking victims who are freed each year in the United States, nearly a third of them are saved as the result of average people seeing something they simply cannot ignore (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). In other words, it is critical to trafficking victims the public is educated regarding the signs of human trafficking. Such public awareness can, literally, save lives. Currently, there appears to be a lack of public awareness regarding human trafficking. In fact, the countries with the highest prevalence of human trafficking have the fewest publications on trafficking, showing the lack of awareness of trafficking in many places (Sweileh, 2018). One of the primary ways to educate the public and raise awareness of human trafficking is through advertising. Spreading facts to the public about human trafficking is one of the most basic, yet effective, ways to make the public aware of this vast problem. Social marketing campaigns, which have been growing, are

one way to increase awareness of human trafficking (Szablewska & Kubacki, 2018). One of the primary goals of social marketing campaigns is to modify behavior (Szablewska & Kubacki, 2018). One example of such a campaign is the "Real Men Don't Buy Girls" campaign that aims to raise awareness of, and reduce, child sexual exploitation and prostitution (Szablewska & Kubacki, 2018). Not only can advertising help identify victims, but engagement with the media can also help prevent human trafficking (DOS, 2015). There are several ways to engage the media in the fight against trafficking. For example, the media and law enforcement should collaborate to provide links to press releases on trafficking cases and other information regarding human trafficking in a single online location (DOS, 2015). It is imperative resources such as the Human Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline be advertised in a wide variety of public places (Bales & Soodalter, 2009), including motels, restaurant and mall restrooms, and hospitals.

Education is another way to increase awareness regarding the growing human trafficking problem. In addition to teaching the public about how to identify victims, it is important to teach johns and other potential consumers about the consequences and ramifications of trafficking. One such method of educating johns is through "john school," which is an intervention program that began in San Francisco and is "designed to reduce the demand for commercial sex and human trafficking by educating men arrested for soliciting prostitutes about the negative consequences of prostitution" (Bales & Soodalter, 2009, pp. 86-87). The program is usually offered to first-time offenders who must pay a fee to attend the one-day class in lieu of prosecution (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). The school's curriculum focuses on the legal consequences of subsequent offenses and the johns' vulnerability to being robbed while involved in prostitution and their increased risks of contracting HIV or other sexually-transmitted diseases (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). It also teaches johns about what the victims experience, including

rape, assault, medical problems, and drug addiction (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). Consumers of sex trafficking need to be made aware of the increased risk of injury to trafficking victims, such as head injuries, vaginal bleeding and bruising, major illnesses, such as hepatitis and HIV/AIDS, and mental health consequences, such as suicidal thoughts, difficulty sleeping, and loss of appetite (Muftić & Finn, 2013). According to Bales and Soodalter (2009), it has been found these john schools are cost-effective solutions to substantially reducing recidivism among offenders arrested for the solicitation of prostitutes. Further, it is important to note such schools have operated for nearly 20 years at no cost to taxpayers and have generated over $1 million for recovery programs for consumers of commercial sex (Bales & Soodalter, 2009).

Victim Identification and Support. Victim identification and support is critical in reducing human trafficking. Only 100,000 victims of human trafficking have been identified, making the ratio of those identified to the estimated number of victims a staggering 0.4% (DOS, 2018). Victim support organizations estimate there are up to ten human trafficking victims for every one identified (McGaha & Evans, 2009). This meager number means less than one percent of all trafficking victims are identified, and just as few manage to escape or be rescued (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). As such, it is critical citizens, law enforcement officers, teachers, hotel staff, and food and beverage, airline, and medical personnel know what to look for in recognizing potential victims of trafficking. "Ignoring the warning signs of human trafficking can perpetuate hell on earth" (Wright, 2010, para. 1). Thus, once individuals believe they have identified a victim, it is imperative they build a relationship with him or her. According to Sharon Rikard, the founder of Doors to Freedom, a non-profit dedicated to assisting trafficking victims, building relationships with victims is the only way to get them to talk about their traffickers and cooperate with law enforcement (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

Once victims escape or are rescued from their traffickers, it is crucial they receive support to assist in their recovery. They need advocates in court and medical centers, educational assistance, therapy, and group counseling. Sex trafficking victims who are able to escape their situations need food, safe shelter, emotional support, employment and training, medical care, drug treatment, and counseling (Erbe, 1984). Special attention needs to be given to victims forced into sex trafficking prior to adulthood, as they display poorer medical and psychological health outcomes than those victims who are older (Muftić & Finn, 2013). Human trafficking victims often lack the knowledge of how to complete seemingly simple tasks, such as creating budgets, choosing their clothing without fear of being harmed, grocery shopping, and cooking; therefore, it is imperative they receive training in general life skills to assist them in moving on with their lives after trafficking. They also need structure, safety, and consistency to recover from their experiences as human trafficking victims (S. Rikard, personal communication, January 30, 2017).

A specific area in which victim identification is crucial is prostitution. There is an inherent link between prostitution and sex trafficking (Elrod, 2015). According to Elrod (2015), the growth of sex trafficking is linked to the growth of the prostitution industry. Individuals who are forced to engage in prostitution do so unwillingly, with pimps exploiting their vulnerabilities, making them victims of human trafficking (Elrod, 2015). According to Jorgensen (2018), police officers "view prostitutes as choosing to work in the underground sex market and are perceived as offenders rather than victims" (p. 3). A problem arises when it is not clear to law enforcement officers that these women are not acting freely or of their own accord and because prostitution is a crime, they are being arrested (Trafficking Victims Advocacy Project [TVAP], 2015). As a result, these women, who are actually victims, are treated by law enforcement as criminals

(Augustson, 2016). This treatment causes trafficking victims to distrust law enforcement and become reluctant to testify against their traffickers because of their rocky relationship with law enforcement (McGaha & Evans, 2009). Most states do not have laws that recognize those victims who are being forced into prostitution (TVAP, 2015). There are no exceptions or immunity opportunities for these victims (TVAP, 2015). In fact, many policing strategies focus on reducing human trafficking by arresting the trafficking victims themselves (TVAP, 2015). The arrests of these women are humiliating, degrading, and are clear violations of their personal freedom and rights (TVAP, 2015). Such apprehensions result in high arrest rates for low level prostitution offenses, which is a benefit to law enforcement organizations, while the actual traffickers remain free (TVAP, 2015).

Global and Multiagency Participation. One of the most imperative solutions to fighting human trafficking is the participation and collaboration of multiple agencies around the world. The U.S. government estimates that up to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders annually (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Further, there is hardly a country in the world not involved in sex trafficking or forced labor (Nnadi, 2013). As such, it is crucial agencies around the world work together to reduce the numbers of trafficking victims. Governments must cooperate with other agencies and make collective stands against human trafficking. Jurisdictional issues may make such multiagency participation difficult; therefore, it is important laws be enacted allowing jurisdiction across borders for purposes of ending trafficking. For example, laws in the United States provide extraterritorial jurisdiction over child sex tourism offenses perpetrated by U.S. citizens overseas (DOS, 2015). It is important for traffickers to know they will still be held accountable even when they commit their offenses across borders.

