

ADULT FEMALE SURVIVORS OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

SPEAK ABOUT FACTORS THAT LED TO THEIR VICTIMIZATION

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY SCIENCES

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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MAY 2016

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DENTON, TEXAS

April 5, 2016

To the Dean of the Graduate School:

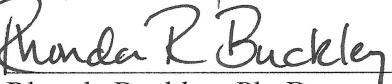
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Amy Johnson entitled "Adult Female Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation Speak about Factors that Led to Their Victimization." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Family Sciences.



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Accepted:



Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

For those who need a voice.

“When our grandchildren ask us where we were when the voiceless and the vulnerable of our era needed leaders of compassion and purpose, I hope we can say that we showed up, and that we showed up on time.”

– Gary Haugen, Founder and CEO of International Justice Mission

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was interesting to write on women who felt such desperation due to their limited resources, because I have always felt supported in my endeavors. This dissertation was no exception. Thank you to my committee members Drs. Holly Moore and Rhonda Buckley for considerable advice on my research, writing, grounded theory, and the IRB process. I love your infectious laughs. Dr. Katie Rose, my major professor, supported me through years of the doctoral program. Dr. Rose, there is no way to express how much I have benefitted under your guidance. You answered my questions, laughed at my jokes, and always looked out for me. You made sure I pursued opportunities that would benefit my career. My education would not have been as rich without you. Thank you.

Christa Hayden, you are one of the most amazing women I know. You are the reason I pursed my PhD. Tiffany Hamlett, my life trajectory changed when I met you. Thank you for introducing me to the world of academia. Chong Kim, thank you for sharing your wisdom. I've had many friends support me through the last five years. I appreciate your encouragement and assistance.

Thank you to my participants. I could not have completed this research without your help. You are remarkable women. I hope I showed you the respect you deserve.

My family has supported me from day one, and I would not be where I am today without this foundation. A special thanks to my brother, Dr. Scott Walters, who treated

me like a colleague rather than a little sister when he answered endless questions on the research process. Mom and Dad, thank you for the advice, babysitting, editing, meals, and encouragement. You have always been my cheerleaders.

Thank you to my husband, Mike. You've always supported me and help keep me sane. I chose wisely. Many thanks to my daughters, Abby and Hannah, who prayed that Mommy would get a 100 on her dissertation. I can't believe I get to be your mom.

Lastly, I give thanks to God, who asks us to stand against injustice. "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." -Micah 6:8

ABSTRACT

AMY JOHNSON

ADULT FEMALE SURVIVORS OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION SPEAK ABOUT FACTORS THAT LED TO THEIR VICTIMIZATION

MAY 2016

This study used grounded theory to explore how adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation talk about factors that led to their victimization. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine women who have successfully exited the sex industry. Data were cataloged using NVivo and coded into themes and categories. The data revealed three main time frames of interest: childhood, entering the sex industry, and exiting the sex industry. Using constant comparative analysis, coding fell into the same three themes for each time period: what was happening, how participants responded, and what happened next. Using action-interaction, a conceptual summary was developed: Overwhelming Issues, Limited Resources, Hollow Solutions. This concept represents three distinct phases that the participants cycled through. They faced overwhelming situations and, presented with limited resources, found solutions that temporarily solved the problems that later became more crushing issues. The cycle was broken when increased resources offered more stable solutions. Implications for further research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Lucy¹ came from an abusive home and was first molested by a male babysitter when she was three years old. While attending elementary school, she was sexually abused by a principal and a classmate. She wondered how pedophiles knew they could take advantage of her. “Could they tell I was marked as a child victim?” She ran away from home as a teenager and met Jack. Desperate to be loved, she quickly fell for his lavish attention. “He spoiled me with flowers and teddy bears, took me out to eat, and treated me like a Queen. If I wrote a poem, he would listen. If I felt the burst of energy to sing, he would let me yodel.” After dating for a few weeks, Jack asked her if she would come visit his parents, and she readily agreed. Although she now knows that she should not have gone because she did not know him well enough, she had no timeline for dating or love at that point. “I remember feeling so lonely that I literally prayed to God for someone to love me, even if he was abusive, as long as he didn’t hit me every day. I remember that prayer. I had no self-esteem.”

