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Sex Trafficking in Michigan

Introduction

When most people hear the term “sex trafficking,” they imagine a crime that happens to women in other countries, when the truth is that sex trafficking occurs close to home as well. This paper intends to clarify what sex trafficking is, the prevalence in the United States and Michigan, who is involved, and how it occurs. It will also explain why it is so hard to stop sex trafficking, what the current laws are against it, what organizations exist to help victims, and what steps would ideally be taken to help stop it. Finally, I provide tips for being able to recognize a trafficking situation and who is at risk. This paper should serve as an overview to introduce people to the complicated crime of sex trafficking, and how it affects Michigan.

Sex Trafficking

To solve the problem of sex trafficking, we first need to understand what it is. One definition of sex trafficking is “a modern-day form of slavery in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years” (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). An official definition of sex trafficking is provided in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which is the federal law against human trafficking, created in 2000. This act defines trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” (Human Trafficking Clinic, 2011).

Victims of trafficking can be male or female, but they are most commonly girls and young women (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). This report will primarily focus on the female

victims of trafficking, since most of the research available is only about women. The average age that girls become victims of prostitution is when they are 12-14 years old (Walker-Rodriguez, & Hill, 2011).

For clarification, although the name “trafficking” implies movement, it is not required. Sex trafficking is more about the exploitation and forcefulness involved in bringing people into prostitution. Victims could be brought in from another country under false pretenses, or they might just be local girls who get kidnapped. Furthermore, whenever the victim is a minor, there doesn’t need to be any proof of force or coercion, since it is always illegal for a minor to be a part of commercial sex acts (U.S. Department of Justice). The act of forcing a minor to be a prostitute fulfills the definition of sex trafficking.

Prevalence

Sex trafficking is the third largest criminal enterprise in the world, and the fastest growing area of organized crime. When many people hear about trafficking, they imagine it happening overseas, when the truth is that this is a problem in the United States as well. The number of victims all over the world is estimated to be in the millions, but some of them are located here too (Walker-Rodriguez, & Hill, 2011). It is hard to obtain exact statistics about the number of victims in the United States since many are never known or never come to the police. According to Shared Hope International’s report on domestic minor trafficking, there are about 100,000 minor sexual exploitation victims per year in the United States alone (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). Additionally, it is estimated that almost 300,000 American youth are at risk of being victims of sex trafficking (Walker-Rodriguez, & Hill, 2011).

Methods and Victims

Raymond and Hughes conducted a 2001 study on sex trafficking in the United States, funded by the National Institute of Justice. They interviewed hundreds of victims, law enforcements, and advocates in order to provide information on many different aspects of trafficking. They even found stories online written by men who had bought women in prostitution (Raymond & Hughes, 2001).

The study found that sex trafficking enterprises are located in both rural and urban areas. Some businesses take place in makeshift locations, while others might pose as or hide behind legitimate businesses. Examples of these businesses include nail salons, restaurants, strip clubs, and in hotels. These enterprises can be owned by families, organized crime groups, or almost anyone (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). There is a lot of variety in sex trafficking because it can involve anywhere from one trafficker to an entire underground business.

Victims can be of any ethnicity, and percentages seem to vary based on where in the U.S. is studied. Victims may be taken from within the United States, or also brought here from another country. Most of them report entering the industry at a young age, some even as children (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Research has shown that victims are getting increasingly younger over time, and this is likely for several of the following reasons. Younger women are perceived to be less likely to have STDs. They also project more of an image of innocence and vulnerability, and this may be attractive to customers (Shared Hope International). The most common characteristics of victims are that they are usually women, and usually young.

Trafficking rings may use a variety of recruitment methods in order to lure in their victims. Push factors for leaving other countries include poor economic conditions and a lack of family support. Usually a promise of making a lot of money is used to draw people in, often times

promising legitimate jobs. Women from within the U.S. are often lured because the pimps will befriend young, vulnerable girls and use emotional or drug dependencies to trap them (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). One research discovery is that pimps are becoming younger over time and this may help them in tricking girls with affection and deceit (Shared Hope International). Some victims were drawn in when a romantic relationship turned abusive, or when they were convinced to turn from stripping to prostitution (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Overall, it seems that money is used to draw women in from different countries, and emotional attachments and deceit are used to draw in domestic girls. Once traffickers gain control over the girls, the situation changes and they are forced to be used for prostitution.

