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Human Trafficking and the Media

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND THE MEDIA

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND THE MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how the media can affect the public's knowledge about human trafficking. Specific attention is paid to what human trafficking is and what the different types of criteria that need to be met are. Of the criteria that is met, the paper looks at the overlapping of requirements between human trafficking and other offenses. More importantly throughout the paper is an analysis on police officers' beliefs about knowing what human trafficking is, what still needs to be done, and their stance on the current definition. The research presented demonstrates the need for more positive psychological approaches when talking to a victim of human trafficking as they are already a part of a vulnerable group and the need to implement clearer terminology to establish modernized laws and programs.

I. Introduction

Understanding how Americans perceive human trafficking is important as these beliefs have the ability to shape and influence related policy. Most citizens never will directly be impacted by such an act, nevertheless, it is equally important to determine the influence of media consumption on such attitudes. The media has the ability to create a lens through which the United States looks. The media is able to shape what the public experiences by their decisions of what they choose to air and how they present such information. The overall presentation of information may be true, but the elements selected and emphasized can affect and dictate how the reader perceives that material. To date, little research has been conducted examining the relationship between media coverage and the United States citizens' attitudes about human trafficking. The main goal of this paper is to examine news consumers' perceptions of the coverage of human trafficking and how the media plays a major role in the outlook.

First, a review of literature will focus on the overarching meaning of what human trafficking is and what the different types of criteria that need to be met are. The literature will also shed light on common misconceptions and stereotypes that tend to occur throughout the public, as well as government agencies, and how in recent years, there have been measures taken in order to prevent this. Next, a look at The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. All of the acts after will also be examined for what they accomplished and what they failed to provide. Lastly, a focus on the media and more specifically how they report the news about human trafficking victims will be looked at closely. The literature will be looking towards myths portrayed by the media surrounding human trafficking and how this affects the public's general knowledge about this occurrence.

II. Literature Review

The sale and distribution of trafficked persons in the U.S. is a global, regional, and national phenomenon. The global use of technology and the increase in world-wide opportunities are factors that have helped to create this global demand. With the rise of media, portrayals of human trafficking influence understanding of human trafficking, which in turn informs policy choices made to address the problem. This then poses the question: Does the media's reporting on human trafficking affect the general public?

Human Trafficking Explained

Human trafficking is a major global crime in which people are exploited for a profit or benefit of others.¹ Trafficking has been recognized as a human rights violation and with the passing of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, the U.S. law defines it as a federal crime.² More specifically, the United States has defined human trafficking as the use of force, fraud, compulsion, trickery, or abuse of power to compel a person to perform labor or services.³ Although people tend to believe victims are trafficked across international borders, 42% are victimized within their own countries and based on the victims that are known, 71% are women and 28% are children.⁴ In 2016, the U.S. Polaris National Human Trafficking Hotline reported 7,572 cases; that number is only those who were discovered using said hotline.⁵

It is important for the literature and for the general public to understand the difference between human trafficking and human smuggling, as these two issues are often crossed between each other. After the introduction of the Anti-Trafficking Protocol by the UN, they also

¹ Susie B. Baldwin, Anne E. Fehrenbacher, David P. Eisenman, *Psychological Coercion in Human Trafficking: An Application of Biderman's Framework*, (Qualitative health research, 2015), 1.

² Baldwin, *Psychological*, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴ David Okech, Y. Joon Choi, Jennifer Elkins, Abigail C. Burns, *Seventeen years of human trafficking research in social work: a review of the literature*, (Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work, 2017), 1.

⁵ Clydette Powell, Michelle Asbill, Elizabeth Louis, Hanni Stoklosa, *Identifying Gaps in Human Trafficking Mental Health Service Provision*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2018), 1.

introduced a protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea, and air.⁶ Human smuggling was defined as “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident”.⁷ They also state that smuggling differs from trafficking in that smuggling requires the crossing of borders, while trafficking victims may be held and exploited in their own country of citizenship and residence.⁸ Also, it is said that smuggled persons can be deported to their country of origin immediately after being identified without the option of being offered temporary or permanent stay, unlike trafficked persons.⁹ Although these definitions seem clear cut, it is hard to distinguish the two, as both trafficked persons and smuggled persons are considered to be migrants and thus smuggling can easily become trafficking.¹⁰

Government officials have brought up the debate in which smuggled migrants, in an effort to finance their migration, develop a debt that they end up accepting to work in conditions that could be labeled as exploitative.¹¹ Also, in some trafficking cases, physical violence is not present and the trafficked person is aware of the type of work that they will be engaging in.¹² All these different types of situations make it hard for government officials to decide what laws should be passed, how to label certain persons, and how to prevent this growing issue. It has become clear that the interest of the state takes precedence over the interest of the individual when it comes down to it.

⁶ Bilijana Meshkovska, Melissa Siegel, Sarah E. Stutterheim, Arjan E. R. Bos, *Female Sex Trafficking: Conceptual Issues, Current Debates, and Future Directions*, (Journal of Sex Research, 2015), 3.

⁷ Meshkovska, *Female*, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

Another issue that has been brought up in literature is the issue of consent when dealing with human trafficking, as many authors have various definitions for a trafficked person. It is seen that the debate is between those who consider it possible for sex work to be voluntary and those who consider prostitution to always be forced.¹³ This situation is not only based on what people seem to believe, but it would essentially put the burden of proving a situation of trafficking on the victim and enable a possible “out” for the trafficker, as they can then claim the person consented to the work.¹⁴ In terms of protocol, consent can be invalidated if any other means, such as coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception are present.¹⁵ Once again, this lays the burden of proof onto the victim in having to prove these means were present. While having these conditions seems like a good determiner, people have brought up that these terms are not clearly defined, which makes it possible to make consent irrelevant in the future.¹⁶

Not only is the debate over how human trafficking should be defined an issue for victims, but it plays a major role for government funding, service provision, and legal protections. For example, many individuals that are in the sex industry are subjected to forms of exploitation that do not fit under legal definitions of trafficking that require exhibiting force, fraud, or coercion.¹⁷ Commercial sexual exploitation or CSE is a term that has since been used to describe individuals who sell or trade sex to meet survival needs, or where vulnerability is exploited by a buyer, trafficker, or pimp.¹⁸ As seen here, this definition overlaps with legal definitions for sex

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷ Becca Kendis, *Human trafficking and prostitution courts: Problem solving or problematic*, (Case W. Res. L. Rev. 69, 2018), 809.

¹⁸ Kendis, *Human*, 810.

trafficking victimization, causing CSE to be used as an umbrella term that is between sex trafficking and voluntary sex work.

Sex work is usually used to describe a voluntary arrangement in commercial sex acts.¹⁹ There are some sex workers that make an independent choice in engaging in this work. For example, they choose sex work over other employment options; they have control over their own profits and finances; they feel free to stop at any time, and they do not experience force, fraud, or coercion.²⁰ There are also individuals in the sex industry that face constrained control in some, if not all, of these areas. Furthermore, the term “sex work” has been used to describe individuals involved in commercial sex as a form of labor, regardless of whether commercial sex involvement is a choice or any vulnerability is present.²¹ This broad definition of sex work is then overlapped with CSE.

The definition and application of these terms to individuals and their circumstances can be complicated. As stated earlier, there is a huge overlap between different categories of commercial sex involvement. Even individuals’ interpretations of their work and victimization can be in conflict with the legal definitions and service providers’ assessments.²² A 17-year-old may see her involvement in commercial sex as voluntary, but would be considered a victim of sex trafficking under federal law.²³ Another issue to note is individuals can also jump between categories over time. Young individuals can age out of trafficking, thus then being categorized as exploited or willing sex workers instead of a sex trafficking victim.²⁴ Unfortunately, the law has

¹⁹ Ibid., 810.

²⁰ Ibid., 810.

²¹ Ibid., 811.

²² Ibid., 811.

²³ Ibid., 811.

²⁴ Ibid., 811.

still yet to realize the complexity of this topic and how to be inclusive without being overly broad.