After a long drive, they pulled up to a ramshackle house. He explained that he needed to quickly help a homeless person before they resumed their travels. When she said she would wait in the car, Jack turned violent and forced her into the home. She was

¹ All names have been changed. Lucy is not a participant in this study, but a friend who allowed me to include her story.

handcuffed to a doorknob as he made a phone call, seemingly asking for further instructions. He destroyed her social security card, naturalization papers, and driver's license. For weeks, she remained a prisoner in the house while being beaten, raped, sodomized, and tortured. She tried to escape several times, but repeated beatings eventually caused her to stop trying. She thought, "Maybe he had a good reason to restrain me. I know it's sad, but when you grow up with violence, this is all you know."

When it was time to move her, Jack took the handcuffs off and ordered her not to run. She ran. She made it to a local shop, but because she had not showered in weeks and had often soiled herself, her appearance disgusted the patrons. She approached one woman and begged for help, screaming, "Help me! He's going to kill me!" The woman backed away, and another woman shielded her child from Lucy. Jack quickly arrived and dragged Lucy out of the store by her hair. She remembers seeing a security officer saluting Jack, who was wearing military garb, as if he were "taking out the trash." Jack asked if anyone had come to her rescue, and when she said no, he replied, "See? You are a nobody."

Time went on, and she and Jack moved to a quadruplex. The beatings continued, and one day, a neighbor called the police. Lucy was taken to a shelter for women of domestic violence, but she was turned away when she could not provide paperwork proving her name and legal status. As she stood crying on the street, a woman approached and asked if she could help. The woman offered to hire Lucy and to help her get her identification papers back. Unbeknownst to Lucy, the woman was a Madame at

an escort service. When she was raped for the first time as an escort, she went to the police. After they found out where she worked, the case was dropped. With nowhere else to go, Lucy went back to the Madame, where she was sold to two men who put a blindfold on her and threw her in the back of a van.

She was taken to a storage facility and was partnered with a child. They told Lucy that if she tried to escape, the child would be beaten. She was once punished by having her body covered in ice for two hours. She prayed that God would let her die and was angry when she made it out alive.

After approximately two years of captivity, she was able to escape through an air duct. She does not have a clear understanding of the time frame because she was kept in a windowless storage facility and had no concept of night and day. At the time of her escape, she was pregnant with her pimp's child. Worried that she would be like her own mother, she gave her child up for adoption. She does not regret her decision and hopes that when the child turns 18 next year, she will seek out her birth mother.

Lucy states that being a survivor is an ongoing effort because she fights triggers and flashbacks. She dreamt of being married, having two kids, and owning a dog and a cat. She longed to live in a two story house, be a stay-at-home mom, help sell Girl Scout cookies, and join the PTA. "I wanted to cook for my family, make lunches for my kids and drink tea with the neighbor wives. Unfortunately, the aftermath of violence can bring some heavy burdens." Lucy admits to having three personas. She showed me a scrapbook of her three personalities. "Kim" is a three-year-old girl who stays that age

due to the first instance of sexual abuse. She likes Winnie the Pooh and the color pink. “Jewel” is the persona who was trafficked; she is easily angered. “Lucy” is the personality that she holds most of the time, although she does have to push the others away.