When the women are lured into the trafficker's control, the traffickers use a variety of methods to keep them there. They might keep them in isolation, threaten them, or get their victims addicted to drugs or alcohol. 65% of American women reported being kept in isolation or under guard. The most common methods seem to be violence and debt bondage methods. Around 90% of the American women reported suffering from verbal threats, physical abuse, and also psychological abuse. Debt bondage is a method where traffickers tell the women they owe them money for various accumulating expenses, so they can never leave because they are constantly in debt to their captor (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). In these ways, the traffickers retain control over their victims and often make them feel scared to try to leave or escape.

Sex trafficking leads to numerous negative outcomes for the victims. Most of the women will contract an STD, and some may become pregnant. The violence may lead to a variety of injuries, such as head injuries, bruises, broken bones, and mouth injuries. Most women in this study suffered from anger and depression following their experience, and many tried to commit suicide. Most also turned to drugs or alcohol in order to cope. Overall, the victims of trafficking

can suffer life-threatening problems following their ordeal, showing how serious this problem really is (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). When we combine the life-threatening negative outcomes with the prevalence of this problem, it shows how important it is to stop sex trafficking and its violence against women.

Customers of Trafficking

There is not a lot of information about the men who pay for sex with trafficking victims. It is known that they may come from a variety of ages, from teenagers to the elderly, and that the majority of them are married. Many buyers subject the women to violence and sexual assault (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). The biggest problem with the customers of trafficking is that they create the demand for the business. The demand for commercial sex services (especially in sex tourism) is greater than the supply of women, which leads to trafficking being used to fill this demand (Shared Hope International). We can hope that if there were less willing customers, there would be less traffickers because it would be less profitable.

According to the Polaris Project, a national organization fighting against sex trafficking, there are multiple reasons why sex trafficking may have so many customers. The buyers might be poorly informed or completely unaware of the realities of sex trafficking and the abuse it puts the victims through. The media also has a tendency to glamorize the commercial sex industry, which may contribute to how unaware the buyers are of what they are supporting. The victims of trafficking may also feel like they need to keep up the act when they are with customers, and they may be too scared to ask for help or let them know what kind of situation they are really in (Polaris Project).

Research by Shared Hope International places buyers into three categories, which helps to show some of the reasoning behind why they purchase women as products. The first type of

buyer is situational, and these are men that are customers because “they are available, vulnerable and the practice is tolerated.” Preferential buyers, which may include pedophiles, have a certain sexual preference so they so they shop specifically for the market that can provide the service or type of girl that they want. Lastly, opportunistic buyers purchase sex either because they do not care, are “blind” to the age or willingness of the victim, or can not differentiate between adults and minors. Our sexualized culture and culture of tolerance are credited as being a factor in why so many men are comfortable with purchasing sex or do not understand what a problem it is. They also say that pornography may serve as a gateway into purchasing prostitutes for some men, although more research is needed on this topic (Shared Hope International).

Trafficking in Michigan

As hard as it is to grasp the idea that sex trafficking is happening in the United States, it may be even harder to imagine it happening close to home. The truth is that trafficking does happen in Michigan, and in fact we are ranked 13th out of the 50 states for the number of trafficking victims. On average, victims become involved in this at the age of 12 (Kus, 2009). People may think that this an unusual occurrence, but one concerning statistic shows the truth: An adolescent female in Michigan is more likely to be the victim of sexual exploitation (141 victims in May 2010) than to die in a car crash (106 victims in an entire year) or commit suicide (31 victims in a year) (Hamilton, 2010). Sex trafficking is far more likely to happen than either of these two other tragedies, even though the others are discussed and publicized more.

Overall, statistics from several months in 2010 show 100-150 victims a month being discovered in Michigan, and this does not even include the unknown victims (Michigan Women’s Commission). According to one website, the U.S. Department of State estimates that there could be up to 2400 sex slaves just in West Michigan (Hilliard, 2012). This estimate comes

from the statistic that there are 1.8 victims for every thousand people (Ellison, 2012). These are estimates, and not solid facts, but even if they are close to the truth it shows what a serious problem trafficking is in Michigan.

Why Michigan?