In 2012, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that 20.9 million people were victims of forced labor and human trafficking worldwide.²⁵ The ILO estimate is to be the most reliable statistic on human trafficking to date and is the most commonly cited. This contrasts against the U.S. State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report data, as they only stated 44,462 victims worldwide in 2014 and 10,051 cases prosecuted.²⁶ This is the main issue when discussing human trafficking, as no reports on the issue ever seem to be the same. This discrepancy is not one particular organizations' fault, as there is underreporting, misclassification of human trafficking situations, and faulty definitions being used still to this day.²⁷

Misconceptions within Law Enforcement and Non-Governmental Agencies

State and local law enforcement agencies have multiple challenges identifying and reporting human trafficking offenses. Research has found that human trafficking victims not only do not come forward to the police, but reporting is reduced due to threats, debt obligations, lack of opportunities to tell others, confusion about their location or surrounding due to movement, deportation fears, and language barriers.²⁸ Law enforcement also lacks training and awareness about the crime of human trafficking and the elements made up of it. In 2014, Polaris reported that only 32 states mandate training of law enforcement on human trafficking crimes. Also, one national study found that less than one in five local law enforcement officers receive training on

²⁵ Amy Farrell, Jessica Reichert, *Using U.S. Law-Enforcement Data: Promise and Limits in Measuring Human Trafficking*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2017), 1.

²⁶ Farrell, *Using*, 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

how to identify and investigate human trafficking, less than one in ten work in a jurisdiction with a protocol in place, and less than one in twenty have designated or specialized units or personnel to investigate human trafficking cases.²⁹ Without proper training, police are unlikely to identify victims through the course of routine police activities.³⁰ Local law enforcement officers are major figures in the fight against human trafficking in the United States. Relying on legislation alone has been found to be insufficient in increasing the prosecution of human trafficking cases.³¹ Law enforcement needs to be able to utilize laws to identify and intervene in cases of human trafficking, as they tend to have close ties with and knowledge of their communities.³² It is essential for officers to be trained on what trafficking is, how to approach survivors, and interview techniques, as the first contact with law enforcement has with a victim can determine the success of the investigation.³³ If law enforcement is not trained, they can ruin the chance at an investigation.

It was also discovered that officers who believed it was unlikely that they would encounter human trafficking victims, were less likely to have knowledge of the policies and procedures when dealing with identification and investigation relating to trafficking.³⁴ Scholars have said officers are hindered by “cultural blinders” that prevent them from recognizing and prioritizing human trafficking investigations despite training.³⁵ Officers also can misidentify human trafficking victims, as officers’ expectations about what human trafficking victims should

²⁹ Claire M. Renzetti, Amy Bush, Marissa Castellanos, Gretchen Hunt, *Does training make a difference? An evaluation of specialized human trafficking training module for law enforcement officers*, (Journal of Crime and Justice, 2015), 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ Susan Mapp, Emily Hornung, Madeleine D’Almedia, Jessica Juhnke, *Local Law Enforcement Officers’ Knowledge of Human Trafficking: Ability to Define, Identify, and Assist*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2016), 329.

³² Mapp, *Local*, 329.

³³ *Ibid.*, 329.

³⁴ Amy Farrell, Jessica Reichert, *Using U.S. Law-Enforcement Data: Promise and Limits in Measuring Human Trafficking*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2017), 4.

³⁵ Farrell, *Using*, 4.

look like are exaggerated by stereotypes.³⁶ Officers think of highly vulnerable, young women, who are forcefully trafficked for sexual exploitation, which are shown in movies, news, and even training materials.³⁷ Similarly, law enforcement will read the definition of human trafficking as victims having the status of “illegal immigrant.” or compare sex trafficking with smuggling, migration, or crossing borders.³⁸ When this is the case, only international victims are counted as victims of sex trafficking and completely ignores the number of domestic victims like runaways who are trafficked throughout the United States.³⁹ One study done to test law enforcement’s knowledge on human trafficking discovered that officers were largely unaware that juvenile involvement in prostitution was considered trafficking.⁴⁰

Another issue that arises is that human trafficking victims and offenders are known to each other and might appear to have interpersonal relationships which then confuses officers into thinking it is an intimate partner crime instead.⁴¹ They are also handled as crimes of human smuggling, resulting in misidentification as illegal immigrants which may lead to the deportation of victims before the trafficking situation had been identified.⁴² Additionally, trafficking victims were misidentified as prostitutes because of the incorrect assumption of their voluntary engagement in sex work and as a result their victimization was not deemed worthy of federal prosecution.⁴³ All this misidentification and mislabeling leads to underrepresentation in victim estimates and misrepresents the spectrum of trafficking for researchers to analyze.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Ibid., 4.

³⁸ Andrea J. Nichols, Erin C. Heil, *Challenges to Identifying and Prosecuting Sex Trafficking Cases in the Midwest United States*, (Feminist Criminology, 2014), 4.

³⁹ Nichols, *Challenges*, 5.

⁴⁰ Susan Mapp, Emily Hornung, Madeleine D’Almedia, Jessica Juhnke, *Local Law Enforcement Officers’ Knowledge of Human trafficking: Ability to Define, Identify, and Assist*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2016), 331.

⁴¹ Amy Farrell, Jessica Reichert, *Using U.S. Law-Enforcement Data: Promise and Limits in Measuring Human Trafficking*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2017), 4.

⁴² Ibid., 5.

⁴³ Ibid., 5.

One national survey discovered agencies that participated in regional or federal task forces were more likely to have training, policies, and specialized personnel than other agencies.⁴⁴ They were also much more likely to investigate cases of human trafficking than nontask force agencies, with 76% of agencies investigating at least one case of human trafficking compared to 25% of medium and large agencies overall.⁴⁵ Another report showed agencies participating in task forces made more arrests as well compared to nontask force agencies with an average of 12 arrests to 8.⁴⁶ Moreover, their arrests resulted in more formal charges as 55% of arrests in task force agencies followed federal charges compared to only 25% in nontask force agencies.⁴⁷ It has been presented that agencies who develop a specialization in human trafficking and have partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and victim service providers are more successful in developing the skills needed to have an effective response to human trafficking.

Law enforcement in the United States also faces a lack of funding and training for new technology, which is a huge obstacle for having an effective investigation.⁴⁸ Human trafficking investigations are relied heavily on technology in this day and age for data mining and analytics.⁴⁹ A study previously done by a non-profit research institute found that only 14 percent of police departments in the U.S. had technology to share and search for data across silos.⁵⁰ Also, only 10 percent had tools for data-mining and only 5 percent had tools to uncover connections

⁴⁴ Amy Farrell, *Improving Law Enforcement Identification and Response to Human Trafficking*, (CRC Press, 2011), 193.

⁴⁵ Farrell, *Improving*, 193.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴⁸ Julia Deeb-Swihart, Alex Endert, Amy Burckham, *Understanding Law Enforcement Strategies and Needs for Combating Human Trafficking*, (Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 2019), 3.

⁴⁹ Deeb-Swihard, *Understanding*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

between data points.⁵¹ Additionally, law enforcement in the United States struggles with collaboration and information sharing even though departments have tried to adopt policies for this initiative.⁵² The overarching issue comes back to lack of proper technology, as the software standards across multiple platforms makes sharing impossible and causes a serious barrier for human trafficking investigations.⁵³ Again, law enforcement are essential in order to combat human trafficking, but they need to be properly trained in order to possess accurate knowledge regarding the issue at hand.

When looking at the information collected by non-law enforcement agencies and government organizations, there tends to be not one specific standard for human trafficking data. A few data systems collected a large number of demographic information, services provided, and forms of victimizations.⁵⁴ Of the data systems that collected detailed information about clients, some of them were structured in a way that makes it difficult to run a report on human trafficking numbers.⁵⁵ Some victim services do not even have human trafficking as a category. Instead, they mark them under sexual assault.⁵⁶ One leading issue that is the cause of varied and non-standardized data collection is an issue explained earlier pertaining to law enforcement agencies: The absence of agreement and understanding for what human trafficking involves. Another issue is the lack of resources and low prioritization in order to properly collect data on trafficking and enter it into a database.⁵⁷ Without every non-law enforcement agency and government

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

⁵² Ibid., 3.