Statement of the Problem

I have worked in Cambodia with women who were children when they first experienced commercial sexual exploitation. When I talk of my work to friends, colleagues, and strangers in the United States, they often shake their heads at what goes on “over there.” Due to the uncomfortable nature of children in the sex industry, some people insist that it only happens in faraway countries (Godsoe, 2015). Most of my contacts are shocked when I tell them that children are also part of the sex industry in the United States. According to Shared Hope International (n.d.), a leading researcher on sex trafficking, 100,000 U.S. children are trafficked each year. There are currently more minors than adults being trafficked in America (Shared Hope International, 2007). The average age of a child first being sold for sexual acts in the United States is 12-14 years old (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Ignorance creates problems, because if the issue is unknown, it cannot be solved. One powerful example of a town fighting to protect children comes from Atlanta. Boxill and Richardson (2007) outlined the story of how women in Atlanta sprang into action once they heard that children were being sold for sex in their city. It began when a judge noticed more 9, 10, and 11-year-old girls were being brought before her court with charges of prostitution. They found that girls had

been kidnapped or persuaded while at malls, movie theaters, schools, and bus stops. When they were brought before the court, the judge felt as if she had few options. She could either put them in juvenile detention for prostitution or send them back to the homes which may have contributed to their exploitation in the first place. There were no available aftercare facilities.

According to Boxhill and Richardson (2007), authorities were not working together to recognize the rising phenomenon. “School social workers were reporting truancies and runaways, and teachers were observing older men picking up girls from middle- and high-school doorsteps without making the connection that there was more under the surface” (p. 144). Parents noticed that their children’s attitudes were markedly different or that they went missing for days and weeks at a time, but it was not connected to the bigger picture. As Judge Hickson noticed the number of cases rising, she decided to take action. Hickson and Deborah Richardson took the information to child advocate Nancy Boxill, who was on the county’s Board of Commissioners. They told her of the stories of children being tortured, raped, and sold repeatedly. Boxill was “almost paralyzed with shame, sadness, and helplessness,” knowing that this was occurring in her town (p. 145).

Hickson, Richardson, and Boxill teamed up with two others to write 300 letters to women who held important positions in the city “who were able to provide the human and financial resources that were needed” (Boxill & Richardson, 2007, p. 146). Eighty women, each being either the president or representative of “every women’s group we

could find, including bridge clubs, garden clubs, professional and religious organizations, social clubs, sororities, and recreational clubs” responded to the letter, and a meeting was held to discuss the problem (p. 147). Child victims spoke of the horrors they had faced. Through the work of this women’s coalition and the federal prosecutor’s office, a sting was held in which 13 pimps were arrested and charged with, for the first time, racketeering. All were found guilty and imprisoned with stiff sentences. In connection with these events, there is now a public awareness group, media and radio coverage, and town hall meetings that direct attention toward the problem. In addition, funds were raised to open a safe house and an aftercare center. Angela’s House, a treatment facility for girls, was opened in 2003.

Changing societal views about commercial sex workers, both minors and adults, begins with awareness. Prostitution is less about sex and more about a violation of human rights (Farley, n.d.). Whether a woman is forced into the industry or states that she chose her path, her life is forever altered. Prostituted women suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and bipolar disorder (Williamson & Prior, 2009). They may even be labeled with tattoos that show them as being the property of the pimp (Boxill & Richardson, 2007). They are often stigmatized and dehumanized, even when reaching out for help (Hotaling, Miller, & Trudeau, 2006).

Not only should we offer help to those bound up in commercial sexual exploitation, but we should also focus on prevention. Most prostituted women have experienced previous sexual abuse, with rape often being the first sexual encounter (Estes

& Weiner, 2001; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Reid, 2011). Frequently, violence is present in the home (Farley et al., 2005; Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, & Watts, 2010). Williamson & Prior (2009) found that the majority of sex trafficking victims spoke of being neglected, having food insecurities, and lacking reliable utilities in the home; victims are often easily persuaded because they are promised basic necessities, such as food and shelter, as payment for sexual acts. Most prostituted women have low self-esteem prior to entering the industry (Hom & Woods, 2013; Reid, 2011). They often leave the home, looking for better living arrangements (Marcus, Horning, Curtis, Sanson, & Thompson, 2014), and runaways are at a high risk for exploitation, with approximately 70% of homeless youth being involved in sex work in order to meet daily needs and addictions (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