It is hard to know why exactly Michigan is one of the states with the highest numbers of sex trafficking victims, but researchers do have some ideas. One main theory is that our geographic location leads to more trafficking. Sharing borders with Canada might be one reason that we have more victims, because victims can be transported in from another country. Detroit is one of the main points of entry for people smuggled into the state (Human Trafficking Clinic, 2011). This may be why it is easier to find stories of sex trafficking arrests and victims in that city.

Another possible reason for higher numbers of trafficking in Michigan is that we have large numbers of vulnerable people, as reported by a 2011 University of Michigan survey. Michigan has a lot of people living in poverty, a fairly high number of homeless people, and immigrants living in poverty. All of these are considered risk factors for trafficking, because it makes people more vulnerable to being kidnapped or exploited. We also have a lot of migrant workers that come to Michigan because of our agricultural industry. This places them at risk for labor trafficking, which is also a problem, though not the focus of this paper (Human Trafficking Clinic, 2011).

Additional risk factors for West Michigan youth, and probably youth in general, are listed on the Manasseh Project's website, though these can probably be applied to the entire state.

Quoted directly from the website, these risk factors include:

- "Prior Sexual Abuse (80% of trafficking victims have a history of sexual abuse)
- Familial Traffickers (children are sold by their families in West Michigan for drug money,

- rent, and other factors)
- Poverty (poor communities are targeted by traffickers who offer kids new clothing, jewelry, and cash in an effort to sell their lie)
 - Runaway/Throwaway Kids (1 in 3 runaways will be approached by a trafficker within 48 hours. There are over 2 million runaway/throwaway kids in America)
 - Being LGBT (members of the LGBT make up a disproportionate amount of the homeless youth population)
 - Transient Male Populations (conventioneers, military instillations, truckers, etc)
 - Existing Adult Prostitution/Sex Industry
 - Substance Abuse (West Michigan kids are escaping their trauma with drugs and alcohol but they are also controlled by traffickers with those same poisons.)”
(Manasseh Project)

Michigan Trafficking Laws

It is important to understand the human trafficking laws, because these are needed to help fight against the traffickers. They define what exactly the crime is and its punishments.

In 2000, Congress enacted a federal law against trafficking, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). The TVPA defined trafficking as seen in the beginning of this report. The official purpose of this law is “to combat trafficking in persons, a contemporary manifestation of slavery whose victims are predominantly women and children, to ensure just and effective punishment of traffickers, and to protect their victims” (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000). In order to carry out these purposes, the law lays out several different actions that the government is supposed to engage in in order to help take care of the victims of trafficking (such as providing medical services and information about their rights), and also to help reduce future trafficking (strict punishments for traffickers and a focus on public awareness) (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000). The law has definitely made an improvement in one way: From 2001 to 2006, the number of trafficking convictions

increased 360% from before the TVPA existed (U.S. Department of Justice).

It wasn't until 2006 that the Michigan government finally enacted a law specifically naming human trafficking as illegal. This law was just recently strengthened in 2010, with the changes coming into effect on April 1, 2011 (State of Michigan). The full Michigan trafficking law can be found at <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-328-1931-LXVIII>. In summary, the law defines terms such as commercial sexual activity and extortion. It bans labor trafficking, or “forced labor and services” with the threat of physical harm or other punishments, such as destroying someone’s passport or blackmail. This can be punishable by up to 10 years, possible more if there are aggravating circumstances, such as physical injuries or death caused (Michigan Legislative Website).

The section of the law specifically against sex trafficking (750.462g) states that “a person shall not knowingly recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain by any means, or attempt to recruit, entice, harbor, provide, or obtain by any means, a minor knowing that the minor will be used for child sexually abusive activity.” These actions could be punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Punishments for trafficking are harsher if the person is guilty of “kidnapping or an attempt to kidnap, criminal sexual conduct or an attempt to commit criminal sexual conduct, or an attempt to kill,” and in these cases the punishment could be as severe as life in prison (Michigan Legislative Website).

