Sex Trafficking in the Twin Ports

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ABSTRACT

More than 600 Minnesota women and children were trafficked over a three year period and more than half from one minority group (LaFave, 2009). Specific services need to be available for victims of sex trafficking in the Twin Ports. This study explored whether there are services available for victims of sex trafficking. The research showed that sex trafficking is a growing problem and that sex trafficking victims could be supported by improving or implementing services. This information can be provided to Twin Ports agencies to determine additional services or changes in current services to support victims of sex trafficking.

Introduction

Problem Statement

This study was a needs assessment of services available to victims of sex trafficking in the Twin Ports (Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin). The intent was to determine if services exist for sex trafficking victims. A study done by The Advocates for Human Rights a non-profit organization, showed that more than 600 Minnesota women and children were trafficked over a three year period and more than half from one minority group (LaFave, 2009).

The devastating effects on sex trafficking victims are immediate and long term and thus specific services are required for support and rehabilitation. These services have not been found to be prominent in human service organizations. The research question asked was “What services are available for victims of sex trafficking in the Twin Ports?” to determine if services are offered in the Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin urban area.

Problem Background

Sexual trafficking is a global issue. According to The Advocates for Human Rights 2008, an estimated 600,000 to four million people are trafficked each year. What is sex trafficking? According to a review of the literature, it was determined that no consensus exists on a universally accepted definition of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The terminology varies and some terms used include: trafficking, human trafficking, and sex trafficking or prostitution. For the purposes of this research, the term sex trafficking will be used.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as (a) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age, or (b) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (United States Department of State, 2009).

The enactment of TVPA made sex trafficking a serious violation of federal law. The TVPA provided for a range of new protections and assistance for victims of trafficking in persons; it expanded the crimes and enhanced the penalties available to federal investigators and prosecutors pursuing traffickers; and it expanded United States activities internationally to prevent victims from being trafficked (United States Department of Justice, 2005).

The United States Department of State estimates that approximately 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States annually (Wisconsin Department of Justice, 2009). Information from state sources provides further information on the extent of the issue.
In 2005, the Minnesota legislature passed Minnesota Statute 299A.785, requiring the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to complete annual studies on the extent and type of human trafficking occurring in the state (Minnesota Department of Public Safety, 2008).

Currently, there is no systemic method for tracking victimization in Minnesota. Counting victims requires gathering information from a variety of individual sources including victim service providers, law enforcement, religious organizations, hospital emergency rooms and other health care providers, labor assistance organizations and culturally-specific assistance programs (Minnesota Department of Public Safety, 2008). The annual studies have shown that victims of labor and sex trafficking have been reported in number of Minnesota counties, including Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey, Wright, and St. Louis (Minnesota Department of Public Safety, 2008).

Information from The Advocates for Human Rights report provides specific information for the Twin Ports which is the Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin geographic area under study in this research project. The report concludes that women have been trafficked for prostitution in the Twin Ports, specifying that a high number of those trafficked were American Indian girls (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2008). This reflects statistics found nationally.

American Indians are twice as likely to experience sexual assault crimes compared to all other races, and one in three Indian women reports having been raped during her lifetime (United States Department of Justice, 2009). There is little data on the nature of trafficking of American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls in Minnesota. The Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition is conducting a statewide research project interviewing and accurately documenting the experiences of Native women and youth being trafficked and prostituted in Minnesota. The study will be completed by June 30, 2009 (Minnesota Department of Public Safety, 2008). According to a report done by Duluth FOX 21 News, sex trafficking is a growing problem in the Twin Ports (LaFave, 2009).

Victims of sex trafficking can be women or men, girls or boys, but the majority are women and girls (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Sex traffickers use a variety of methods to condition their victims including starvation, confinement, beatings, physical abuse, rape, gang rape, threats of violence to the victims and the victims’ families, forced drug use and the threat of shaming their victims by revealing their activities to their family and their families’ friends (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities are compelling factors that facilitate the ease with which sex traffickers are able to recruit women, (Hughes, 2004) but they are not the cause of sex trafficking.

Victims of sex trafficking face numerous health risks. Physical risks include drug and alcohol addiction; physical injuries such as broken bones, concussions, burns, vaginal/anal tearing; traumatic brain injury (TBI) resulting in memory loss, dizziness, headaches, numbness; sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, urinary tract infection, pubic lice; sterility, miscarriages, menstrual problems; other diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria, and pneumonia; and forced or coerced abortions (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2009).

According to U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2009) the psychological harm to victims of sex trafficking include disassociation between mind and body, shame, grief, fear, distrust, hatred of men, self-hatred, suicide, and suicidal thoughts. Victims are at risk for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which includes acute anxiety, depression, insomnia, physical hyper-alertness, and self-loathing that is long lasting and resistant to change (defined as complex PTSD).

The medical, psychological and emotional trauma experienced by victims of sex trafficking, and the environmental factors they experience, must be addressed in order for the victims to become survivors. Non-profit agencies can play a key role in helping victims reintegrate into communities.

Victims of sex trafficking need assistance in housing, health care, legal services, employment, and counseling. “We have things for domestic violence, but nothing for trafficked
Sex trafficking victims require comprehensive services, including emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing, counseling, educational assistance, job training, medical care, mental healthcare, legal representation and culturally-specific programming, as well as specialized programming for youth and persons who have been in prostitution (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2008).

**Statement of Research Proposal and Rationale**

The research project, a needs assessment, was designed to assess the availability of services for victims of sex trafficking in the Twin Ports. The project was designed to answer the question, “What services are available for victims of sex trafficking in the Twin Ports?”