While research shows broad themes of abuse, trauma, and neglect, there is a gap in literature regarding specifics in those themes. Research reports that most commercial sex workers were sexually abused as children (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Reid, 2011), but it is important to know who is abusing the child, whether it be the mother, father, or someone else, and why that abuse is not being stopped by a third party. Childhood trauma is commonly reported (Hotaling et al., 2006; Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2003), but specifics are often missing. More research is needed to discover what traumatic events are reoccurring, and which traumatic events have far reaching effects on women who are in the commercial sex industry. Another theme that is commonly reported is the issue of neglect (Farley et al., 2005; Hossain et al., 2010;

Williamson & Prior, 2009), but there are many different definitions of neglect. Literature that utilizes the voices of sexually exploited women would be beneficial in revealing specifics within the commonalities often cited.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to use grounded theory to discover how women in the commercial sex industry talk about factors that preceded their entry into sex work. Grounded theory is valuable for topics that have been understudied (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Much of the current literature on commercial sexual exploitation does not include a theoretical framework (Banović, & Bjelajac, 2012; Farley & Barkan, 1998; Hossain et al., 2010; Mastin, Murphy, Riplinger, & Ngugi, 2015; Reid, 2014; Reid & Piquero, 2014; Ross et al., 2003). When a theory is used, it may be specific to the discipline in which the study is conducted. Differing fields of family sciences, social work, economics, and criminal justice will use theories that are specific to their disciplines.

For instance, existing research that focuses on the family and human development aspect of commercial sex work have utilized Bronfenbrenner (Dalla, 2000). Studies looking at the economic view, including money and commercialism, of the sex industry use social exchange and network in migration theories (Jani & Anstadt, 2013). The field of criminal justice focuses on illegal activities and law enforcement and so uses the criminal career paradigm or theory of informal social control (Reid & Piquero, 2014). Additionally, the commercial sex industry includes aspects of restoration and healing through social work and counseling, resulting in a strengths-based perspective theory

(Busch-Arendariz, Nsonwu, & Heffron, 2014). Commercial sexual exploitation is multifaceted and intricate, and new theories must be created that focus specifically on the topic of how women in the sex industry discuss the path that led them towards their exploitation. Gathering information from participants, grounded theory was used to analyze the ways in which they spoke about some of the common precursors that occurred before victimization.

The purpose of this study was to explore how adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation discuss factors that led to their victimization. The women discussed events that happened as children and adolescents, outlining how childhood happenings began a path towards their eventual exploitation. With an understanding of how childhood may lead to later exploitation, educational prevention programs can be developed. Semi-structured interviews were used so the participants had the freedom to bring up topics they felt were important, rather than topics that the researcher or a literature review would deem important. Grounded theory creates theory based on emerging data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). With this technique, the researcher does not begin with preconceived theories or notions. The data guides the findings and theories.

Definition of Terms

Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) - This encompassing term includes all aspects of the sex industry, including escort services, prostitution, stripping, and pornography. Women's Support Project (n.d.) states, "Commercial sexual exploitation commodifies

women and girls and supports a culture that views women as objects who are more a ‘sum of body parts’ than a whole being” (para. 5).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) - According to the U.S. Department of Justice, “The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is sexual abuse of a minor for economic gain” (Albanese, 2013, p. 1). This term is used interchangeably with child sex trafficking or minor sex trafficking.

Human Trafficking – Human trafficking is an umbrella term for people in an enslaved state. According to the U.S. Department of State (n.d.), “People may be considered trafficking victims regardless of whether they were born into a state of servitude, were transported to the exploitative situation, previously consented to work for a trafficker, or participated in a crime as a direct result of being trafficked” (para. 2).

John - A customer who purchases sexual acts is known as a john, a buyer, a client, or a trick (Smith, 2009).

Minor – A person who is under the age of 18 is considered a minor. At the age of 18, one is referred to as an adult. Commercial sexual exploitation “has devastating consequences for minors, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and even death” (U.S. Department of State, n.d., para. 5).

Pimp – A pimp is any person who exploits someone sexually for monetary gain. A pimp can be male or female, adult or minor, a family member, friend, boyfriend, or stranger.