⁵³ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁴ Amy Farrell, Meredith Dank, Matthew Kafafian, Sarah Lockwood, Rebecca Pfeffer, Andrea Hughes, Kyle Vincent, *Capturing Human Trafficking Victimization Through Crime Reporting*, (NCJRS, 2019), 7.

⁵⁵ Farrell, *Capturing*, 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 10.

organization collecting data, the United States will continue to have a dark number of human trafficking victims.

If data is collected, it is important and beneficial for agencies to share their data with one another. With this in mind, it is often challenging amongst non-governmental agencies. An issue that is continuously brought up is the issue of confidentiality. For example, with domestic violence shelters, they keep their information private in order to make sure no abuser could get the victim's name to if they were there.⁵⁸ Additionally, non-governmental and non-law enforcement agencies view information sharing with stakeholders and the public differently.⁵⁹ Non-law enforcement governmental agencies report their data to whichever government agency body they are mandated to report to, but they do not feel the need to share their data with other stakeholders or the public.⁶⁰ Non-government organizations stated that they are not comfortable sharing their data with other stakeholders and the public due to funding.⁶¹ The public and other stakeholders frequently measure success by the number of victims NGOs serve, not taking into account the outcomes of those victims.⁶² Most NGOs working with human trafficking victims are small, they do not serve a large amount of clients, which they believe gives the wrong impression on how successful they are.⁶³ With this in mind, there is still a strong interest in developing a system that would enable the sharing of information to determine which agencies have human trafficking victims in their care.

U.S. Laws on Trafficking in Persons

⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

⁶² Ibid., 25.

⁶³ Ibid., 25

In 2000, Congress enacted the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act or VTVPA in order to combat human trafficking. This Act was divided into three provisions: the Trafficking Victims Protections Act, the Violence Against Women Act, and Miscellaneous Provisions. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act describes trafficking as: sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud or coercion; Whoever knowingly recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides, or obtains by any means a person; or benefits, financially or by receiving anything of value from participation knowing that force, fraud, or coercion will be used to cause the person to engage in commercial sex act or that the person has not attained the age of 18 years.⁶⁴ The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act provided the first definition of human trafficking in the United States and subsequently created new prosecution tools and victims services as an aid to prosecuting traffickers.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act was then signed into law by President Clinton and focuses on areas within trafficking, such as prosecution and assistance for victims and prosecution of criminals for human trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act condemns all trafficking, but only victims who are victims of “severe form” of trafficking are actually assisted.⁶⁵ Congress identified the two severe forms of trafficking as sex trafficking and involuntary servitude of labor.⁶⁶ It is required for each to have the presence of “force, fraud, or coercion” by a trafficker in order to dominate to victim, unless the victim is younger than eighteen.⁶⁷ If a victim is found to have been subjected to “severe” form of trafficking, that person can receive benefits, but in order to receive these benefits the victim needs to display how there

⁶⁴ *Id.* § 1591, 114 Stat. 1487 (Codified as 22 U.S.C. § 7109).

⁶⁵ Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386.

⁶⁶ Julianne Siegfriedt, *When Sex Trafficking Victims Turn Eighteen: The Problematic Focus on Force, Fraud, and Coercion in U.S. Human Trafficking Laws*, (William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law, 2016), 29.

⁶⁷ Megan Helton, *Human Trafficking: How a joint task force between health care providers and law enforcement can assist with identifying victims and prosecuting traffickers*, (Health Matrix, 2016), 439.

was a “severe form” of trafficking and needs to assist in the prosecution of the perpetrator.⁶⁸ The TVPA defines “coercion” by only including three means of coercive force: threats of serious harm, threats of restraint, and threats involving the legal process.⁶⁹ This means that mental or psychological coercion that a human trafficker may use to control their victims could not be used to support the claim that they are a victim.⁷⁰

Once the victim is deemed eligible to be considered a victim and agrees to cooperate with law enforcement, the victim can then apply for a T-visa or a Continued Presence status in the United States while the case is being brought against their traffickers.⁷¹ The T-Visa enables holders to live and work in the United States for three years and later apply for a permanent residency, making this Act for combating trafficking for victims not born in the United States.⁷² Also, those who do receive T-visas are mostly on their own after about one year, when the original government assistance runs out.⁷³ Social workers resettling trafficking clients find that the timetable for government benefits does not match up with their clients’ needs in the long term.⁷⁴ A former Director of Anti-Trafficking Programs at one of the largest providers in New York City stated financial support is given and then stopped without any consideration for what happens to the victims and the case, essentially creating a new subset of poor immigrant workers.⁷⁵ The government is not giving out enough T-visas and few that receive them have to live in poverty.

⁶⁸ *Id.* § 107(e) (4), 114 Stat. 1479 (codified as 22 U.S.C. § 7105).

⁶⁹ 22 U.S.C. § 7102 (2000).

⁷⁰ Megan Helton, *Human Trafficking: How a joint task force between health care providers and law enforcement can assist with identifying victims and prosecuting traffickers*, (Health Matrix, 2016), 444.

⁷¹ Julianne Siegfriedt, *When Sex Trafficking Victims Turn Eighteen: The Problematic Focus on Force, Fraud, and Coercion in U.S. Human Trafficking Laws*, (William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law, 2016), 29

⁷² Siegfriedt, *When*, 29.

⁷³ Denise Brennan, *Myths Meet Reality: How We Are Not Fighting Trafficking or Supporting Trafficking Survivors*, (Innovations in the Fight Against Human Trafficking, 2016), 610.

⁷⁴ Denise, *Myths*, 610.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 611.

The Law and reauthorizations in 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2013 predominantly focus on foreign-born individuals being trafficked into the United States and abroad, although in 2005 some provisions were added.⁷⁶ For example, there was the inclusion of additional resources for domestic sex trafficking, finally recognizing that this issue is in regards to people being trafficked across national borders as well as U.S. citizens. Also, the only area of the VTVPA and following reauthorizations that allows funds to be designated to resources for individuals engaging in unlawful commercial sex acts is found in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005.⁷⁷ This only allows funds to track the number of unlawful commercial sex acts, as well as the purchasers of such acts. Although, no services or assistance is included for this population within the VTVPA, including the Violence Against Women Act and for leaving the sex trade. This makes proving force, fraud, and coercion all the more important.

With the exclusion of those who sell sex unlawfully as being defined victims does not reflect the majority of research and knowledge about this particular group.⁷⁸ It is known that individuals who are involved in the commercial sex trade are at a greater risk of violence and victimization including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by pimps, buyers, and even law enforcement. This population also has a higher mental health issues, substance abuse, and history of sexual abuse.⁷⁹ Stating that this population does not meet the conditions of a victim, which is what is being excluded from the VTVPA accomplishes, further stigmatizes this vulnerable group.⁸⁰ These individuals who sell sex are not only not considered to be victims of trafficking,

⁷⁶ Julianne Siegfriedt, *When Sex Trafficking Victims Turn Eighteen: The Problematic Focus on Force, Fraud, and Coercion in U.S. Human Trafficking Laws*, (William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law, 2016), 29.

⁷⁷ Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005, Pub. L. No 109-164, § 201, 119 Stat. 3567.

⁷⁸ Julianne Siegfriedt, *When Sex Trafficking Victims Turn Eighteen: The Problematic Focus on Force, Fraud, and Coercion in U.S. Human Trafficking Laws*, (William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law, 2016), 29.

⁷⁹ Siegfriedt, *When*, 32.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

but selling sex is still a criminal act in every state but Nevada. The criminalization of selling sex causes individuals to have higher barriers to exiting the sex trade because of possible criminal records and difficulty obtaining housing.⁸¹ Also, society's association of adult commercial sex with personal choice further marginalizes this group of individuals and therefore influences the laws in place for trafficking victims.