The section of the law that was added in 2010 is 750.462j. This lengthy section strengthens the previous law in several ways. It makes it illegal to provide or receive the labor or services of a person if force, fraud, or coercion are known to have been used. The punishments are stronger if this involves a minor (less than 18 years of age) or commercial sex act. A commercial sex act can be any kind of sexual contact for which someone receives a payment. Providing or holding a

person for the purposes of servitude or debt bondage is also banned, again with harsher punishments for crimes involving minors and commercial sex acts. Debt bondage is defined as “the status or condition of a debtor arising from a pledge by the debtor of his or her personal services or of those of a person under his or her control as a security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services are not respectively limited and defined.” Imprisonment can be used as punishments for these crimes, along with restitution for the victims and reimbursing the government for its expenses (Michigan Legislative Website).

Michigan Trafficking Stories

To better understand the problem of sex trafficking in Michigan, it might be beneficial to provide some examples, as taken from the news:

In June 2012, law enforcement officials made busts in hotels and motels all over the Detroit area. They arrested 70 different people (pimps and customers) and were able to save six teenagers (ages 13-17) from sex trafficking (Elrick, 2012).

In January, police busted a multi-state sex trafficking ring in Detroit. Dozens of victims, as young as thirteen, have been rescued from the ring. So far, two people had been arrested for their involvement. The ring was broken up and raids were made after a 17 year old girl managed to escape from the group and get in contact with the police. People living on the same street said they had no idea what was happening in the house, just that they remember a lot of traffic in and out of the house (Schabner, 2012).

In March, a Detroit resident was the first person to be convicted under the new sex trafficking laws. Sedrick Leman-Isaac Mitchell, aged 33, was convicted of eight different charges because of his actions in sexually exploiting two teenage females. Mitchell held the two

girls in his house, and put them out on the streets at night, forcing them to be prostitutes and keeping their earnings. He would physically abuse the girls if they did not earn enough money. He also sexually abused the girls. For being convicted of these counts, he was facing up to life in prison (Oakland Press).

In June 2012, Sonny Miller was arrested on charges of child pornography and possible sex trafficking. A year after getting out of jail (he was convicted on a rape charge) he was charged with a home invasion and later found to have 5 boys and girls (ages 6-15) being held in his house. Sexually explicit pictures and videos were found. Police believe he may have bought access to the children. The children were then taken into protective custody (Pepper, 2012).

Fighting Sex Trafficking

Legal interventions to sex trafficking have the potential to make an enormous impact on the problem. The first thing that law enforcement needs is a good set of laws they can use in order to arrest and convict traffickers. Prior to 2006, Michigan did not even have an official law naming labor and sex trafficking illegal, so we have come far since then. The law was even strengthened in 2011, which seems to show that some priority is being placed on this problem. It would appear that Michigan does have a strong and clear law against sex trafficking, which gives law enforcement one of the tools that they need.

The potential problem is that sex trafficking is not necessarily an easy crime to find and arrest people for. Sex trafficking tends to be a hidden business, sometimes a part of organized crime, so it is not always easy to see. Neighbors might not know that there is a trafficking ring in a house on their street; they just might notice that the house has a lot of visitors. The traffickers will try to keep the business hidden, and their victims might be scared to try to get help or talk to police. Police awareness of the problem is the next step needed.

One 2008 study found that law enforcement in smaller communities were likely to say that they thought trafficking was rare or non-existent in their communities. Officers in larger communities (over 75,000 in population) were more likely to believe it is a pervasive problem. Additionally, less than half of law enforcement agencies (in a random sample) had any specific trafficking training, and less than 16% had a specific unit to fight trafficking. The way that trafficking was more likely to have been discovered was when officers were investigating a different type of crime, such as a domestic disturbance or a drug raid. Drug trafficking and prostitution were often connected to trafficking (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy, 2008).

Furthermore, research has found the number one barrier to fighting sex trafficking is misidentification of victims. This can occur at all levels of the criminal justice field, and leads to a variety of negative outcomes (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). If the prostitute or victim is under the age of 18, then it is never considered consensual and should hypothetically always be considered trafficking if there is a pimp involved. Even still though, many minors are arrested for prostitution and crimes related to their condition.

One 2005 study found 11 females were arrested in Boston for every 1 purchaser. Law enforcement seems much more inclined to see the girls as criminals, and to not assign the proper criminal weight to the customer's actions (Shared Hope International). Another strange problem that may arise is that some law enforcement officers report charging girls with a minor offense for the purpose of being able to detain them in a facility and keep them safe from their traffickers. This may be an indication of the lack of proper places available for victims of trafficking to reside (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009).