Seventy-five percent of sex workers have worked for a pimp at one time (Estes & Weiner, 2001). A pimp is a trafficker.

Prostitute – A person who sells his or her body for sexual purposes is called a prostitute. When the term prostitute is used, it implies that the person is willingly selling his or her body, with no regard for unseen factors (Rand, 2010).

Prostituted Minor – Someone under the age of 18 who is being prostituted. Minors cannot legally consent to sexual acts (United States Department of State, 2014); therefore, they are always prostituted, whether by a pimp, trafficker, or client.

Prostituted Woman – This term is used by those against prostitution. It refers to a woman who sells her body for sexual purposes, but it takes away the implication that she is exercising free will (Blinders, 2005). It is something done to her, rather than something she has chosen.

Sex Trafficking – The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines severe forms of trafficking in persons as “sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age” (U.S. Department of State, 2014, sec. 103). Sex trafficking is the “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (sec. 103). If the victim is under 18 years of age, force does not need to be proven. There are no social, cultural, or economic exceptions to this rule. A victim does not need to be transferred from one location to another to fall under this definition. In fact, many victims are trafficked out of

their homes by a family member or friend (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Within the literature, several names for this phenomenon are used interchangeably: Child sexual exploitation (CSE), commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST), and child sex trafficking (CST).

Survivor – This term refers to someone who has exited the sex industry through escape, choice, or rescue.

Trafficker – A trafficker is anyone who uses humans for monetary gain. A trafficker uses violence, lies, and manipulation to lure victims. Pimps, gangs, and other individuals or groups who sell people are traffickers. According to Polaris Project (n.d.), “their common thread is a willingness to exploit other human beings for profit” (p. 1).

Delimitations

This study used female participants who identified themselves as being previously trafficked or prostituted. All participants are currently survivors of the sex industry and have been receiving mental, financial, and/or physical support from a local advocacy center. The women are now adults.

Summary

The commercial sex industry is a violation of human rights (Farley, n.d.). Prostituted women suffer from PTSD, depression, and other mental illnesses (Williamson & Prior, 2009). Hotaling et al. (2006), speaking from her own experience, notes that prostituted women are a marginalized and stigmatized population. She remembers, “No

one asked me if I hurt, or why I hurt. No one ever treated me like a person. I was just a whore, a drug addict, and a criminal" (p. 2).

This study aimed to lend a voice to the prostituted women to discuss victimization factors that may have contributed to their sexual exploitation. This qualitative study utilized grounded theory to examine what survivors say about the factors that led to their experiences in the commercial sex industry. The participants discussed events beginning in childhood which outlined a path towards commercial sexual exploitation. The knowledge of risk factors should be used in educational prevention programs and theory building.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the topic of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE).

Current laws and definitions are probed. The research conducted on CSE show common themes regarding risk factors of those who enter the sex industry. This chapter also introduces grounded theory, the theoretical foundation for this study, along with some studies that have used grounded theory to examine CSE.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation has many different names, having been discussed for centuries. One phrase that comes to mind is the “world’s oldest profession,” coined by Kipling in 1899. Prostitution is discussed in the Bible, with Rahab, a prostitute, being in the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:5, New International Version). The more current terms include sex workers, prostituted women, and victims of sex trafficking. Legally, commercial sex workers are divided into two groups. The first group includes all minors, regardless of circumstance, and any adult who is being controlled by another person. Each commercial sex worker in this group is defined as a victim, who should not face prosecution. The second group includes adults who do not have a pimp. They have no protection under the law and may face prosecution. In Texas, a commercial sex worker who has three arrests for prostitution is considered a felon, is fined up to \$10,000, and could be imprisoned for 180 days to two years (ProCon, 2008).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