As with multiagency participation, cooperation among nations is also crucial to decreasing human trafficking. To obtain international cooperation in fighting human trafficking, laws must exist that criminalize similar behaviors in comparable terms and with similar severity (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Governments must establish agreements simplifying transnational investigations, policies on exchanging evidence, and procedures on how to best extradite traffickers (Winterdyk et al., 2012). In the more than 200 countries around the world, none have bilateral cooperation treaties with the others; without such international joint treaties, countries cannot cooperate with each other, which means human trafficking cannot be reduced (Winterdyk et al., 2012). One consideration all countries must consider and agree upon is that of offender extradition, which is the process by which offenders are returned to the jurisdiction in which they are prosecuted (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Other considerations for countries participating in transnational cooperation include mutual legal assistance in both investigations and prosecutions, systems against money laundering, cooperation regarding the freezing of assets and forfeitures, and cooperation in victim protection and policies regarding deportation (Winterdyk et al., 2012).

Perhaps the most obvious barrier in encouraging multiagency cooperation is the lack of channels by which to exchange information and intelligence (Winterdyk et al., 2012). When law enforcement, judicial, and other governmental agencies can effectively work together, domestically and across borders, the best results in reducing and preventing human trafficking are obtained (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Well-structured interagency task forces that bring all the involved parties together to ensure a victim-centered response to trafficking may help reduce human trafficking (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). These agencies include the DOJ, ICE, the FBI, and the Department of Labor. Such task forces can combine agency resources to help ensure efforts to reduce trafficking are maximized.

One potential method of assisting the growth of interagency task forces is through the creation of a central website or comprehensive set of resource links to all governmental human trafficking reports (Potocky, 2010). Interpol has also developed a best practices method to improve international cooperation and has extended its focus to all forms of human trafficking (Winterdyk et al., 2012). The international organization uses a system in which it can search for trafficking suspects, locate missing persons, and gather information from worldwide sources (Winterdyk et al., 2012). All the information collected can then be used to assist law enforcement agencies in protecting borders from the entry of traffickers and helping them make inquiries on stolen travel documents, stolen vehicles, and fugitive offenders (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Essentially, it allows data to be collected in a single location, helping to fight human trafficking more seamlessly and efficiently.

Governmental Intervention and Prosecution. Once victims are rescued and their traffickers are identified, it is imperative the government intervene and hold the perpetrators accountable through prosecution. As Bales and Soodalter (2009) articulate, victims "are becoming victims because the law is not being enforced" (p. 74). To prosecute traffickers, protect victims, and ultimately prevent trafficking, government action is vital (DOS, 2015). The first step to governmental intervention must be the formation of a single, global definition of trafficking that can be used to effectively create policy both nationally and internationally, as reducing the discrepancies found in different laws can assist in assuring offenders do not exploit gaps and inconsistencies in these laws (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Because human trafficking is a fundamentally clandestine crime, its effects on victims and communities may remain concealed or unknown, causing the problem to be treated as a lower priority than many other crimes (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Trafficking's perceived non-existence makes data collection difficult

and inaccessible to the public. As such, government transparency and accountability are key in helping to reduce human trafficking (Potocky, 2010).

The need for governmental intervention and prosecution becomes clear when the ratio of identified victims to convicted offenders is expressed. This ratio of convicted traffickers to identified victims is only 7% (DOS, 2018). Further, according to the U.S. government, less than 1% of trafficking cases are solved each year (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). The number of cases solved and offenders prosecuted must be increased with the government's assistance. It is imperative governments begin prosecuting more human trafficking cases. According to Potocky (2010), despite the conviction rate on prosecuted cases in the U.S. being 96%, U.S. attorneys choose not to prosecute 60% of trafficking cases, compared to only 25% of all other federal criminal cases. Because of the small number of trafficking cases being prosecuted, the conviction rate appears inflated.

Figure 3

Total Trafficking Convictions Worldwide

YEAR	PROSECUTIONS	CONVICTIONS	VICTIMS IDENTIFIED	NEW OR AMENDED LEGISLATION
2012	7,705 (1,153)	4,746 (518)	46,570 (17,368)	21
2013	9,460 (1,199)	5,776 (470)	44,758 (10,603)	58
2014	10,051 (418)	4,443 (216)	44,462 (11,438)	20
2015	19,127 (857)	6,615 (456)	77,823 (14,262)	30
2016	14,939 (1,038)	9,072 (717)	68,453 (17,465)	25
2017	17,471 (869)	7,135 (332)	96,960 (23,906)	5
2018	11,096 (457)	7,481 (259)	85,613 (11,009)	5

The above statistics are estimates derived from data provided by foreign governments and other sources and reviewed by the Department of State. Aggregate data fluctuates from one year to the next due to the hidden nature of trafficking crimes dynamic global events, shifts in government efforts, and a lack of uniformity in national reporting structures. The numbers in parentheses are those of labor trafficking prosecutions, convictions, and victims identified.

(DOS, 2019, p. 38)

Governments must focus on obtaining evidence of trafficking and identifying the victims and their perpetrators, as prosecuting traffickers requires this evidence. Further, law enforcement personnel must be properly trained on what evidence to seek and how to identify traffickers and victims. To collect the most beneficial pieces of evidence, the government can focus on technology, as it often makes the crime more traceable (DOS, 2013). The cell phones and computers of traffickers and their victims contain archives of data, which can be "evidentiary gold mines" (DOS, 2013, p. 14) for law enforcement. For example, text messages, voicemails, geographic tags, and web browsing history can all help identify traffickers and obtain convictions against them and assist in detecting and recognizing patterns of money laundering (DOS, 2013).

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defined human trafficking as a new crime and enhanced penalties for offenses that already existed, including slavery and involuntary servitude (Winterdyk et al., 2012). All 50 states have passed state legislation outlawing human trafficking in the 19 years following the passage of the Act, and some states have mandated more comprehensive mechanisms to improve victim identification and crime response, such as police training, victim services, and data collection (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Despite the positive changes created as a result of the TVPA, its implementation has been criticized. As Potocky (2010) states, this policy "was a major landmark in human rights legislation; however, its implementation and modification over time have been a travesty" (p. 373). Despite the prioritization of trafficking through new laws and dedication of resources to efforts to stop it, fewer cases of human trafficking have been identified than were predicted (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Explanations for these lower-than-expected numbers encompass five primary challenges, including: 1) the failure of local officials to properly prioritize the problem,

combined with inadequate law enforcement and first responder training to identify potential trafficking cases; 2) difficulties in identifying trafficking; 3) the fear victims have of the police and their reluctance to participate in investigations; 4) poor relationships between law enforcement and victims, particularly illegal immigrants and prostitutes; and 5) challenges securing arrests and prosecuting cases (Winterdyk et al., 2012). Critics of the TVPA purport its focus is on international trafficking victims and the services available to victims cater to those from abroad. Further, many suspect domestic trafficking is more prevalent than international trafficking because of the increasing difficulty crossing the United States' borders (Bales & Soodalter, 2009). It is alleged domestic human trafficking is being largely ignored. The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, which was signed into law in 2013, gives states the option to define children as individuals under the age of 24 (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], n.d.).

With the exponential rise in the use of technology to assist traffickers in their crimes, governments must establish Internet and trafficking regulations to successfully combat human trafficking and exploitation. In January 2017, *Backpage* stopped operating its adult advertising pages because of pressure from the United States' government. According to Hersher (2017), "a 2016 Senate report called the website the 'largest commercial sex services advertising platform in the United States' and said that '*Backpage* officials have publicly acknowledged that criminals use the website for sex trafficking'" (para. 2). Despite what initially appears to be progressive in the fight against human trafficking via the Internet, many law enforcement departments are unhappy with this result. According to Detective Benton, *Backpage* is extremely cooperative in responding to subpoenas and has exceptional record-keeping practices, assisting law enforcement's investigations and identification of human traffickers (personal communication,

January 30, 2017). Other websites that participate in facilitating human trafficking are not as cooperative with law enforcement and should have been the government's targets. Further, with the discontinuation of adult advertising on *Backpage*, human traffickers have resorted to other websites to facilitate their exploitation of victims.