The VTVPA treats trafficking victims and individuals involved in commercial sex acts as two different groups. This problem can be seen with the age component of the trafficking definition, where the individual brought to perform such act has not reached 18 years of age.⁸² This additive was made to say individuals who are under eighteen do not need to specify force, fraud, or coercion because they are minors and that these elements are already assumed.⁸³ This then turns the focus to what happens once the individual turn eighteen. A 17-year-old who sells sex and is considered a victim of trafficking, has resources and assistance available through the VTVPA turns eighteen and is no longer considered a victim in the eyes of society or the law.⁸⁴ The difference they are stating is that a 17-year-old is a victim of trafficking, but an 18-year-old is a prostitute and a criminal. It is known that minors who sell sex are likely to have faced homelessness, foster care, or juvenile justice involvement in which the need to support oneself financially occurs.⁸⁵ Studies have estimated that about ten to thirty-three percent of homeless youth end up trading sex for money, shelter, and food.⁸⁶ Resources provided by the VTVPA that

⁸¹ Ibid., 33.

⁸² Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, 114 Stat. 1464.

⁸³ Julianne Siegfriedt, *When Sex Trafficking Victims Turn Eighteen: The Problematic Focus on Force, Fraud, and Coercion in U.S. Human Trafficking Laws*, (William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law, 2016), 34.

⁸⁴ Siegfriedt, *When*, 34.

⁸⁵ Siegfriedt, *When*, 35.

⁸⁶ Siegfriedt, *When*, 35.

would normally help get individuals out of situations such as these would be withdrawn if eighteen or over as they no longer meet the official definition of trafficking.

There is a major issue with having the definition of sex trafficking assuming that turning 18 years old compares to having choice and available options outside of selling sex when research has provided otherwise. Minors and adults are treated as two separate groups when they are simply individuals of the same populations, but at different stages in their life. With research supporting adolescent victims of sex trafficking having negative family situations such as abuse, domestic violence, and substance abuse, the same is true for those eighteen and older. Around forty-nine percent of adults have experienced physical abuse by a family member as a child and forty-seven percent experienced sexual abuse by at least one family member.⁸⁷ This also shows that early childhood abuse experiences put U.S. born children on a path of vulnerability to sell sex as both children and adults.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act law of 2008 strengthened federal trafficking laws while also including provisions that govern the rights of unaccompanied immigrant children who enter the United States. This TVPRA differentiates legal procedures for unaccompanied children who are residents or nationals of non-contiguous countries and contiguous countries.⁸⁸ Children from non-contiguous countries are referred to the Department of Health and Human Services and Office of Refugee Resettlement for screening and placement. They are also placed in removal proceedings, placed in an ORR shelter or foster home pending removal hearing, and provided access to counsel to represent them in legal proceedings to protect them from mistreatment, exploitation, and trafficking.⁸⁹ Children from contiguous countries need

⁸⁷ Siegfriedt, *When*, 38.

⁸⁸ William Wilberforce Trafficking Victim Protection Act § 235 (a)(5)(D), § 235 (c)(5)(2008).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, § 235 (c)(5)(2008).

to be screened within 48 hours of apprehension in order to determine if the child has been trafficked or is susceptible to trafficking, if the child has fear of returning to their home country, and if they are able to make an independent decision to withdraw an application for admission into the United States.⁹⁰ The TVPRA of 2008 also eliminated sex trafficking charges where the requirement was the defendant knew that the person engaged in commercial sex was a minor where the defendant had a reasonable opportunity to observe the minor.⁹¹ It further expanded the penalty for conspiring to commit trafficking and created a penalty for those who knowingly benefit financially from the participation in activities that engage in trafficking.⁹²

Then, in February 2013, Congress reauthorized the TVPA which added an amendment to the Violence Against Women Act. This established and strengthened programs that ensured U.S. citizens do not purchase products made by victims of human trafficking and to prevent child marriage. The reauthorization also strengthened collaboration with state and local law enforcement to ease charging and prosecuting traffickers. The TVPRA 2013 provides resources to support holistic services for survivors and enables law enforcement to investigate cases, hold perpetrators accountable, and prevent human trafficking, forced labor, and modern slavery from even occurring.⁹³ Other key elements include prevention of U.S. foreign aid from going to countries that use child soldiers, penalize the confiscation of identity documents, create grant-making programs to respond to humanitarian emergencies that cause an increased risk of trafficking, Authorize the State Department's Trafficking in Persons office to form local partnerships in other countries to combat child trafficking, and enhance law enforcements ability

⁹⁰ Ibid., § 235 (c)(5)(2008).

⁹¹ Ibid., § 235 (c)(5)(2008).

⁹² Ibid., § 235 (c)(5)(2008).

⁹³ Ibid., § 235 (c)(5)(2008).

to fight sex tourism by extending jurisdiction under the 2003 PROTECT ACT to prosecute U.S. citizens living abroad who commercially sexually exploit children.⁹⁴

The most current reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act was signed on January 9, 2019, by President Trump, where it strengthens the federal government's efforts to fight human trafficking by continuing with previous existing programs while also including new enforcement and prevention initiatives. This law requires the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to develop victim screening protocols for local, state, and federal law enforcement to have officers trained to recognize human trafficking victims. TVPRA of 2017 emphasizes the need for law enforcement to refer victims to services instead of automatically arresting, charging, or prosecuting them for offenses resulting from their victimization. The TVPRA designates a prosecutor in each federal judicial district to serve as the Human Trafficking Coordinator, where it gives prosecutors the power to enjoin conduct that may violate federal human trafficking statutes.⁹⁵ It also increased penalties for human trafficking convictions for 18 U.S. Code 1591. Sex trafficking of children of by force, fraud, or coercion from 20 years to 25 years and amended to increase the maximum prison sentence for repeat offenders from twice the offense's maximum prison sentence to three times.⁹⁶

The TVPRA continued to expand prevention efforts for groups to identify human trafficking victims. It allows the U.S. Department of Education grant money for schools to educate children about avoiding human trafficking and train the staff to identify it. The DOJ also needs to submit to Congress and publish a report on efforts by the National Institute of Justice to develop a methodology to measure the occurrence of human trafficking in the United States,

⁹⁴ Cassondra Murphy, *Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act Becomes Law*, (Human Trafficking Institute, 2019).

⁹⁵ Murphy, *Trafficking*, (Human Trafficking Institute, 2019).

⁹⁶ Ibid.,

while the FBI must submit to Congress and publish a status report on the innocence Lost National Initiative.⁹⁷ Additionally, the TVPRA amends the Combat Human Trafficking Act of 2015 to require the DOJ to include technical training on determining if individuals suspected of engaging in commercial sex acts, illegal child labor, or forced labor are trafficking victims.⁹⁸ The DOJ, along with the Office of Tribal Justice also needs to implement a program for tribal law enforcement officials to receive technical training and assistance on victim-centered approaches to investigating and prosecuting serve forms of trafficking.⁹⁹

The Media and Myths Portrayed

Police officers are not the only ones that believe in stereotypes when discussing human trafficking victims, but the news media and public as well. Often people do not understand how these victims get into human trafficking in the first place and question, even more, why they stay. These victims are recruited based on a vulnerability that they display to the recruiters. Often times, trafficking victims may be in need of affection and love and these recruiters prey on this vulnerability by developing a relationship with them.¹⁰⁰ The traffickers then entice the victims in performing sex work by stating that they need to do so in order to support them financially.¹⁰¹ Another tactic that has been commonly known is offering employment. Traffickers prey on victims' economic vulnerability or play into their desire to migrate.¹⁰²

Scholars have begun to argue that mass media have played a role in enabling the sex trade to increase. Mass media technologies, such as social media and classified advertising Web

⁹⁷ Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017, § 402, S. 1312.

⁹⁸ Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017, § 502, S. 1312.

⁹⁹ Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017, § 504, S. 1312.

¹⁰⁰ Bilijana Meshkovska, Melissa Siegel, Sarah E. Stutterheim, Arjan E. R. Bos, *Female Sex Trafficking: Conceptual Issues, Current Debates, and Future Directions*, (Journal of Sex Research, 2015), 4.