New literature reveals that the problem of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), also known as sex trafficking of minors, thrives within our borders. Shared Hope International (n.d.) reports that each year, 100,000 U.S. children are victims of CSE. Currently, minors comprise the largest group of trafficked persons in the U.S. (Shared Hope International, 2007). The pursuing of young children is partly due to the fear of contracting AIDS and other STDs, which leads to a demand for younger, more virginal, girls (Hotaling et al., 2006). Younger girls are targeted because they bring in more profit due to rising demand (Boxill & Richardson, 2007). In the United States, the average age of a child first being exploited in the commercial sex trade is between 12 and 14 years of age (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

The United States Bureau of Justice reports that 82% of suspected human trafficking incidents between January 2008 and June 2010 were labeled as sex trafficking, with 40% of those involving a child (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011). Ninety-four percent of victims were female, and 83% were U.S. citizens. This banishes the notion that the majority of children caught in the U.S. sex trade are foreign born. Estes and Weiner (2001) found that only 10% of their sample had been brought into the country, leaving 90% of victims trafficked domestically.

Researchers find it difficult to accurately report the issue because it is enveloped in secrecy. It is also difficult to determine exact numbers of CSEC victims because different systems report victims in a variety of ways. For instance, a minor may be cited

for prostitution and not counted as a sex-trafficking victim. Some sex workers found in raids are deported before a decision has been made on whether or not they are trafficking victims (Hepburn & Simon, 2010).

Additionally, CSEC is a hidden problem. The illegal, underground nature makes it difficult to calculate statistical information on the phenomenon. Estes and Weiner (2001) conducted the most robust sex trafficking research to date. They estimate that approximately 245,000 to 287,000 youth are at risk of sexual exploitation in the United States. Godsoe (2015) believes “many if not most people prefer not to know about prostituted children, wishing to ignore this uncomfortable issue” (p. 1337).

When a minor is called a prostitute, it implies that she willingly sells her body for money (Rand, 2010). Hotaling et al. (2006), a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation states, “As a community, we must reject the myth that if a girl is on the street wearing lipstick and a miniskirt, she is advertising her consent to sexual abuse, and that by so consenting she herself has committed a crime” (p. 5). According to the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report (U.S. DOS, 2014), children under the age of 18 cannot legally consent to sex. Nonetheless, they are sometimes arrested for prostitution. When caught, these girls may face legal action even though the law states that there is to be a differentiation between minor and adult prostitution (Reid & Jones, 2011). Boxill and Richardson (2007) state that people make a distinction between sexual abuse survivors, viewed as victims, and survivors of CSEC, who are often looked at as willing

participants. The law does not allow minors to drink, drive, or vote; in the same way, they are not mature enough to willingly sell their bodies.

Reid and Jones (2011) discuss the confusion of treating victims of commercial sexual exploitation as criminals, charged under prostitution laws, or as victims who are minors and are therefore not legally able to consent to sex. When the act is referred to as “minor prostitution,” the children are categorized with the illegal act of prostitution, rather than being seen as victims. TVPA (U.S. DOS, 2000) states that victims of sex-trafficking should not be charged with participating in illegal activities resulting from being trafficked. The victims do not need further humiliation and stigma by being arrested, jailed, and labeled as offenders. In the same way that victims of child pornography are not held responsible, whether or not they had given their consent, no minor involved in the commercial sex industry should be held liable (Reid & Jones, 2011).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women

Women who enter the sex industry as adults are not always considered victims. As stated previously, a trafficked individual is one who engages in sexual acts “as a result of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion, or any combination of such means” (U.S. Department of State, n.d., para. 2). If the prostituted female is a minor, it is not necessary to prove force or coercion, but if the woman is over 18, in order to be considered trafficked, force must be proven. Those who were victims of sexual exploitation as minors are no longer protected under the law once they turn 18 if they are not being

controlled by a trafficker or pimp. Commercial sex workers over 18 who are not under someone's control are said to be engaging in prostitution. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, prostitution is "a sexual act or contact with another person in return for giving or receiving a fee or a thing of value" (para. 5). Prostitution is the trading of sexual acts for money, drugs, food, shelter, or other needed items (Murphy, 2010). Even though these adults cannot be classified as a victim of sex trafficking and are not protected under the law, advocates consider all sex workers to be victims of CSE. Barry (1995) states, "sexual exploitation is a practice by which person(s) achieve sexual gratification or financial gain or advancement through the abuse of a person's sexuality by abrogating that person's human right to dignity, quality, autonomy, and physical and mental well-being" (p. 326).