Social Media

One of the technological resources to which human traffickers have turned to facilitate their exploitation of victims is social media. Human traffickers often exploit their victims through the use of the Internet and social media. The Internet has facilitated the increase of exploitation of victims worldwide. The number of people using the Internet around the world is 4.66 billion, which is nearly 60% of the population, and there are over 4.2 billion social media users (Kemp, 2021). The number of social media users worldwide grows by more than 13% each year and has more than doubled in the past five years (Kemp, 2021). Ninety-five percent of teenagers have access to a smartphone, and 45% of teenagers report being online on a near-constant basis (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). The nearly ubiquitous presence of social media allows human traffickers to recruit and lure victims to whom they may never have previously had access. While human trafficking is not a new occurrence, the Internet is a fairly new resource for human traffickers to find and sell vulnerable individuals while simultaneously concealing their identities (Kunze, 2010). Human traffickers use social media to recruit individuals into commercial sex and other exploitative actions through a variety of ways, including posing as romantic interests, presenting bogus modeling jobs, and offering assistance to struggling individuals (Polaris, 2018).

There are six steps human traffickers use to groom their potential victims (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). The first step in this grooming process is targeting potential victims,

especially vulnerable individuals, including young men and women (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). According to Lewis and Llewellyn (2019), young people are commonly targets of human traffickers because of their seeming naivete and gullibility. Young people who are on social media often and who are willing to provide personal information to strangers are perceived to be from households with less supervision and are considered easier targets. The second step in the online grooming process is gaining the potential victims' trust (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). Attempts at gaining trust may include asking personal questions, getting to know their victims' needs, sharing personal information about themselves, making promises, and giving compliments (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). The third step in grooming is filling a need (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). Potential trafficking victims may share their desires with strangers on social media. These desires can include money, freedom, emotional support, friendship, or even romantic relationships. Often, potential traffickers try to make their victims believe they are the only ones who can meet the victims' needs (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). The fourth step in grooming is isolating the victims (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). Traffickers attempt this isolation on social media by convincing their victims to meet them in person. Once they entice their victims to meet them in person, they make the victims feel special and attempt to cultivate relationships the victims see as caring and unique (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). They also use isolation tactics to turn the victims against their friends and families (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). The next step in the grooming process is sexualizing the relationship (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). In this stage, the traffickers increase requests for photos and other sexual advances (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). Eventually, if the potential victims do meet their traffickers in person, the traffickers may attempt physical or sexual contact. The final step in the grooming process is maintaining control, wherein traffickers may employ sympathy or threaten their victims (Lewis

& Llewellyn, 2019). In online and social media relationships, the traffickers may threaten to tell their victims' parents or others they were sent racy photos, threaten to share or post such photos, or use other ways to humiliate the victims (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). Manipulation is key in this step of grooming.

Examples of online grooming techniques can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 4

Online Grooming Examples

Emotion	Core Message from Youth that Exposes Vulnerability	What it might look like Online	Trafficker's Strategic Response	Trafficker Repellent
Need Understanding	I desire understanding. They don't understand me.	"Nobody gets me"; "You don't really know me"	I understand you.	Some people do understand me.
Emptiness/Love	I'm not feeling loved.	"I am so sick of being single"; "I wish I had someone around for me"	I love you.	I am loved.
Desire/Allure	I'm not feeling beautiful. I want you to like my body and my looks and think I'm desirable.	"OMG, I am so ugly"; "How do I look?"; "Check out my new pics." "What do you think?"	I think you're beautiful. I'll encourage you to show your body. Use your body	I am beautiful and I have beautiful elements to my body, mind, and spirit.
Disappointment	My life is not going well/not fulfilled.	"My life sucks." "Everyone in my life can go to hell." "Is this all there is to life?"	I'll make your life better.	My life is alright.
Connection	I don't have friends/family who care/connect to.	"She's not my true friend"; "If you're not going to support me, unfriend me"; "I don't need you anymore"	I'll be your best friend.	I have friends and family that care about me.
Freedom	I want to be treated like an adult. I want my independence. I want to take risks.	"My parents don't trust me"; "I'm being treated like a kid"	I'll encourage you to take risks. You are an adult.	I talk to my family and friends and negotiate my desire for freedom and independence.
Fear	I'm scared.	"I need to get out of here"; "Someone save me"	I'll protect you.	I talk to my family and friends about my fears and they support me.
Success	I want to be successful.	"I wish there was a way to make quick money"; "Need to step up my game and make real money"	I'll make you successful.	I am successful in my life right now.
Confidence	I'm not confident	"I don't know what to do"; "Is this right?"; "I don't know who I am"	Trust in me.	I'm pretty confident and know who I am.

(Kunz et al., 2018, p. 6)

The Internet also allows traffickers and other criminals the opportunity to keep their illegal activities clandestine (Latonero, 2011). It also allows traffickers to maintain near-constant surveillance on their victims (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015). Because of the highly unregulated nature of the Internet, traffickers and consumers have minimal risk of being identified or prosecuted (Kunze, 2010). While most social networking sites are not harmful on their own,

they allow criminals the ability to exploit and recruit their victims with "new, efficient, and *often anonymous*" (Latonero, 2011, p. 13) approaches with very little risk (Latonero, 2011). The Internet is also beneficial to human traffickers because of its global reach (Kunze, 2010). Internet and social media sites are also used by traffickers to advertise their victims to potential johns and other buyers in wide-reaching areas (Latonero, 2011). According to Kunze (2010), Craigslist has been "the single largest source of prostitution in the nation . . . Missing children, runaways, abused children and women trafficked in from foreign countries are routinely forced to have sex with strangers because [they are] being pimped on Craigslist" (p. 241). Other websites used by human traffickers to exploit or groom their victims include Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, Grindr, Kik, and Meetme.com (Polaris, 2019). In a survey of human trafficking survivors, Polaris discovered 26% of participants were exploited by their traffickers via their own personal social media accounts, and over 75% of survivors used internet platforms while they were being trafficked (Polaris, 2018). Traffickers use deceptive language online to disguise their intentions and avoid law enforcement (Konrad et al., 2016). It is difficult to discern through an ad whether the individuals advertised are actually of-age and willing participants (Konrad et al., 2016). The benefit of recruiting and grooming victims through social media outlets is the ability of traffickers to groom many victims at once (Kunz et al., 2018).