**Research Design**

**Sample**

A non-probability sampling technique was used to select key informants in Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin. Key informants were representatives of human services, social service, criminal justice, and other agencies. The key informants in each geographic area (Duluth or Superior) were selected using a list of human services, social service, criminal justice, and other agencies. Agencies were selected for the list which reflected services which victims of sex trafficking would need to access (sexual assault, domestic abuse, emergency shelter, legal aid). Interviews were facilitated during a three week period in July.

The use of the non-probability sampling technique allowed the researcher to choose the sample according to the problem of sex trafficking. The key informants were professionals in the community who helped the researcher gain information on services available for victims of sex trafficking.

**Research Methodology**

This exploratory research attempted to determine whether services are available for victims of sex trafficking. A qualitative research design was applied for the needs assessment. This needs assessment helped identify if specific resources and services were available for victims of sex trafficking.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected in structured interviews, up to 60 minutes each in person or by phone. Interviews were completed with six participants. All participants were provided with the informed consent and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research prior to the interview.

The same questions were used for all interviews, regardless of the mode of the interview. Open and closed questions were used and included inquiries about services provided for sex trafficking victims. Confidentiality allowed participants to talk about their knowledge of victims of sex trafficking without any worry of judgments by outside agencies.

Notes were taken at each interview. On the interview form and accompanying notes, the identity of the participant and the agency they worked at was not noted. Initials of the participant were noted along with the general type of agency (i.e. legal, emergency shelter) rather than the agency name. A list of participants was kept in a separate file for tracking purposes only and accessed only by the researcher. This list was destroyed once the research was completed. To ensure privacy, a password was used in order to access the data collection on the researcher’s computer. Only the researcher and the McNair mentor had access to the information collected from the interviews.

**Ethical, Social Justice and Human Diversity Issues**

The data collection was conducted in an ethnical manner and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. There was no identifying information about the
participants and the data collection was done in a confidential manner. All participation was voluntary; the informed consent provided the subjects with detailed information regarding the study. The study did not exclude any ethnic or racial group.

**Strengths and Limitations of Interviews**

The strengths of face to face interviewing provided the opportunity to build trust, so the interviewee felt comfortable to share information. Appropriate eye contact helped the interviewing process; this was not possible in the phone interview and it is possible less information was provided as a result. The key informants provided information regarding sex trafficking, but were not able to provide information regarding the experiences of victims of sex trafficking. Interviewing victims may have provided the researcher a better understanding of sex trafficking. The small sample of interviews may have limited the research; additional interviews would provide a better understanding of sex trafficking. The interview number was limited due to time constraints for the research and the schedules of potential interviewees.

**Results**

**Data Analysis**

The interview questions used were open and closed ended questions. There were a total of six questions. An analysis of the interviews was completed using Marlow’s process of qualitative analysis (Marlow, 2005). The interviews were transcribed and read through carefully to determine categories and meaning units. Following this, main themes were determined. Below are the six questions and a summary of the responses received.

**Is sex trafficking an issue in your geographic area? If yes, why? If no, why not?**

Of the six interviews only one did not think sex trafficking was an issue. Three of the six participants identified why they believe sex trafficking is an issue; one identified sex, food and drugs as the motivating factor; the second identified the demand, to make profits; and the third identified casework and the 2008 Human Trafficking in Minnesota report.

**Does your agency provide services for victims of sex trafficking?**

All six interviewees said yes to this question.

**If yes, what kind of services?**

Every interviewee answered this question. There were a variety of services mentioned: shelter, advocacy, legal advocacy, information, referrals, support groups, community education, crisis intervention, medical, counseling, housing, life skills, outreach, education assistance, and chemical assessment and indirect services.

**If yes, could you describe those services?**

One interviewee described services which included doing a rape test for forensic and outreach to victims in jail. The other interviewee said investigating crimes.

**If yes, how often do you see victims of sex trafficking or how many clients per year do you work with? Why do you think you see these numbers of clients?**

No clear themes arose in the responses. One interviewee declined to answer and then said not a high number. One interviewee said not sure and said victims do not say they are victims of sex trafficking. One interviewee said that forty percent of clients were in prostitution or trafficking. One interviewee said at least 30-50 and at least a few every month. One interviewee said the number of
victims are more than what is realized. Only one interviewee answered the second part of the question. The response was that women seek services because of cultural and spiritual reasons.

**If no, where do you refer victims of sex trafficking?**

Five out of six responded to this question. Overall, participants said that victims are referred to other programs as needed. Two interviewees said they refer victims to the Twin Cities, one interviewee said they only refer women out for medical and housing needs. One interviewee said women are referred out for counseling and shelter. One interviewee said women are referred out for emergency shelter and counseling.

**Themes**

The research conducted showed three themes as a result of the interviews. The first theme is the belief by participants that sex trafficking is an issue in the Twin Ports. This reflects information from the literature that shows that sex trafficking is a growing problem in the Twin Ports.

The second theme is the belief by participants that their agencies provide services for victims of sex trafficking. However, none identified services specifically designed for victims of sex trafficking. As identified in the literature, victims need comprehensive services to deal with the significant and long-term effects of sex trafficking. The third theme is the practice of referring victims to appropriate services.

**Conclusion**

Victims of sex trafficking are in need of inclusive services and assistance to deal with the effects of sex trafficking and to determine their next steps in their lives. Victims and service organizations both face many barriers in finding one another and it is important to minimize those barriers through service coordination, increased awareness of the issue, training for those who may come into contact with victims, and increased ability to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes (Human Trafficking in Minnesota, 2008).

**Suggestions for Future Research**

It would be beneficial to interview survivors of sex trafficking to address the barriers in receiving services and assistance. Interviewing survivors would also help in finding out the needs of the victims of sex trafficking to improve or implement services.
Sex Trafficking in the Twin Ports

References