Farley, a leading researcher in commercial sexual exploitation against women, states, "Even today, many mistakenly assume that prostitution is sex, rather than sexual violence, and a vocational choice, rather than a human rights abuse" (n.d., para. 2). Even if a woman was not forced into prostitution, she loses herself in the industry. With each act of sexual exploitation, a part of her dies away, becoming someone who accommodates the men who rent her body for self-gratification (Farley, 2003). She is reduced to a "filthy whore" whose whole self is reduced to only the individual parts that serve sexual purpose; her "civilian identity" fades as she becomes socially stigmatized (p. xiv). One article referred to them as "free-lance STD-spreaders" (as cited in Farley,

2004, p. 1088). Even though a prostituted woman may not be physically forced into commercial sex exploitation, does not mean that she suffers no harm from the industry.

Supply and Demand

As long as the demand is present, and the risks to the seller (pimp or trafficker) and buyer (john) are minimal, this industry will continue. In the United States, sexually exploited women are sold up to 15 times a day (Hom & Woods, 2013). Records from a brothel on the East Coast report that some women have serviced 55 men in one day (Shared Hope International, 2007).

In 1999, believing that prostitution is a form of violence against women, Sweden outlawed the purchase of sexual acts but not the sale of such acts. The law prosecutes the johns while referring prostituted individuals to agencies aimed at helping them exit the industry. Five years after this law was implemented, Sweden noted a two-thirds drop in prostitution (Offenbacher, 2010). However, in the U.S., prostituted women are prosecuted at higher rates than johns or pimps (Godsoe, 2015). In 2006, Nevada arrested 153 minors on charges of prostitution, but only two pimps were charged (Shared Hope International, 2007). In Boston, 11 sex workers were arrested for every one customer. Chicago has a 9:1 arrest ratio, and New York, a 6:1. In 2005, pimping a minor was classified as a misdemeanor and came with a \$50 fine, while the minors were charged with prostitution (Shared Hope International, 2007). In 2002, johns in Atlanta received a \$50 fine for purchasing a prostituted minor (Boxill & Richardson, 2007). Customers in the commercial sex industry seldom face imprisonment (Godsoe, 2015). One argument

states that it would cause difficulties for the men involved. “Why make a married man get busted in a sting, have his name and picture be published in his local paper and have to explain everything to his wife? Isn’t that destructive to society?” (as cited in Farley, 2004, p. 1088).

With minimal consequences, it is easy to see how the demand drives the market. When interviewed, johns stated that greater penalties and public exposure would curb their use of commercial sex (Farley, Freed, Phal, & Golding, 2012). In denying the victim status to prostituted girls and women, the blame falls on them rather than those who are harming them. Godsoe (2015) states, “the focus on prosecuting the prostituted girls themselves detracts from pursuing the pimps and customers exploiting children, leading the DOJ to acknowledge that these men ‘have largely escaped accountability for many years’” (p. 142).

Pimps

When a pimp exploits people for money, he/she is involved in trafficking. A pimp is most often male but can also be female, a friend or stranger, or even a family member. Research varies in reporting how many prostituted females have been under the control of a pimp at some point, with numbers ranging from 40% - 84% (Banović & Bjelajac, 2012; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Norton-Hawk, 2004). The differing percentages are due to several factors. One study suggests that prostituted women controlled by pimps have different demographics, such as earlier drug use and sexual encounters, so results may be dependent on the population of the study (Norton-Hawk, 2004). Many

prostituted women do not use the word pimp. They call him daddy or boyfriend. Too often, it is a friend or family member who is acting as a pimp; in which case, the girl would rightly call him her step-father or family friend.