The ability of mobile devices to connect to the Internet makes trafficking individuals easier for perpetrators. According to Konrad et al. (2016), mobile devices and the ability to connect to the Internet are vital for their ability to exploit their victims. Mobile devices are prevalent, and nearly all traffickers use them to increase their trafficking business (Konrad et al., 2016). In fact, according to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the "majority of traffickers now recruit children online through social networking apps and sites and use the

information obtained through these methods to relate to, and build trust with, children more quickly" ("Child Sex Trafficking," 2019, para. 3). With the affordability and prevalence of such devices, "traffickers are able to recruit, advertise, sell, organize, and communicate primarily – or even exclusively – via mobile phone" (Konrad et al., 2016, p. 735). As a result of the shortage of research conducted regarding sex trafficking, the crime is being intensified by the introduction and ease of use of new technologies (Latonero, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Despite human trafficking being a multi-billion-dollar industry affecting every country in the world and every state in the United States, many states have seen only minimal developments in the fight against trafficking. The number of trafficking victims in the state and the financial implications of human trafficking are virtually unknown. Data collection on the scope of trafficking is still minimal. This lack of data, coupled with the growth of social media use, is allowing human trafficking to grow exponentially.

This study attempts to fill the gaps in the existing knowledge of the effect of social media on human trafficking victimization. This study relies on the minimal human trafficking research and empirical evidence that exists. Based on the research conducted nationally, this study suggests human trafficking victimization in the United States can be reduced through decreased, or more cautious, use of social media.

Research Question

This review of the literature will help discover the effect of social media use on human trafficking victimization. To determine the role social media plays in luring and grooming potential human trafficking victims, this study seeks the answer to the following research question: *What role does social media play in human trafficking victimization?*

Chapter 3: Methodology

Design

The research paradigm for this study is qualitative in nature and relies upon feedback from individuals in two groups, one with participants aged 18 to 24 and one with participants older than 24, who spend varying amounts of time on differing social media platforms. This qualitative research reveals the relationship between social media and human trafficking victimization. The methods used include the context of experiences, actions, interactions, opinions, and behaviors of these specific research groups. Because the very nature of human trafficking is clandestine, it is difficult to answer the question posed by this study using numerical data, making the qualitative method the most effective for this study.

Approach

The research in this study uses a grounded theory approach because of the lack of prior research conducted and the lack of knowledge regarding the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "grounded theory is a good design to use when a theory is not available to explain or understand a process" (p. 87). Data collection and analysis are used to develop a theory regarding the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization grounded in data collected from male and female study participants who spend various amounts of time on social media. The grounded theory approach is used in the research portion of this study to develop a framework to explain the role of social media in human trafficking victimization. The development of this framework will help to generate a theory regarding the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization which will, in turn, aid in determining proper precautions potential human trafficking victims can take to reduce the likelihood of being trafficked as a result of their social media use. Further, the

development of this theory can assist in providing context for further research and the expansion of ideas in areas that have not been fully explored, making a grounded theory approach the most appropriate for the research portion of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research conducted in this study can create a foundation for future research in the area of human trafficking and the effects of social media use. Such a foundation is necessary due to the current lack of information on the effect of social media use on human trafficking victimization.

Sampling and Recruitment

Information for this study was gathered via confidential surveys, as shown in Appendix A, from female and male individuals who use social media for varying amounts of time and were split into two groups: ages 18 to 24 and over 24. Study participants were primarily recruited by the researcher through social media. The researcher posted recruitment announcements, as shown in Appendix B, on social media websites expected to receive high visitation from social media users. The announcements included the purpose of the research project, its goals, and a link to an informed consent and survey. The surveys were available for completion for a period of three months to obtain as many responses as possible. Once participants completed the surveys, a thorough review of their answers was completed.

Inclusion criteria. To ensure a thorough study, inclusion criteria included a wide range of individuals with differing backgrounds, family situations, and educational majors. Participant selection was limited to social media users who were at least 18-years-old.

Exclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria was largely related to age. Individuals who were below the age of 18 were excluded. Individuals who do not use social media were also excluded.

Setting

The research conducted in this study was via confidential online surveys. Confidential surveys were the most appropriate setting for this human trafficking research due to the innately clandestine nature of the offense. Online surveys allowed participants the comfort of confidentiality, increasing the likelihood for honest, candid responses.

The Researcher's Role

In this qualitative study, the researcher's role was crucial, as the researcher was the instrument of data collection. The researcher in this study acted in an objective manner as an observer, simply administering written surveys without attempting to influence participants' responses. Due to the reticent nature of human trafficking, the researcher approached this study with the assumption that there is not enough information known about human trafficking and the role social media plays in victimization and that parties may be hesitant to speak freely on the subject.

The researcher in this study was careful not to form biases; therefore, she chose to conduct surveys via the Internet. Such means of conducting surveys allowed confidentiality and reduced judgments and biases based on body language, appearance, and mannerisms.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through written, confidential surveys administered by the researcher. The researcher used Google Docs to administer the surveys, as this allowed the survey respondents to remain confidential. The researcher primarily used close-ended questions to gather information regarding the role of social media in potential human trafficking recruitment. Examples of survey questions to the student respondents included, but were not limited to, the following: "How many hours per day are you on social media?" "What social media platforms

do you use?" "Do you accept friends and/or followers you do not know personally?" "Has anyone ever asked you to send photos of yourself to them, asked you to meet, asked your age, or asked about your home life?" "Have you ever thought about leaving home?" "What would make you want to leave home?" The surveys were available until 225 participants in each group had completed the surveys. Reminder announcements were posted periodically on social media to encourage participation.

Respondents' answers were reviewed and analyzed using a grounded theory approach, wherein recurring responses were clustered into categories through open coding. The researcher determined if there were any sub-categories, or properties, of the categories through analysis and identified emerging themes.

The researcher's analysis of the data attempted to formulate a theory regarding the role of social media in human trafficking victimization. Formulating a theory about the role of social media in human trafficking through a grounded theory study is important because there currently lacks research regarding the pathways from social media to human trafficking. If a theory can be formulated and additional information can be discovered, the information learned can assist in determining proper precautions potential human trafficking victims can take to reduce the likelihood of being trafficked as a result of their social media use.

Limitations. The clandestine subject matter, available personnel, confidential information, and time constraints limited this study. This study was conducted primarily through surveys focusing on the learned opinions and observations of appropriate respondents. The findings were limited to the population from which information was collected, their responsibility to keep certain information confidential, and their willingness to honestly discuss their social media habits.

Validity

The credibility and validity of this study were ensured using various sources of data, analyzing and comparing the results of data to previously published statistics and literature regarding human trafficking and social media use. The accuracy of the participants' responses was validated through their written responses, rather than verbal answers.

Transferability. This study describes the role of social media use in human trafficking victimization based on study results in locales of participants. It is possible for its results to be transferred to other locations if they have similar settings and resources. At minimum, other areas can use the information collected in this study as a starting point to further additional research.

Ethical Considerations

When contemplating the ethical considerations of this study, the risk to the participants had to be examined. While this research study imposed minimal risk for participants, it was important to keep the participants' identity confidential due to the inherently dangerous nature of human trafficking. To keep the participants' identity confidential, their names and other identifying information was not requested or published. There was also the potential for slight emotional risk to participants, as they were asked to reflect on potentially harmful and risky behavior on social media. To minimize this risk, participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Only willing subjects participated in the study. Participants were provided with contact information for several counselors and human trafficking resources should they need follow-up therapy or assistance. The results of the surveys are kept on a password protected computer accessible only by the researcher. Further, no survey responses were printed. Rather, all responses have been stored on the researcher's personal computer.

Chapter 4: Results

The results of this study in relation to its research question and the patterns identified are discussed in depth below.