¹⁰¹ Meshkovska, *Female*, 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 4.

sites, enable the sex trade by allowing traffickers means to recruit and arrange meeting with sex buyers.¹⁰³ Using the Internet is quicker than street prostitution and enables a level of anonymity, which people tend to like. Social media sites have an endless global supply of victims, as classified ads on sites such as Backpage.com and others have made it easier for pimps to connect with customers.¹⁰⁴ Online is even beneficial to the trafficker because there is less risk as they can ensure before meeting the client that they are comfortable with the transaction and make the client come to them.¹⁰⁵ They can seek work and receive solicitations through e-mail, phone, or social media at all times, never missing an opportunity.¹⁰⁶

Also, Third-party websites that allow users to post directly to the third-party or “host” forum, take advantage of the CDA’s protection of publishers online even when it is promoting illegal behavior.¹⁰⁷ Websites like Craigslist.com and Backpage.com have been known to provide forums for such activities.¹⁰⁸ Even though many of the advertisers in these forums are not trafficking victims, the research and experience of organizations believe that a large number of minor sex trafficking victims are bought and sold on Backpage.com or similar websites.¹⁰⁹ They enable traffickers and sex workers a way to present their enterprise as a legitimate business, thus bypassing any legal prohibitions on commercial sex advertising.¹¹⁰ It has even become the new

¹⁰³ Anne Johnston, Barbara Friedman, Meghan Sobel, *Framing an Emerging Issue: How U.S. Print and Broadcast News Media Covered Sex Trafficking, 2008-2012*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2015), 4.

¹⁰⁴ ¹⁰⁴ Maria Eirini Papadouka, Nicholas Evangelopoulos, Gabe Ignatow, *Agenda Setting and Active Audiences in Online Coverage of Human Trafficking*, (Information, Communication & Society, 2016), 3.

¹⁰⁵ Maria, *Agenda*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ David Barney, *Trafficking Technology: A look at Different Approaches to Ending Technology-Facilitated Human Trafficking*, (Pepperdine Law Review, 2018), 759.

¹⁰⁷ David, *Trafficking*, 757

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 757.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 758.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 758.

normal that casual dating sites are led by prostitution advertisements, customers seek individuals who they believe are prostituting and do not think they could be a victim of human trafficking.¹¹¹

The media can also influence public knowledge about the topic as well. Popular portrayals of human trafficking influence understanding of human trafficking, which in turn informs policy choices made to address the problem.¹¹² For example, if popular portrayals misrepresent the issue or overlook types of trafficking, a multitude of problems can result, including under-enforcement, failure to identify victims, and insufficient resources.¹¹³ Movies display ideas about both culture and the law, they contribute to popular beliefs about criminal activity and other legal issues.¹¹⁴ With such an increase of coverage on human trafficking on television and movies, media portrayals of this have shaped and will continue to shape popular perceptions and policy debates.¹¹⁵

For most of the public, news media is the only source of information and opinion on human trafficking. As a result, national and international media play critical agenda setting and gatekeeping roles in raising public awareness, even though coverage has been criticized for being narrow, inconsistent, and misleading.¹¹⁶ Before the Internet, the public agenda on human trafficking was made by legacy news outlets, such as large circulation newspapers and network television.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, today online news platforms and social media allows readers to play a role in setting the public agenda on multiple social issues.¹¹⁸ Agenda setting is the selective

¹¹¹ Ibid., 759.

¹¹² Jonathan Todres, *Human Trafficking and Film: How Popular Portrayals Influence Law and Public Perception*, (Georgia State University College of Law, 2015), 41.

¹¹³ Jonathan, *Human*, 41.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁶ Maria Eirini Papadouka, Nicholas Evangelopoulos, Gabe Ignatow, *Agenda Setting and Active Audiences in Online Coverage of Human Trafficking*, (Information, Communication & Society, 2016), 2.

¹¹⁷ Maria, *Agenda*, 2.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

coverage of topics that leads the public to view certain issues as more important than others regardless of their newsworthiness.¹¹⁹ This means media not only tell people what to think about certain issues, but also how they should think about them. Of the few human trafficking cases that are reported by news media, they are only done so because news editors evaluated them as “newsworthy.”¹²⁰

Most of the information the media receives about human trafficking is from politicians and policymakers. Studies have found that most news articles mirror the information provided by policy makers rather than offering different ideas and encouraging debate.¹²¹ A study based on the review of U.S. newspaper articles published in 2009 found that coverage was dominated by official sources and that a majority of reporting was “event-driven.”¹²² By the mid-1990s, U.S. news coverage continuously focused on sex-trafficking victims, specifically those who were young and female.¹²³ Then in 2008-2012 almost half of their sample of newspaper and broadcast news stories on sex trafficking focused on minors exclusively.¹²⁴

Rather than influencing the debate, the news media follows the narratives presented by policymakers and other perspectives are omitted as those ideas could undermine the legitimacy of institutions.¹²⁵ Alternative views are only reported if there are disagreements among members of Congress, midlevel policymakers in the executive branch, or experts close to the policy process.¹²⁶ The overall literature on media framing of public policy leans towards media

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹²¹ Rachealle Sanford, Daniel E. Martinez, Ronald Weitzer, *Framing Human Trafficking: A Content Analysis of Recent U.S. Newspaper Articles*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2016), 3.

¹²² Rachealle, *Framing*, 4.

¹²³ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁵ Girish J. Gulati, *News Frames and Story Triggers in the Media's Coverage of Human Trafficking*, (Human Rights Review, 2011), 367.

¹²⁶ Gulati, *News*, 367

coverage of human trafficking being framed in a way that has marginalized alternative views on trafficking and criticisms of current policy, which legitimizes the common view on human trafficking.¹²⁷

Officials and news media categorize victims, in which some trafficked individuals are considered “less deserving” of being designated as victims than others based on the conditions of their exploitation, character, past actions, and their willingness to be smuggled.¹²⁸ The ideal or legitimate victim is weak, vulnerable, and trafficked by a dangerous offender. It was found that even though news stories continuously blame the traffickers for exploiting their victims, they simultaneously blamed victims for their failure to escape their situation.¹²⁹ Other coverage has stated the trafficking problem is due to trafficking victims being brought into the United States by others, even though trafficking victims in the United States are more likely U.S. citizens than they are foreign nationals.¹³⁰

One study discovered that 69% of American adults use some type of social media and an estimated 50% of all Internet users use social networks.¹³¹ Social media covers a wide category of Internet-based application that enable the creation and exchange of user generated content.¹³² With this in mind, this has been essential for modern-day traffickers, as they can use social media as a means to deceive, recruit, and sell victims into sex work.¹³³ This also raises a problem

¹²⁷ Ibid., 367.

¹²⁸ Rachealle Sanford, Daniel E. Martinez, Ronald Weitzer, *Framing Human Trafficking: A Content Analysis of Recent U.S. Newspaper Articles*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2016), 4.

¹²⁹ Anne Johnston, Barbara Friedman, Meghan Sobel, *Framing an Emerging Issue: How U.S. Print and Broadcast News Media Covered Sex Trafficking, 2008-2012*, (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2015), 4.

¹³⁰ Anne, *Framing*, 4.

¹³¹ David Barney, *Trafficking Technology: A look at Different Approaches to Ending Technology-Facilitated Human Trafficking*, (Pepperdine Law Review, 2018), 760.

¹³² David, *Trafficking*, 760.

¹³³ Ibid., 760.

for law enforcement as traffickers supply victims with pre-paid or disposable phones, which cannot be identified while still posing on social media.¹³⁴

A study performed by the Thorn Foundation interviewed 115 former victims of trafficking and discovered 63% reported being advertised online.¹³⁵ This popularity of online ads has increased, as this can be seen in national revenue estimates from online prosecution ads that increased by 20% in only one year (2010-2011).¹³⁶ Findings in 2015 then suggested that traffickers are more likely to post ads on websites advertising services and 18% stated that they even posted their own ads.¹³⁷ The victims who had posted their own ads were required to post a specific number a day, where one victim had to post three times a day, morning, noon, and night.¹³⁸ Of the victims who posted their own ads, they were only allowed to be online for 10-20 minutes and were only allowed to be on prostitution advertising sites.¹³⁹ Backpage.com is actually the leading U.S. website for online adult ads, it accounts for 70% of all online commercial sex ads.¹⁴⁰

Of the respondents from Thorn study in 2015, half were advertised on Backpage.com and was the most common site for their posting only second to craigslist that was shut down in 2010.¹⁴¹ To show just how much Backpage.com is used for illicit activities, from May 2012 to May 2013 Backpage.com generated \$37 million from advertisement sales within the Adult Services category.¹⁴² Blackpage.com is responsible for around 70-80% of prostitution advertising

¹³⁴ Ibid., 760.