If a victim would be over 18 years old, then it might be harder to define as sex trafficking. Sex trafficking is when the person is forced into prostitution through threats or other

manipulative means, instead of through their own free will, but this has the potential to be hard to prove. Our culture has a tendency to believe that women are compliant in prostitution, instead of seeing them as victims. It can be difficult for officers to tell if a crime is prostitution or trafficking, and if the person in question is a criminal or victim. Victims also may tend to be a part of groups that aren't often historically a priority, such as minorities, non-citizens, or people in poverty (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy, 2008). This ends up being a problem because instead of victims of trafficking receiving assistance, they are often arrested for prostitution, or for being juvenile delinquents or illegal immigrants.

Some of the factors that officers reported as being the most important to them when trying to identify if a woman or girl might be a victim of sex trafficking were: if the victim looked fearful or non-cooperative, if they did not have control of their documents or travel, if they look injured or malnourished, and if they were frequently moved or had makeshift living quarters (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy, 2008). Factors that make it more difficult to tell that a girl is under 18 and a victim are that the girls are often trained to lie to law enforcement, and so law enforcement may believe that they are over 18 and not in any trouble. Additionally, pimps may provide the girls with fraudulent paperwork to go along with their story, making it even more difficult for police to tell the truth (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009).

In the 2008 report on trafficking (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy), officers reported that one of the main problems that occurred during the investigation of sex trafficking cases was the lack of victim cooperation. This may occur because of fear, a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, fear of deportation, lack of knowledge of victims' rights, and/or other factors. Victims also may feel guilt and blame themselves for what has happened. One unique issue related to sex trafficking is that there can be a sort of "trauma bonding" that occurs between traffickers and

victims, so if the girl is released from police custody they may go straight back to the person who victimized them (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). Other problems that may arise once the crime is identified as trafficking are language barriers, wide numbers of victims, and the number of professionals needed to help deal with the trauma that victims have faced (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy, 2008).

Overall, it is clear that several of the main problems in combating sex trafficking are finding the actual crime, correctly identifying it as trafficking, and victim compliance during the actual investigation. The report gave several suggestions for ways to improve law enforcement's role in combating sex trafficking. These include: creating a training program for local law enforcement agencies to educate them further on sex trafficking, broadening the victim centered approach to focus on offenders more, and using more multi-agency task forces (they lead to more arrests and charges).

Advertisements

Another way to help combat sex trafficking is to keep traffickers from advertising their services. They rely on customers in order to make money, and one key way that traffickers find customers is by posting advertisements online. Technology has over time become the single greatest facilitator of the commercial sex industry. One reason for this is that cell phones help traffickers connect with people, but make them harder to catch. The biggest reason though is that the Internet gives traffickers the opportunity to post advertisements online and connect with more people (Shared Hope International). One huge step was taken in September of 2010 when the online classifieds website, Craigslist, announced that it had permanently closed down the "adult services" category so that people could no longer post there. Advocates and attorneys had put pressure on Craigslist to close down this service, and Craigslist listened. Previously, they had

been making \$10 for every advertisement on this page, making millions every year from it. However, they had been willing to help law enforcement with investigations. Now, they cut off this advertising avenue, for the purpose of doing their part to combat sex trafficking. As meaningful as this step was, there are some potential problems that might come from it. Even though the adult services section of Craigslist is gone, traffickers can still disguise their ads in other sections of the website. They can also move their business to a different website. For example, now the website Backpage is under fire for having the majority of adult services advertisements (Norfleet, 2012). Now that the advertisements are more spread out, it may even make it more difficult for law enforcement to use them in investigations (Miller, 2010).

Trafficking Victims Protection Act

The federal law, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, has also come under some criticism for not being as helpful for victims as it should be. A 2007 article in the Harvard Journal of Law and Gender, by April Rieger, discusses some of the difficulties of using the TVPA to help victims. For people that apply, the TVPA provides immigration help, shelter, food, protection, legal assistance, and more. In order to qualify for these benefits, the person must prove that they were a victim of “severe” trafficking, which is the case of sex trafficking means proving that they were forced to perform commercial sex acts by force, fraud, or coercion. They must also be willing to assist in the prosecution of the traffickers (Rieger, 2007).