Demographics

The demographic data collected on the study's participants are displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Profile (N=450)

Variables	***Percent***
Age 18-24 – survey one	50.0%
Age >24 – survey two	50.0%
Male (18-24)	43.6%
Male (>24)	32.9%
Female (18-24)	55.1%
Female (>24)	66.7%
Gender neutral (18-24)	1.3%
Gender neutral (>24)	0.4%
Caucasian (18-24)	62.7%
Caucasian (>24)	70.7%
Asian (18-24)	13.8%
Asian (>24)	14.2%
African American (18-24)	12.9%
African American (>24)	5.8%
Hispanic or Latino (18-24)	7.1%
Hispanic or Latino (>24)	3.6%
Native American (18-24)	1.8%
Native American (>24)	0.4%
Pacific Islander (18-24)	0.9%
Pacific Islander (>24)	0.9%

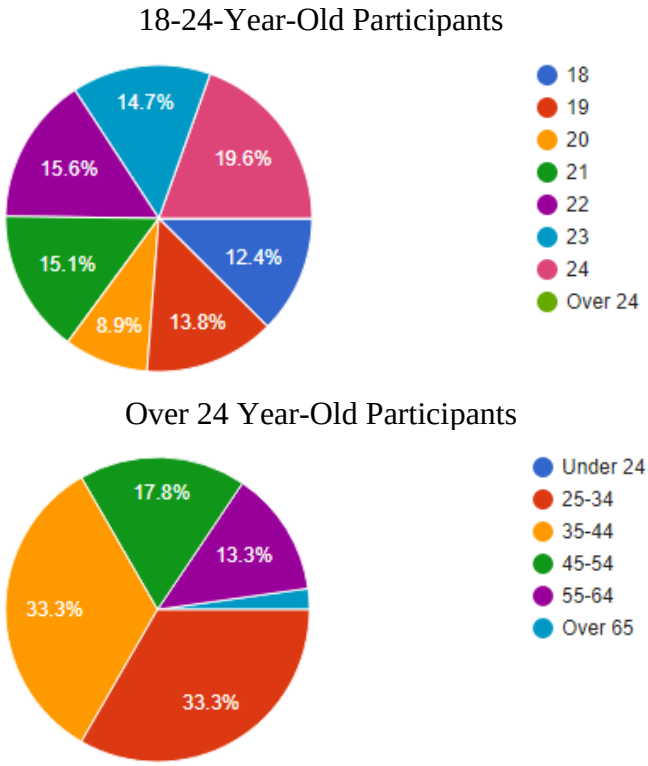
Middle Eastern (18-24)	0.0%
Middle Eastern (>24)	1.3%
European (18-24)	0.0%
European (>24)	0.9%
Raised in a two-parent household (18-24)	76.0%
Thought about leaving home due to unhappiness (18-24)	43.1%
Has children (>24)	67.6%
Children live with them (>24)	68.9%
Married (>24)	56.9%
Accept unknown friends/followers on social media (18-24)	69.6%
Accept unknown friends/followers on social media (>24)	39.1%
Been asked for age on social media (18-24)	59.4%
Been asked for age on social media (>24)	37.8%
Given age when asked (18-24)	63.7%
Given age when asked (>24)	42.7%
Been complimented by someone they met on social media (18-24)	80.9%
Been complimented by someone they met on social media (>24)	64.7%
Been asked to send photos of themselves by someone they met on social media (18-24)	53.3%
Been asked to send photos of themselves by someone they met on social media (>24)	40.4%
Provided photos when asked by someone they met on social media (18-24)	47.4%
Provided photos when asked by someone they met on social media (>24)	28.5%
Been asked on social media to meet in person (18-24)	57.0%
Been asked on social media to meet in person (>24)	42.2%
Met in person when asked on social media (18-24)	49.3%
Met in person when asked on social media (>24)	38.8%
Been asked about home life by someone on social media (18-24)	44.8%
Been asked about home life by someone on social media (>24)	37.5%
Provided information about home life to someone on social media (18-24)	60.8%
Provided information about home life to someone on social media (>24)	39.0%
Been promised something by someone on social media (18-24)	16.4%

Been promised something by someone on social media (>24)	11.2%
Someone on social media expressed a romantic interest in them (18-24)	71.0%
Someone on social media expressed a romantic interest in them (>24)	50.2%
Had a modeling job or photo shoot discussed with them by someone on social media (18-24)	45.1%
Had a modeling job or photo shoot discussed with them by someone on social media (>24)	16.1%
Been offered a way to make money by someone on social media (18-24)	64.7%
Been offered a way to make money by someone on social media (>24)	46.%

The ages of the participants are shown in the figure below.

Figure 5

Ages of Survey Participants



Many social media sites are used by the survey participants who spend varying amounts of time on social media, as demonstrated in the following figures.

Figure 6

Social Media Sites Used by Survey Participants

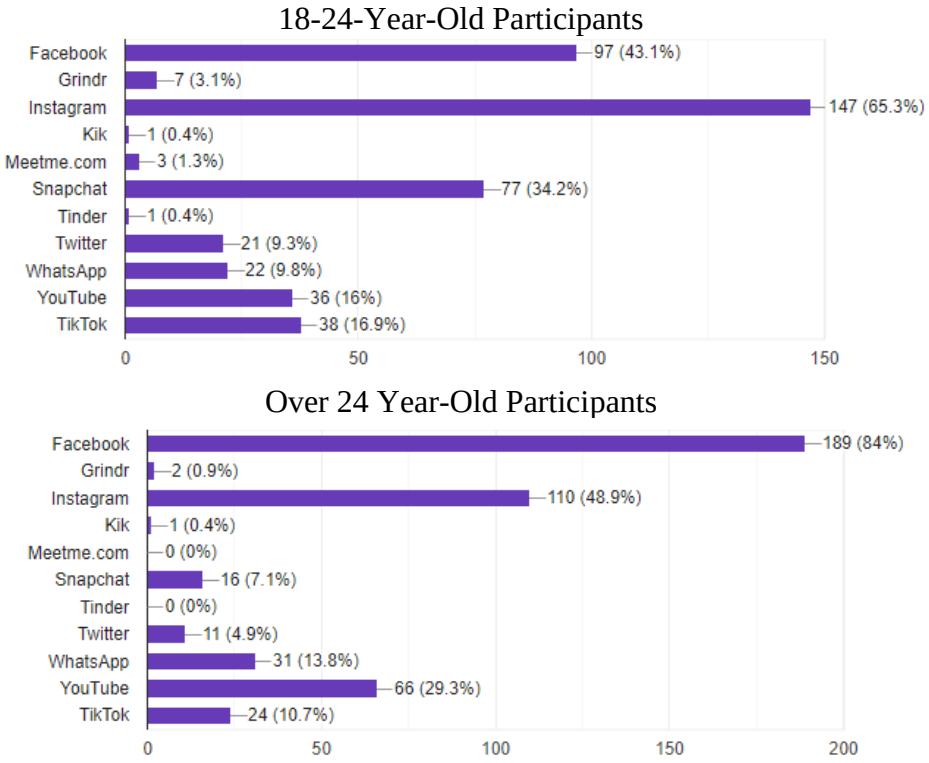
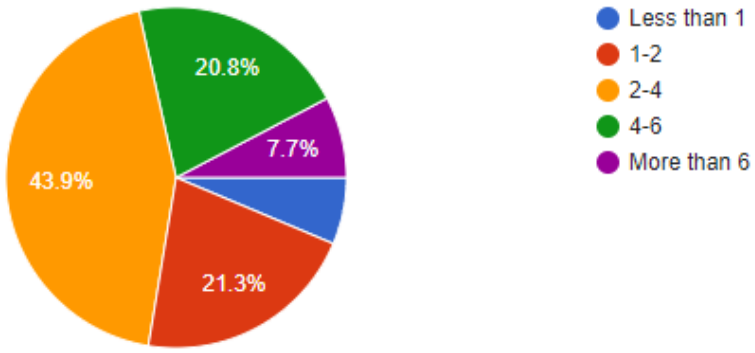
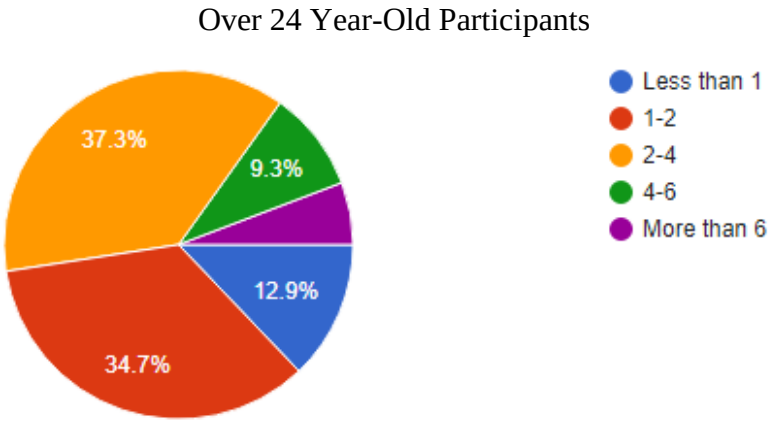