¹³⁵ Marisa Hultgren, Murray E. Jennex, John Persano, Cezar Ornatowski, *Using Knowledge Mangement to Assist in Identifying Human Sex Trafficking*, (49th Hawaii International Conference on System Science, 2016), 4346.

¹³⁶ Marisa, *Using*, 4346.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 4346.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 4346.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 4346.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 4347.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 4347.

¹⁴² David Barney, *Trafficking Technology: A look at Different Approaches to Ending Technology-Facilitated Human Trafficking*, (Pepperdine Law Review, 2018), 757.

in the United States.¹⁴³ Overall, trafficking's shift to technology is creating problems with investigations and law enforcement as new and innovative ways keep popping up.

When researching films and human trafficking it was found that part of the reason people believe cultures of the Third World or immigrant communities are so much more sexist than Western ones, is because sexual violence in the West is thought to be the behavior of a few deviants than a part of the culture.¹⁴⁴ Films also show U.S. citizens only being trafficked by individuals in other countries, opposed to U.S. citizens being trafficked by U.S. citizens.¹⁴⁵ The reality that films do not show is that U.S. citizens are traffickers and U.S. citizens create the demand for goods and services provided by trafficked individuals.¹⁴⁶

III. Methods Research question and Hypotheses

The literature review has highlighted a noticeable gap in how news consumers perceive the media coverage of human trafficking. The purpose of this study is to close the gap of information by looking at three variables. Hypothesis 1: The more media one consumes, the more likely they are to believe that human trafficking is not an issue in the United States. Hypothesis 2: The more coverage of human trafficking, the more likely they are to agree human trafficking to be illegal immigrants. Based upon these hypotheses, the dependent variables for this study would be respondents' agreement that extensive news coverage (1) leads news consumers to believe human trafficking is not an issue in the United States; (2) Human trafficking is made up of illegal immigrants. The independent variable for hypotheses 1 and 2 would be different measures of media consumption.

¹⁴³ David, *trafficking*, 758.

¹⁴⁴ Johnathan Todres, *Human Trafficking and Film: How Popular Portrayals Influence Law and Public Perception*, (Georgia State University College Law, 2015), 53.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

Survey Sample

The sample for this project will be generated toward general news consumers. Preferably, this project will draw on a sample of news consumers who reside in the U.S. ages 18 years or older. Since having a minimum age of 18 this will exclude having to have further consent for minors. A random sample of 121 individuals will be drawn as participants for this study using a convenience sample of online people. The random sampling method will increase the likelihood of completion as well as maintaining a sample that is as representative as possible of the population that they are sampled from. Using the random sampling method online was also necessary, as this research was conducted during the global pandemic of COVID-19. Individuals are not required to take this survey as their participation is voluntary and will consist of no consequences, costs, or financial risks. The study should take participants approximately 2-5 minutes to complete a questionnaire online with no compensation for completing the survey and they are allowed to end participation at any time during the study.

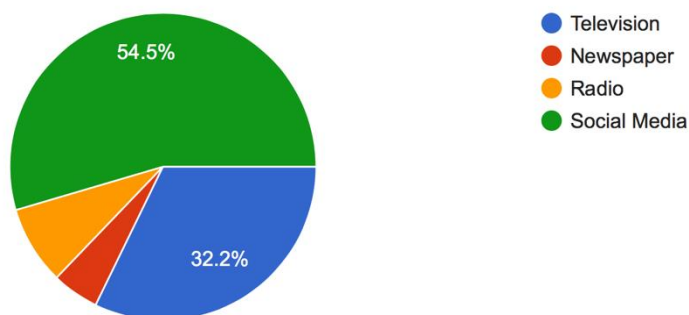
IV. Discussion and Conclusion

The research looks to determine how news consumers perceive the media coverage of human trafficking. Throughout current findings, there was a general lack of connecting the media, human trafficking, and the public altogether. Previous literature tended to only showcase the media's desire for showcasing the "perfect victim" instead of what victims tend to be. Also, discussions on how the media presents their stories, more specifically human trafficking victims, can cause misinformation about the cases and myths about human trafficking in general. With all this information already provided, there have been few tests done to see if the media does in fact affect news consumers' perceptions of human trafficking.

In this study, the respondents' were asked what they consider to be their main source of news. Out of 121 participants, 54.5% of respondents' considered social media to be their main source of news, meaning more than half respondents receive their information from the internet. The respondents were also asked how many hours on average do they spend on social media, with 62% selecting between one and five hours and only 8.3% choosing more than twenty hours.

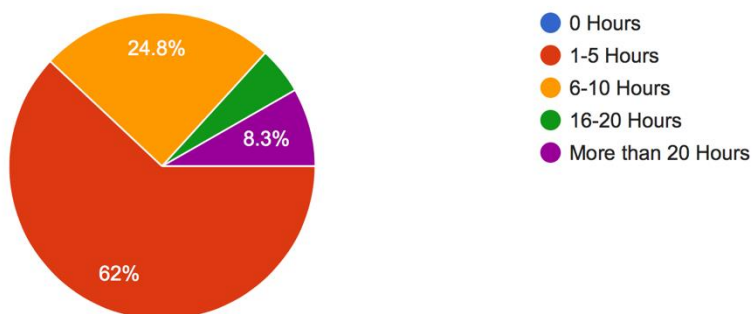
Which of the following do you consider to be your main source of news?

121 responses



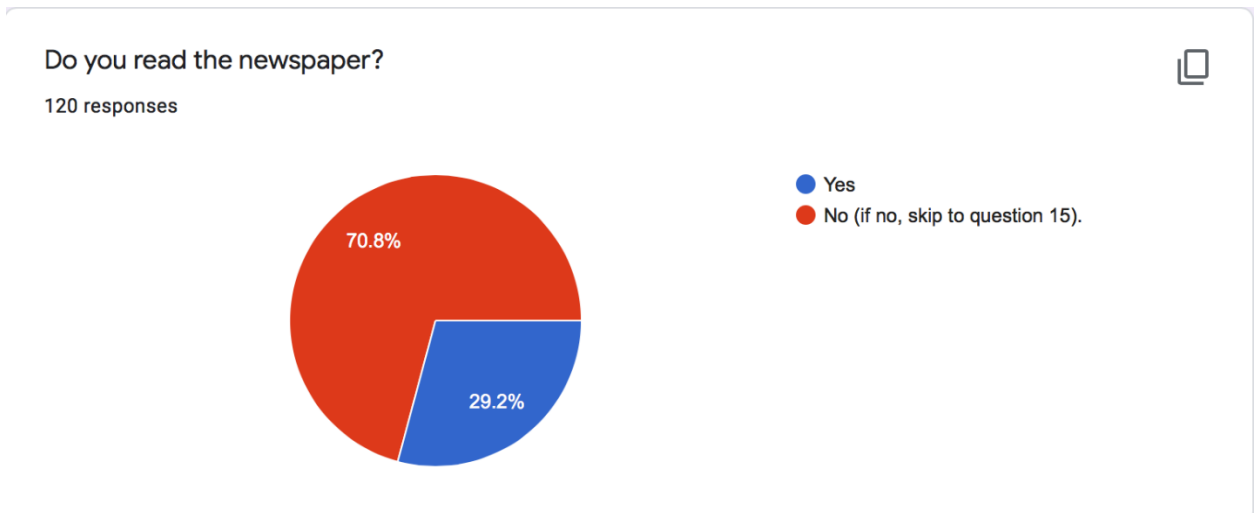
How many hours on average do you spend on social media?