One problem with the TVPA requirements is that victims need help immediately after being removed from the circumstances that they were in, but there can be a considerable delay before they are certified for assistance. Another problem is only letting victims of “severe” sex trafficking receive assistance, which means that the government does not provide any assistance to other types of victims. Someone that was desperate and chose a job in the sex industry will not

be considered a victim, but rather a prostitute, and will likely be deported and/or denied assistance. The other key problem with the TVPA is that it requires victims to be willing to help in the prosecution of their trafficker, and many women will be unwilling to do that. One main reason for this is that they would fear retaliation against them and their family, and also how traumatic it could potentially be to discuss what happened and potentially have to testify in court. Overall, this critique is concerned with the fact that the government seems to be more concerned about prosecution than helping the actual victims of trafficking (Rieger, 2007).

Helping Victims

In addition to the importance of arresting and convicting traffickers, it is also important to make sure victims are getting the help they need. Unfortunately, it seems like victims that have been brought in from other countries may not always get this help. They can get arrested for not having the proper paperwork and permission to be in the country, and many will get deported back home. It is possible for some victims to get a visa to remain in the country, but this is often for the main purpose of making sure they can testify against the trafficker (Brock, 2010). This is one reason why trafficking victims may fear coming forward for help.

Victims from this country may be more likely to receive help. There may be medical or psychological interventions available to help them, or even homes or shelters where they can temporarily live. Unfortunately, there may not be enough assistance or resources available to help every victim as much as they need, and for as long as they need. Experts speak of the importance of specialized treatment programs for the victims of trafficking. This is because trafficking is such a unique crime, with severe trauma and the long periods of time over which it may occur. There don't seem to be enough treatment programs and residential places available to specifically help trafficking victims. As of a 2009 report, there were only 5 shelters in the entire

country dedicated specifically to helping victims of domestic minor sex trafficking, not near enough (There are possibly a few more that have become available since then.) (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). Fortunately, Michigan is lucky to at least have some organizations available to help the victims of sex trafficking and raise awareness, including the Hope Project, WAR International, the Manasseh Project, the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force, and several more.

The Hope Project, located in Muskegon, MI, began in 2005 as a way to inform the public about the tragedy of sex trafficking, but has since evolved to also provide interventions for the victims of trafficking. The two main goals of the Hope Project are to raise awareness and build a home for rescued girls. This home will be called Hope Village, which will provide a residential program for the girls. I was able to talk to Julia Koch, the Director of Development and Advocacy to learn more about the current status of the Hope Project. As of right now, they have been unable to open Hope Village and are not sure when they will be able to. This is because the Hope Project is funded entirely through donations, and with the poor economy it has been hard to raise enough money to achieve the goal of opening a comprehensive residential program. Currently, the project has been focused on awareness and raising money to start up Hope Village. However, they have also been able to help some victims of trafficking on a case-by-case basis, and also some adult survivors. They are also able to provide referrals for people, for example to language specialists.

I was able to learn more about the future plans for Hope Village. The website describes the treatment programs as intending to help the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional aspects of recovery. Julia explained that the program is primarily intended for survivors of trafficking between the ages of 11 and 18, and the treatment will last for 18 to 24 months. Because

everyone's stories are unique and girls may be at different points of healing, the programs will be individualized. The girls will first be given an assessment of their medical and psychological needs, spiritual status, and how far along they are in their education. An individual plan will then be made so they can start working through their problems. Family may be included in the treatment, when it is appropriate. Julia described the treatment process as peeling back the layers of an onion, in order to find the piece in the center, so that they can rebuild from that. Financial independence will also be a focus of the treatment programs, so that the girls can be more independent when they do move on from the program (J. Koch, personal communication, October 15, 2012). The Hope Project website encourages people to get involved in ending sex trafficking, through volunteering, advocating for their cause, getting informed, and making donations (Hope Project).