Figure 7

Hours Spent by Survey Participants on Social Media Daily

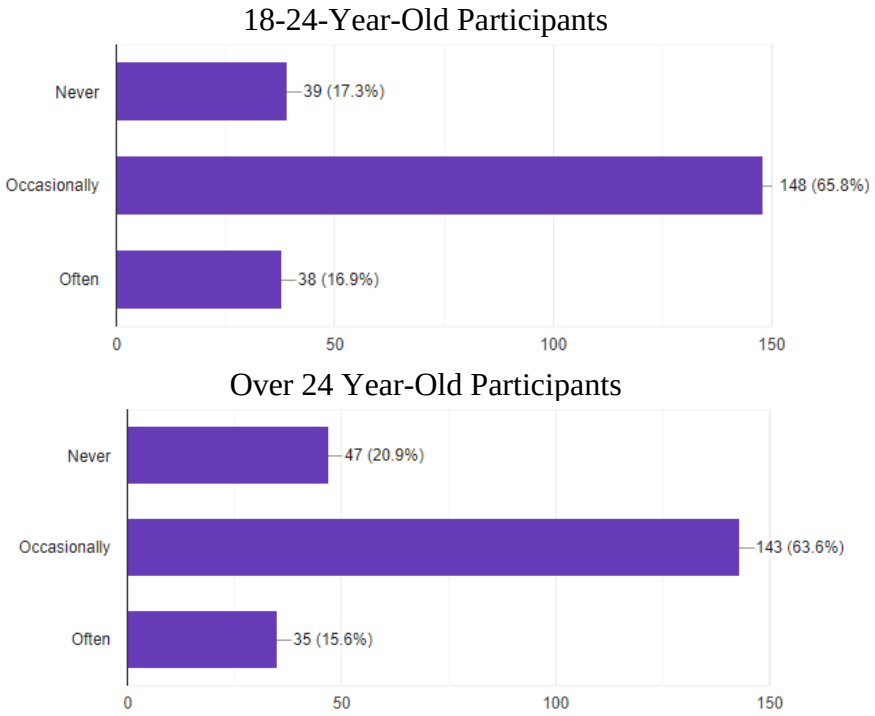




Of note, both the 18- to 24-year-old study participants and the over 24-year-old participants have very similar habits regarding the frequency with which they discuss their social media habits with their friends and family. The similarities in these frequencies are demonstrated in the figure below.

Figure 8

Frequency of Discussing Social Media Habits with Friends or Family



Research Question

In addition to improving the knowledge of human trafficking and recruiters' techniques, this study sought answers to the following research question:

1. *What role does social media play in human trafficking victimization?*

Research question one. To answer research question one, study participants of prime human trafficking victimization age (18 to 24-years old) were asked about their social media habits. These participants were asked specifically about what social media platforms they use, how often they use social media daily, and what information they provide to other social media users they do not know. The information gathered from these participants was compared to responses to the same or similar questions from participants over the age of 24-years-old.

Research question one conclusions. The study's answers to questions regarding research question one indicate the social media habits of users between the ages of 18 and 24 may explain why young people are one of the most vulnerable populations to human trafficking. First, the younger group of study participants spends more time on social media than the older group. Over 72% of the younger group spends more than two hours on social media daily, compared to only 52% of the older group. Further, the types of social media sites used by each group are significant in potential human trafficking victimization risk. For example, approximately 34% of the younger social media users use Snapchat, a social media site known for its ephemeral messages and lack of moderation, compared to only 7% of the older users. The study's younger social media users are also more likely to use social media sites promoting dating and other relationships, such as Grindr, Meetme.com, and Tinder. Another factor that must be considered when determining a young person's vulnerability is their happiness and satisfaction with their home lives. Over 43% of the study's younger participants indicated they

have considered leaving home because they were unhappy. This dissatisfaction at home has been caused by a desire for independence (29.5%), strict parents (20%), abuse (12.4%), neglect (11.4%), absent parents (10.5%), and too many responsibilities at home (7.6%), among other things.

Younger social media users may also be more vulnerable to human trafficking victimization because it can be inferred the older participant group may be more careful about befriending strangers and sharing personal information on social media because many of them are married and have children. Nearly 57% of this study's older participants are married, and 68% of them have children. Only 39% of these older participants accept friends and/or followers on social media whom they do not personally know; whereas, nearly 70% of younger users accept such friends and followers. Younger social media users are also more willing to share personal information and photos with unknown users. When strangers have asked participants their ages on social media, only 43% of older users gave that information, compared to 64% of younger users.

Younger users are also more at risk of human trafficking victimization because they send photos of themselves to strangers more frequently than older users. Over 47% of younger participants have sent photos of themselves to social media users they do not know, compared to only 28.5% of the older participants. Younger social media users are also more likely to meet strangers from social media in person. Almost half of the 18- to 24-year-old respondents who reported being asked to meet strangers from social media in person actually met them. Conversely, only 39% of the over 24-year-old participants met strangers from social media in person. These social media habits likely make younger users more susceptible to human trafficking victimization.

The study's answers to questions regarding research question one also provide insight into the tactics used by potential human traffickers in finding and luring possible victims. For example, social media users in both survey groups reported being complimented by strangers online. Specifically, nearly 65% of older participants and 81% of younger participants have received compliments from strangers on social media. Approximately 42% of human traffickers select their victims based on physical characteristics (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). This study's participants have also had romantic interests expressed to them by strangers on social media. Specifically, 71% of younger social media users and 50% of older users reported unknown social media users expressing romantic interests in them. By complimenting strangers online and expressing romantic interests, human traffickers believe they are increasing their likelihood of obtaining control over their intended victims.