121 responses



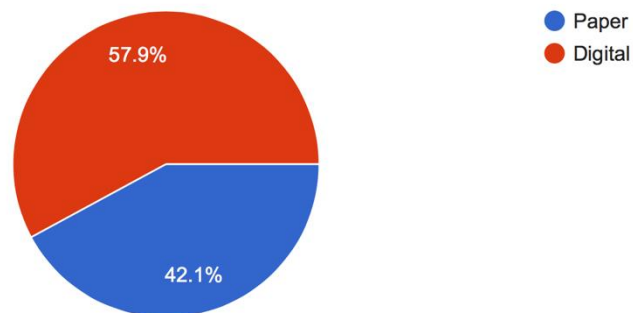
Of the 121 respondents, only 29.2% indicated that they read the newspaper, with more than half stating they read the newspaper in digital form (57.9%). This shows that even when people

do read the newspaper, they are more likely to take advantage of technology and read the paper digitally.



What form do you read the newspaper in?

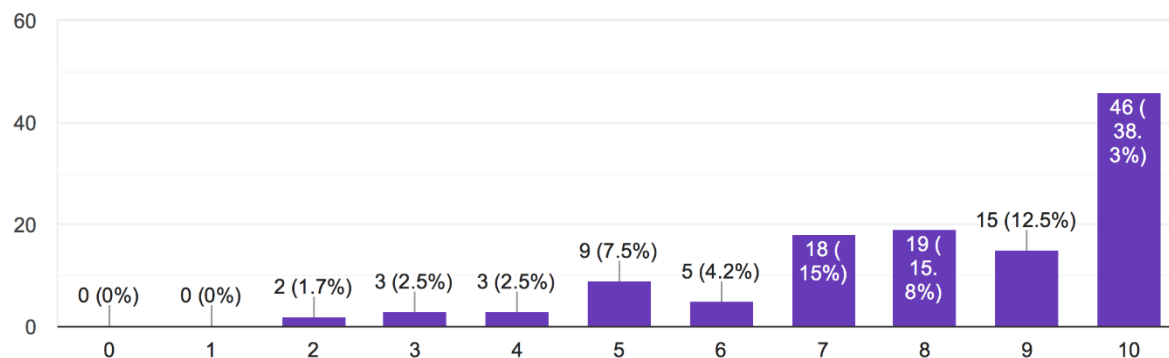
38 responses



This study found that news consumers are less likely to agree that human trafficking is not an issue in the United States even though other works have stated otherwise. This figure displays the results of agreement towards if human trafficking is common in the United States, with 93.3% having some agreement towards the statement and only 6.7% as otherwise.

Please rate your agreement to the statement based on the scale below: Human trafficking is common in the United States.

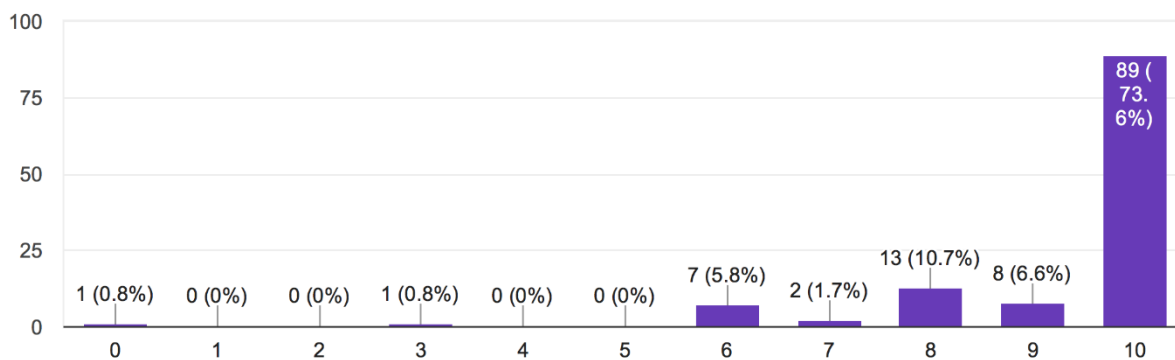
120 responses



It is interesting to note that of the 93.3% of people that agree human trafficking is common in the United States; 98.4% of those individuals believe a citizen of the United States can be a victim of human trafficking in the United States. Of the 98.4% who agree a citizen of the United States can be a victim of human trafficking in the United States; 73.6% strongly agreed with that statement.

Please rate your agreement to the statement based on the scale below: A citizen of the United States can be a victim of human trafficking in the United States.

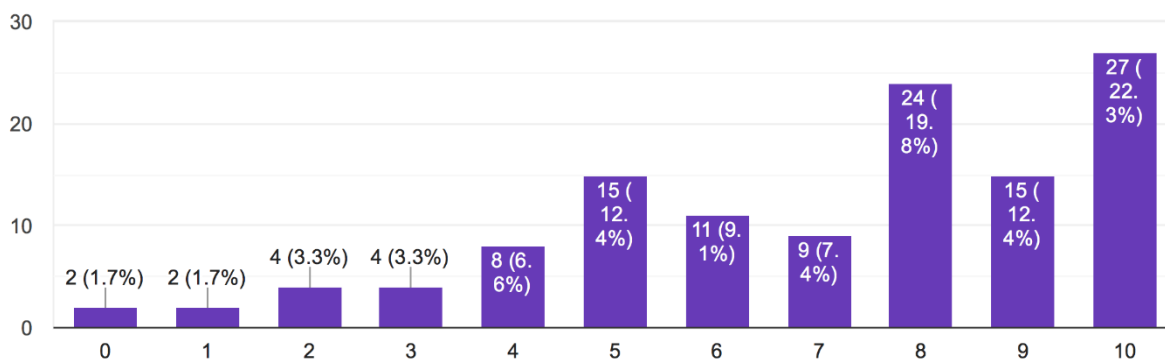
121 responses



As shown in previous literature and studies, the general concusses by respondents seemed to agree that the media mostly portrays illegal immigrants as human trafficking victims (83.4%), with only 16.6% disagreeing.

Please rate your agreement to the statement based on the scale below: The media portrays human trafficking victims as mostly illegal immigrants.

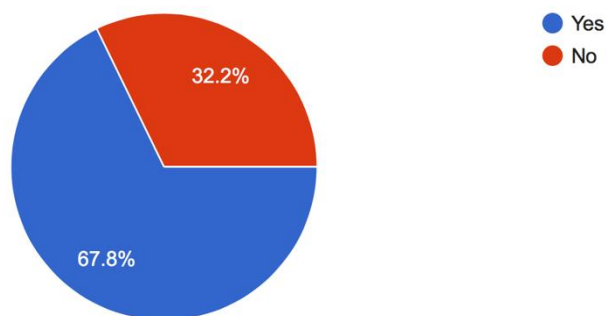
121 responses



This study also asked respondents if they were aware of what human trafficking is defined as in the United States, as previous literature has continuously stated that most people do not truly know what the standard definition consists of. 67.8% indicated they do know what human trafficking is defined as in the United States, with only 32.2% specifying otherwise. It would be interesting to note of the 67.8% who specified they know the definition of human trafficking in the United States, what they believe the definition to be. Perhaps a follow-up question of having the respondents enter what they think the definition consists of could further pinpoint whether the respondents truly know the correct definition.

Are you aware of what human trafficking is defined as in the United States?

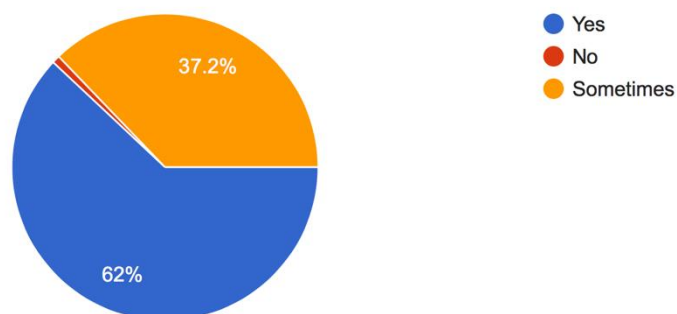
121 responses



There was also overall agreement from respondents believing media coverage can contribute to misinformation about human trafficking, with only 0.8% in disagreement. 62% selected that the media can contribute to misinformation, while 37.2% stated it can sometimes lead to misinformation. This further supports previous studies stating that the media leads to misinformation to the public. Although most respondents believe the media to sometimes be a useful tool in trying to help stop human trafficking (63.6%).