Wedgewood Christian Services, located in Grand Rapids, MI, started the Manasseh Project in 2010, after seeing the story of a child trafficked in the community and becoming inspired to take action. Their mission is to serve not just as an awareness organization but also to provide aid for those who need it. They list four main goals on their website: to educate members of the judicial system, who they see as the first responders of trafficking, to empower young people to be able to recognize traffickers and victims, to invite the community to raise awareness and funds, and to have shelters and treatment for the victims of sex trafficking. An example of a recent promotion of the Manasseh Project is a piece of art they have featured in Grand Rapids' ArtPrize competition. The piece is a portrait of Leslie King, a victim of sex trafficking, at the age of 13 years old. The woman in the picture is now the founder of an organization that advocates for exploited women (Manasseh Project).

WAR stands for Women at Risk, International, which is a non-profit organization with

stores in Michigan and Illinois, and they also operate in countries all over the world. Their mission is to unite and inform women about trafficking and sexual slavery. The organization was founded in 2006, founded its first store in Michigan in 2007, and now has 3 stores and numerous connections to other states and countries. WAR helps women in numerous ways. They have staged emergency interventions to save women from imminent danger. They also use preventative methods such as orphanages and loans in order to help keep women out of sexual slavery. They even have safe houses in other countries to help keep women out of danger. They also use outreach methods to help inform women of the ways that they can help them, which includes offering a job and childcare. Creating relationships and trust leads to more success in helping the women at risk. One of the final ways that WAR International helps women is through the jobs that they offer, which are jobs of making products that can be brought to the WAR stores and also sold online. Most of the money from these sales go back to help the women who need it. The products can easily be viewed online, and contain jewelry, scarves, ornaments, and other handmade items. Overall, WAR International helps women overseas more so than the local victims, but they advocate for helping all victims and trafficking, and their locations in Michigan help to raise awareness for problem of sex trafficking (Women at Risk International).

Lastly, the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force is made up of over 90 member agencies that work together to fight against sex trafficking. They are located at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Their mission statement is “to facilitate a collaborative effort to prevent trafficking of persons within the State of Michigan, to pursue prosecution of perpetrators, and to protect and rehabilitate trafficking victims.” The organization, like the others mentioned, is funded entirely through donations. Members include the Hope Project, WAR International, the Manasseh Project, community members, law enforcement agencies, and more

(Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force).

Suggestions for Combating Trafficking in Michigan

It is clear that people all over the country, from citizens to government officials, have been working to stop trafficking in Michigan and help the victims who have suffered because of it. These efforts are clearly making a significant difference, but the problem still exists and could use even more help. Throughout the research of this paper, I have seen a number of suggestions for how to potentially help stop the problem of trafficking and continue to assist victims, including but not limited to the following:

Law enforcement need to have more training about the problem of human trafficking. One problem occurring is that it is often hard to identify victims of sex trafficking, so more training could help this problem. We can't help the victims of sex trafficking until we recognize them, and we can't punish the traffickers until we find them. Additionally, the girls are often seen as the criminals and getting charged for prostitution, so this error needs to be fixed.

Victims are also often reluctant to cooperate with police, so law enforcement should look into finding ways to help increase victims' cooperation. This was cited as one of the biggest problems in trying to investigate instances of trafficking. This could help both the victims and also hopefully in prosecuting more traffickers.

Part of the reason why trafficking young girls has become such a prevalent problem is because there are so many willing customers. One of the main ways that traffickers find customers is through online advertising. Craigslist has already been pressured to shut down the adult services section of their website, but now this business has moved on to various other websites, including Backpages. Law enforcement should continue to work with these websites to try to locate trafficking cases, and in my opinion, people should continue to pressure as many

websites as they can to shut down adult services advertisements. It may be impossible to keep traffickers from advertising their businesses, but we can certainly make it a lot more difficult for them to do so.

It would likely help victims more if the TVPA was modified so that the benefits are more accessible to victims. Currently, there is a delay before someone can receive any sort of assistance because they first have to prove that they were a victim of “severe” sex trafficking and they also must express their willingness to help prosecute their trafficker. Proving severity might be difficult and some girls are also too scared to speak against their trafficker for fear of repercussions for themselves or their family. The TVPA would probably be more helpful if there were fewer hoops to jump through before victims could receive some of the many benefits that it offers.

According to Julia Koch, there are only around 150 beds in the entire country available for the domestic, minor victims of sex trafficking. Comparing this to the thousands of victims recovered from trafficking every year, this is not even close to enough. The problem is that these places are funded entirely through donations, and it is difficult to raise enough money to help everyone, as evidenced by the Hope Project’s current struggle. We need to find a way to make more residential treatment programs available for those who need them.