Human traffickers are also known to groom their victims. One of the steps in grooming is gaining the potential victims' trust (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). One way traffickers may try to gain potential victims' trust is by asking them about their home lives and empathizing with them if they are unhappy with their parents, siblings, friends, or school. In this study, nearly 45% of the younger participants have been asked about their home lives by strangers on social media, and 37.5% of the older participants have been asked about their home lives. Once again, the younger social media users put themselves more at risk of human trafficking victimization, as over 60% of them provide that information about their home and personal lives to strangers on social media; whereas only 39% of the older users provide such information. Another step in the grooming process is filling potential victims' needs (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2019). During this step, traffickers may promise their victims something. Sixteen percent of this study's younger participants and 11% of the older participants have been promised something by a stranger on

social media. Some of these promises have included money, cars, jobs, clothing, and vacations. Over 45% of the younger study participants have received interest from strangers on social media regarding modeling jobs or photo shoots, and nearly 65% of them have been offered ways to make money from individuals they do not know.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the role of social media in human trafficking victimization. This research study utilized a qualitative methodology to discern the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization. While information about human trafficking, generally, is readily available from literature reviews, information specifically regarding the role social media plays in victimization is lacking. It is crucial social media users be educated on the risks of sharing information and befriending strangers on the Internet. Despite similarly sharing information regarding their social media habits, younger social media users are more likely to become human trafficking victims, as they are more willing to share personal information with potential traffickers. This willingness accelerates the grooming process of human traffickers. The risk of becoming a human trafficking victim can likely be significantly reduced if social media users refuse to share personal information and photos with other social media users whom they do not know personally.

Recommendations

The results of this study indicate the need for education and awareness regarding the risks and dangers of social media use, especially involving strangers. More broadly, they indicate the need for action against human trafficking. Based on the review and analysis of the study's findings and the need for action, the following recommendations are suggested.

1) Implement training and awareness programs in schools regarding the risks of social media use and the dangers of befriending and communicating with strangers;
2) Publicly encourage discussions among family members and friends regarding social media habits and risks;
3) Implement media campaigns to raise public awareness of human trafficking;
4) Develop social media pages advertised to increase and spread awareness of human trafficking; and
5) Execute a plan for partnerships among schools, hospitality, law enforcement, human services, child welfare, mental health, and healthcare agencies with the common goal of eliminating human trafficking.

Conclusion

Human trafficking, the fastest growing illicit industry in the world, is found in nearly every country worldwide. Its prevalence and growth, coupled with the increasing use of social media, creates a hotbed for human traffickers. Social media helps traffickers conceal their criminal activities while remaining largely anonymous. Young people are at greater risk of becoming trafficking victims because they are generally more naïve and trusting of strangers online. They tend to share more personal information than their older counterparts, allowing predators to take advantage of, and ultimately victimize, them. As a result, it is crucial to increase awareness of the risks of using social media and corresponding with strangers online. It is only when this awareness is increased and precautions are put into action that human trafficking can be reduced.

The results of this study indicate the importance of increased training and awareness on the risks of social media use. Schools and other organizations frequented by young people must receive support and training from appropriate personnel on recognizing the risks of social media use and steps by which those risks can be reduced. Trends in social media use by young people that may increase their risk of human trafficking victimization must be identified, and then steps in reducing potential victimization must be taken.

From this study's research question, the following conclusions have been identified:

1) Human trafficking is an existent and increasing problem;
2) Predators use social media to gain contact with, and increase the trust of, potential victims;
3) Potential victims of human trafficking share common characteristics in their social media use;
4) There is a lack of proper awareness concerning the risks of social media use and befriending and communicating with strangers online; and
5) Social media users must receive the proper education regarding the risks they face online and how to minimize those risks, ultimately reducing their chances of human trafficking victimization.

All the study's findings relate to the research question and correspond to the primary themes within the data.

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Appendix A

Human Trafficking and Social Media

* Required

NSU Florida
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7796
PHONE: (954) 262-5369

Participant Letter for Anonymous Surveys
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
The Role of Social Media in Human Trafficking Victimization

Who is doing this research study?

This person doing this study is Alicia Terwilliger with Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. They will be helped by Dr. Marcelo Castro and Dr. Jennifer Allen.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are an individual between the ages of 18 and 24 who uses social media.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is designed to gather information regarding social media use and human trafficking. Through the results of this study, precautions potential human trafficking victims can take to reduce the likelihood of bring trafficked as a result of their social media use will be explored.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

You will be taking a one-time, anonymous survey. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You can decide not to participate in this research and it will not be held against you. You can exit the survey at any time.

Will it cost me anything? Will I get paid for being in the study?

There is no cost for participation in this study. Participation is voluntary and no payment will be provided.

How will you keep my information private?

Your responses are anonymous. Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law. Your identity and responses will remain completely confidential. Any identifiable information obtained from this survey will remain confidential and will be accessed only by myself, my faculty advisor, and the Institutional Review Board members. Your responses will be used solely for my research regarding the role of social media in human

NSU Florida
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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trafficking victimization. Your name will not be used in any written reports resulting from this research. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board, and other representatives of this institution. All confidential data will be kept securely on the researcher's password-protected computer. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by deletion.

Who can I talk to about the study?

If you have questions, you can contact Alicia Terwilliger at (843) 330-6446 or Dr. Jennifer Allen at (954) 262-7878.

If you have questions about the study but want to talk to someone else who is not a part of the study, you can call the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (954) 262-5369 or toll free at 1-866-499-0790 or email at IRB@nova.edu.

Do you understand and do you want to be in the study?

If you have read the above information and voluntarily wish to participate in this research study, please feel free to contact me at ab3238@mynsu.nova.edu.

1. If you have read the proceeding information, meet the qualifications, and wish to participate in the study, please check below. *

   Check all that apply.

   - [ ] PROCEED TO SURVEY

2. What is your gender? *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ( ) Male
   - ( ) Female
   - ( ) Transgender
   - ( ) Gender Neutral

3. What is your age? (If you are under 18 or over 24, you MAY NOT PARTICIPATE in this survey.) *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ( ) 18
   - ( ) 19
   - ( ) 20
   - ( ) 21
   - ( ) 22
   - ( ) 23
   - ( ) 24
   - ( ) Over 24

4. What is your ethnicity? *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ( ) White or Caucasian
   - ( ) Black or African American
   - ( ) Hispanic or Latino
   - ( ) Asian
   - ( ) Native American
   - ( ) Pacific Islander
   - ( ) Middle Eastern
   - ( ) European
   - ( ) Other: _____

5. Is English your first language? *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ( ) Yes
   - ( ) No

6. Were you born in the United State or another country? *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ( ) United States
   - ( ) Another country

7. If another country, please specify which one.

   _____

8. In what state do you live? *

   _____

9. Were you raised in a two-parent household? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

10. If your answer to the previous question is "no," please indicate whether your father is present in your life.

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

11. Have you ever thought about leaving home because you are unhappy? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

12. If your answer to the above question is "yes," please indicate what would make you want to leave home.

Mark only one oval.

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Absent parent
- Too many chores/responsibilities
- Parent too strict
- Parent not strict enough
- Desire for independence
- Other: _____

13. Do you use social media? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

14. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," please indicate which TWO of the following social media platforms you use the most.