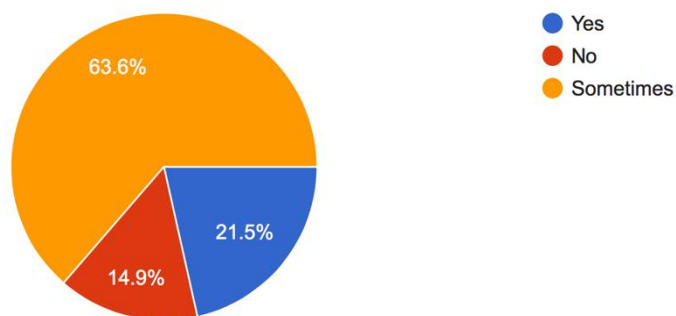
Media coverage can contribute to misinformation about human trafficking.

121 responses



Do you believe the media to be a useful tool in stopping human trafficking?

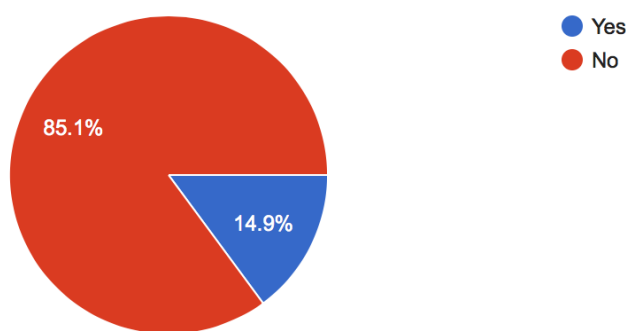
121 responses



It seems that although most respondents seem to believe that they know the definition of human trafficking in the United States, they are not aware of the type of aid given to victims of human trafficking. 85.1% listed that they were unaware with only 14.9% indicating that they did in fact know what type of aid was supplied to victims. It would be interesting to see out of the 14.9% if the respondents know the conditions and limits of the aid for victims.

Are you aware of what type of aid is given to victims of human trafficking?

121 responses



Since the 2000s there have been hundreds of policies and programs that have been initiated to prevent and combat human trafficking, protect victims vulnerable to trafficking, and prosecute traffickers. One example is the UN's Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking

(UN GIFT) that was launched in March 2007.¹⁴⁷ National governments have also created their own policies and programs to meet the “three P’s”. The U.S. established the TVPA which is designed to combat human trafficking through protection prosecution and prevention.¹⁴⁸ The protection addresses trafficking victims’ needs for support to recover and go back into society and includes benefits and services to victims within the U.S. who may not be U.S. citizens or permanent residents.¹⁴⁹

Even after a victim has been identified, there is a long road to recovery that has many challenges. TVPA created new immigration statuses which included the T-visa and access to public benefits for trafficking victims through “certification”.¹⁵⁰ With the T-visa, adult victims of human trafficking are granted temporary status and employment in the U.S. for four years where the victims can apply for permanent resident status.¹⁵¹ What they do not tell the public or victims is that the lucky few who receive T-Visas, they are on their own after one year when the initial government assistance runs out.¹⁵² In the United States, there is financial insecurity for formerly trafficked persons’ and without more benefits the U.S. is creating a new subset of poor citizens.¹⁵³ There are complex standards of the application process for the T-Visas that ultimately stop victims from applying and many additional services cannot be received until a T-visa application is even completed.¹⁵⁴ Also, the exploitation and trauma that victims have bore means

¹⁴⁷ Deanna Davy, *Anti-Human Trafficking Interventions: How Do We Know if They Are Working?*, (American Journal of Evaluation, 2016), 489.

¹⁴⁸ Deanna, *Anti-Human*, 489.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹⁵² Denise Brennan, *Myths Meet Reality: How We Are Not Fighting Trafficking or Supporting Trafficking Survivors*, (Innovations in the Fight Against Human Trafficking, 2016), 610.

¹⁵³ Denise, *Myths*, 610.

¹⁵⁴ David Okech, Whitney Morreau, Kathleen Benson, *Human Trafficking: Improving victim identification and service provision*, (International Social Work, 2011), 498.

they need specific recovery services, such as health care, counseling, and legal representation.¹⁵⁵ Further reauthorization of the TVPA should provide for publicly funded safe havens with trained social workers who can identify, encourage, and screen potential victims in order to help them get legal and social services, as most shelters are run by nongovernmental organizations with limited resources.¹⁵⁶

There are consequences of framing victimhood around constructed groups that do not exist solely to one another. The label of the victim comes with visibility and recognition that the meaning we attach to those labels matter. We need to reevaluate those labels and consider an additional policy that does not exclude marginalized groups, but provides access to resources, a reevaluation of selling sex as a crime, and the revictimization that happens for individuals through the criminal justice system. In order to better address the problem of victimization and marginalization for individuals who sell sex, there needs to be a reframing of what it means to be a victim of human trafficking. Until the United States government and society considers adults who sell sex to also be a vulnerable population and address the issues that result in the label of prostitute with choice, this group will continue to face a stigma and be left without proper resources.

The most critical barrier to understanding human trafficking and the collection of analysis of data is that victims involved in human trafficking are a part of a hidden population. There are really no reliable estimates of the number of human trafficking victims and perpetrators.¹⁵⁷ They are questionable due to methodological weaknesses, gaps in data, the interpretations made, and

¹⁵⁵ David, *Human*, 498.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 499.

¹⁵⁷ Deanna Davy, *Anti-Human Trafficking Interventions: How Do We Know if They Are Working?*, (American Journal of Evaluation, 2016), 491.

the inconsistencies in data found in different studies and reports.¹⁵⁸ This lack of reliable data has implications for the evaluation of anti-human trafficking interventions. The U.S. Government Accountability Office claimed that conducting impact evaluations of anti-human trafficking projects is challenging due to multiple factors, including problematic estimates of the number of trafficking victims.¹⁵⁹ Reliable data estimates are important for baselines, which evaluate how effectively specific interventions are reducing human trafficking.¹⁶⁰

Most anti-trafficking projects have short time frames and objectives that are too broad that can hinder evaluation.¹⁶¹ Specifically, the U.S. GAO discovered that programs also hamper impact evaluation because they lack logic framework that clearly linked activities with goals, indicators, and targets.¹⁶² With these difficulties, few evaluations that measure the impact of programs have been conducted and not much is known about the actual impact of anti-trafficking interventions.¹⁶³ In order to combat this problem, suggestions have been made that measurable indicators should be developed for human trafficking programs as well as procedures established for setting and modifying targets.¹⁶⁴ Measurable indicators will ultimately allow stakeholders to assess how the project is actually performing in terms of achieving its overall goals and objectives.

A review of evaluation in anti-trafficking initiatives found overwhelmingly that anti-trafficking programs are not being adequately evaluated, which obstructs anti-human trafficking responses and limits progress in preventing the crime.¹⁶⁵ Even the UN has admitted that the

¹⁵⁸ Deanna, *Anti-Human*, 491.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 492.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 493.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 493.

information gathered on human trafficking does not currently display whether countertrafficking efforts have reduced human trafficking.¹⁶⁶ Limited research has been done that explores the consequences of anti-human trafficking activities that do not adequately evaluate programs. Further research needs to be done to measure and assess program elements, such as effective legislation and prosecutions, relevance, effectiveness, program objectives, strategies, and interventions.¹⁶⁷

Throughout this research, it has been made abundantly clear that there needs to be better practices in place in order for law enforcement to properly do their job in order to help victims of human trafficking and bring their traffickers to justice. This starts with the U.S. government providing funds to law enforcement agencies in order for them to be equipped with the tools they need to keep the country safe. The U.S. government also needs to develop programs that actually help victims to reintegrate back into society, while continuously evaluating such programs for effectiveness. Lastly, the United States as a whole needs to be better educated on the issue of human trafficking, what it entails and who it can happen to. Still, no study to date has examined the influence of media consumption on news consumers' perceptions about human trafficking.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 492.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 492.

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