Shared Hope International also recommends that more priority is placed on targeting buyers. They are also committing a crime, so it is wrong to place the blame on the victims and only accuse them of prostitution. Additionally, buyers are the ones that create the demand of sex trafficking in the first place, so if we could actually reduce the number of willing customers, it would make a negative impact on the trafficking industry (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009).

Besides just training police officers to be better at recognizing trafficking situations, we

could also spread the awareness of trafficking to citizens so that they can be better prepared to recognize trafficking situations or people at risk of being trafficked. Spreading awareness about the problem of trafficking in Michigan could help both to rescue girls who are already involved, and also to warn young girls who are at risk for getting involved. Awareness might also make a difference if it informs men about the realities of trafficking, and what they are really paying for a supporting if they choose to be a customer. They may help on a preventative level if it keeps men from supporting traffickers. If we can reduce the demand, then it will really hurt the sex trafficking industry.

The website Meet Justice provides profiles and indicators of victims of sex trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Common characteristics of sex trafficking victims include: being female, being young, immigrants and domestic women may both be at risk (one report shows foreign women more at risk for labor trafficking and domestic victims more at risk of sex trafficking), and a history of sexual abuse.

Meet Justice provides this list of indicators of a possible trafficking victim:

- “Lack of familiarity with where he/she is: victims are forbidden to observe street names or businesses: this is called “staying in pocket”.
- They are not in control of their own visas, passports, identification, or work documents
- Lives with their employer and/or several other people in a small space, like a hotel room
- Drug Addiction: Victims are often forcibly inoculated with drugs to make them dependent on their traffickers. The need to feed the addiction becomes more important than the need to escape. This also further brainwashes the victim into believing that they are criminals, enforcing hopelessness and distrust of police.
- The person has untreated or recurring sexually transmitted diseases or infections.
- They have an agent/manager in the adult entertainment industry.
- They are not allowed to be on their own.

- Frequent, sudden travel without notice
- Presence of tattoos marking ownership or possession by another person
- Presence of anxiety disorders
- Post-Traumatic Stress disorder
- Eating disorders
- Conduct disorders
- Self-harm
- Insomnia” (Meet Justice)

There are a variety of locations or businesses that may be a front for trafficking, including:

- Model Agencies
- Travel agencies
- Employment companies
- “Au Pair” babysitting services
- International matchmaking services
- Mail order bride services
- Commercially fronted brothels
- Massage Parlors
- Cantinas
- Hostess Clubs
- Strip Clubs
- Escort Services (Meet Justice)

The website provides a separate list of risk factors and indicators for children victims of commercial sexual exploitation, since this only involves minors. Risk factors include being young, having any kind of previous history of abuse, a dysfunctional family life (such as parental use of drugs or living in poverty), parental neglect, living in impoverished conditions, having a history of running away, being female, spending hours online unsupervised, and being emotionally or mentally vulnerable.

Indicators of these exploited children include:

- “Unexplained absences from school
- Disengagement from education
- Presence of older boyfriend/older male who is not a boyfriend
- Presence of tattoos ‘marking her’ as personal property
- Access to material things that they can’t afford to purchase on their own (jewelry, new clothes, shoes, technology)
- Recurring STDs and other sexual health issues
- Changes in temperament/mood
- Drug and Alcohol Use
- Going out late and staying gone for days at a time
- Displaying sexualized behavior” (Meet Justice)

By making more people aware of the risk factors and signs of sex trafficking, we can try to warn them to avoid it or report any possible cases of trafficking that they may notice. We can not help the victims of trafficking until they become known, and many may be scared to come to the police for help, for the many reasons previously discussed.

It should be clear by now that sex trafficking, whether in Michigan or anywhere else, is a unique and very complicated problem. There are so many different factors contributing to it that it will be extremely difficult to stop it entirely. Many of the suggestions for improvement would also require a lot of money or resourced to implement. Regardless, sex trafficking is extremely dangerous and detrimental to the victims involved, and so it deserves to be a priority for law enforcement and anyone else capable of helping. For now we can hope that by raising awareness and making more people informed about the many complexities and signs of sex trafficking, it will make a difference.

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