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Facebook
- [ ] Grindr
- [ ] Instagram
- [ ] Kik
- [ ] Meetme.com
- [ ] Snapchat
- [ ] Tinder
- [ ] Twitter
- [ ] WhatsApp
- [ ] YouTube
- [ ] TikTok

15. How many hours per day do you average on social media?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 1
- 1-2
- 2-4
- 4-6
- More than 6

16. Do you accept friends and/or followers on social media who you do not know personally?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

17. Has anyone on social media ever asked you your age?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

18. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you provide that information?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

19. Have you ever been complimented by someone you met online through social media?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

20. Has anyone on social media ever asked you to send photos of yourself to them?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

21. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you provide photos?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

22. Has anyone on social media ever asked you to meet them in person?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

23. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you meet them in person?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

24. Has anyone on social media ever asked you about your home life?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

25. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you provide that information?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

26. Has anyone on social media ever promised you anything?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

27. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," what did he or she promise you?

_____

28. Has anyone on social media ever expressed a romantic interest in you?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

29. Has anyone on social media ever discussed a modeling job or photo shoot with you?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

30. Has anyone on social media ever offered you a way to make money?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

31. How frequently do you discuss your social media habits with your friends and/or family?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Never
- [ ] Occasionally
- [ ] Often

Thank you for your participation and valuable feedback.
Should you need counseling services after participating in this survey, please contact a counselor.

Counseling referrals can be given to victims from any location by calling the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at (888) 373-7888 or emailing info@polarisproject.org.

Human Trafficking and Social Media

Over 24

* Required

NSU Florida

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Participant Letter for Anonymous Surveys
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
The Role of Social Media in Human Trafficking Victimization

Who is doing this research study?

This person doing this study is Alicia Terwilliger with Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. They will be helped by Dr. Marcelo Castro and Dr. Jennifer Allen.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are an individual over the age of 24 who uses social media.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is designed to gather information regarding social media use and human trafficking. Through the results of this study, precautions potential human trafficking victims can take to reduce the likelihood of being trafficked as a result of their social media use will be explored.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

You will be taking a one-time, anonymous survey. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You can decide not to participate in this research and it will not be held against you. You can exit the survey at any time.

Will it cost me anything? Will I get paid for being in the study?

There is no cost for participation in this study. Participation is voluntary and no payment will be provided.

How will you keep my information private?

Your responses are anonymous. Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law. Your identity and responses will remain completely confidential. Any identifiable information obtained from this survey will remain confidential and will be accessed only by myself, my faculty advisor, and the Institutional Review Board members. Your responses will be used solely for my research regarding the role of social media in human

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NSU Florida

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

trafficking victimization. Your name will not be used in any written reports resulting from this research. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board, and other representatives of this institution. All confidential data will be kept securely on the researcher's password-protected computer. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by deletion.

Who can I talk to about the study?

If you have questions, you can contact Alicia Terwilliger at (843) 330-6446 or Dr. Jennifer Allen at (954) 262-7878.

If you have questions about the study but want to talk to someone else who is not a part of the study, you can call the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (954) 262-5369 or toll free at 1-866-499-0790 or email at IRB@nova.edu.

Do you understand and do you want to be in the study?

If you have read the above information and voluntarily wish to participate in this research study, please feel free to contact me at ab3238@mynsu.nova.edu.

Page 2 of 2

1. If you have read the proceeding information, meet the qualifications, and wish to participate in the study, please check below. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] PROCEED TO SURVEY

2. What is your gender? *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Gender Neutral

3. What is your age? (If you are under 24, you MAY NOT PARTICIPATE in this survey.) *

Mark only one oval.

- Under 24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- Over 65

4. What is your ethnicity? *

Mark only one oval.

- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern
- European
- Other: _____

5. Is English your first language? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

6. Were you born in the United State or another country? *

Mark only one oval.

- United States
- Another country

7. If another country, please specify which one.

_____

8. In what state do you live? *

_____

9. Do you have children? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

10. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," please indicate whether they live in your household.

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

11. Are you married?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

12. Do you use social media? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

13. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," please indicate which TWO of the following social media platforms you use the most.

Check all that apply.

- Facebook
- Grindr
- Instagram
- Kik
- Meetme.com
- Snapchat
- Tinder
- Twitter
- WhatsApp
- YouTube
- TikTok

14. How many hours per day do you average on social media?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 1
- 1-2
- 2-4
- 4-6
- More than 6

15. Do you accept friends and/or followers on social media who you do not know personally?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

16. Has anyone on social media ever asked you your age?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

17. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you provide that information?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

18. Have you ever been complimented by someone you met online through social media?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

19. Has anyone on social media ever asked you to send photos of yourself to them?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

20. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you provide photos?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

21. Has anyone on social media ever asked you to meet them in person?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

22. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you meet them in person?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

23. Has anyone on social media ever asked you about your home life?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

24. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," did you provide that information?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

25. Has anyone on social media ever promised you anything?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

26. If your answer to the previous question is "yes," what did he or she promise you?

27. Has anyone on social media ever expressed a romantic interest in you?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

28. Has anyone on social media ever discussed a modeling job or photo shoot with you?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

29. Has anyone on social media ever offered you a way to make money?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

30. How frequently do you discuss your social media habits with your friends and/or family?

Check all that apply.

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often

Thank you for your participation and valuable feedback.

Should you need counseling services after participating in this survey, please contact a counselor.

Counseling referrals can be given to victims from any location by calling the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at (888) 373-7888 or emailing info@polarisproject.org.

Appendix B

Do you use social media? Are you between 18 and 24 years old? We are conducting a research study about the role of social media in human trafficking victimization and need your input.

My name is Alicia Terwilliger, and I am a graduate student working with Dr. Jennifer Allen at Nova Southeastern University. We are conducting a research study regarding the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization. If you use social media and are between 18 and 24 years old, I would love to hear from you regarding your social media use.

Through the results of the study, precautions potential human trafficking victims can take to reduce the likelihood of being trafficked as a result of their social media use may be identified. Your responses will be used to analyze the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization and help identify precautions that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of victimization.

If you are a social media user, please take about 30 minutes to complete a survey for this research project. Participation is completely voluntary, and your answers and identity will remain anonymous.

If you are interested, please complete this confidential survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/u/1/d/e/1FAIpQLSdmyEtnN9ahhI48PzpkcFswsKo9feEmA_ixhdqQnoJzgrD_KA/viewform

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at ab3238@mynsu.nova.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

Alicia Terwilliger

Graduate Student

Nova Southeastern University

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Allen, Professor of Criminal Justice.

(IRB approval received on February 4, 2021)

Do you use social media? Are you over 24 years old? We are conducting a research study about the role of social media in human trafficking victimization and need your input.

My name is Alicia Terwilliger, and I am a graduate student working with Dr. Jennifer Allen at Nova Southeastern University. We are conducting a research study regarding the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization. If you use social media and are over 24 years old, I would love to hear from you regarding your social media use.

Through the results of the study, precautions potential human trafficking victims can take to reduce the likelihood of being trafficked as a result of their social media use may be identified. Your responses will be used to analyze the role social media plays in human trafficking victimization and help identify precautions that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of victimization.

If you are a social media user, please take about 30 minutes to complete a survey for this research project. Participation is completely voluntary, and your answers and identity will remain anonymous.

If you are interested, please complete this confidential survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe74IMWD1KdR3bdPQiKC0pOCZnW_wbNf013JqS2s45MdppvaQ/viewform

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at ab3238@mynsu.nova.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

Alicia Terwilliger

Graduate Student

Nova Southeastern University

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