Pimps pretend to be photographers looking for models, producers looking for actors, or they may simply approach girls at schools, shopping malls, and arcades (Hotaling et al., 2006). Recruiters, those used by the pimp to obtain girls, are not limited by age or gender. Victims report that males, females, minors, and adults approached them as they walked down the street or visited a friend's home. (Williamson & Prior, 2009). Pimps and recruiters seek out vulnerable people.

Pimps most frequently use the seduction tactic, wherein they shower the girl with affection and gifts, thereby gaining her trust (Friedman, 2005). They isolate their victims and tell them that no one cares about them (Hom & Woods, 2013). Some will introduce the girl to addictive drugs, therefore making her dependent on his supply (Fowler, Che, & Fowler, 2010). The pimp may take the role of a boyfriend or a paternal figure, and the victim falls in love and does what he asks of her (Estes & Weiner, 2001). The female's main purpose is to earn money for the pimp. She may not see herself as a victim; she is simply helping the man she loves. Similarities are made to the Stockholm syndrome or trauma bonds, where captives bond with their captors (Friedman, 2005; Hom & Woods, 2013).

Hotaling et al. (2006) describe two types of pimps. The "smooth talking" pimps, also known as "lover boys," target girls who have low self-esteem and are looking for

love and a sense of belonging. The smooth talkers act as boyfriends and shower the girl with gifts and affection before manipulating her into sexual exploitation. The “guerilla” pimp kidnaps the victim, often transporting her to unknown locations, beating, and raping her.

Although it may appear that the woman is a willing part of the sex trade, she is a prisoner. Her will has been broken, and she feels no self-worth. She is his property and will do as he asks (Reid & Jones, 2011). Some pimps tattoo their names on victims to forever label their property (Boxill & Richardson, 2007). Although it may appear to an outsider that the female is free to leave or obtain help, several factors keep her enslaved. Pimps may threaten to kill her family (Reid & Jones, 2011). The victims do not have the ability to control their basic health and safety needs (Hossain et al., 2010). Pimps often take away identifying papers such as a driver’s license, passport, or social security card (Hotaling et al., 2006). Without these documents, the victim has no proof of name, age, or legal status. If she has been moved to another country, she might not speak the language and be unable to seek help (Cole, 2009).

Sex workers often view authorities as people who will prevent them from making a living and who can punish or imprison their loved ones (Marcus et al., 2014). They fear that the police can’t protect them, and they find that some authorities despise them and view them as criminals (Helfferich, Kavemann, & Rabe, 2011). Every time the police on the street stop or harass the victims, they are pushed further from authorities and closer to

the pimp (Lloyd, 2011; U.S. DOS, 2014). Due to trauma bonding, some do not realize that they are, in fact, victims.

Victimization Risk Factors

Although prostituted minors and adults are distinct under the law, they are strikingly similar in other ways. While there is no way to distinguish between a person who will or will not enter the commercial sex industry, there are common factors that attribute to higher risk. Many of the victims are runaways, throwaways (those kicked out of their homes or abandoned), or giveaways (having been given to relatives or child protective services) (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Hom & Woods, 2013; Reid, 2011; Williamson & Prior, 2009). Many runaways have been victims of sexual abuse before running away, which confounds the problem (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Runaways living on the streets are often hungry and lack basic necessities. Traffickers prey on children who appear to be vulnerable and in need. Gangs prey upon homeless youth, using them for pornography and prostitution. Approximately 30% of youth living in shelters and 70% of youth living on the streets are involved in prostitution to meet their daily needs and addictions (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Women who enter the sex industry are more likely to report unemployment, lower levels of education, and a need for money (Reid, 2014). Ross, Farley, and Schwartz (2003) state, “the evidence is clear: Those in prostitution have experienced extremely high rates of childhood trauma, violent victimization while in prostitution, substance abuse, and psychiatric disorders” (p. 203).

There are common themes when viewing the childhood homes of commercial sex workers. Childhood sexual abuse is a risk factor (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Farley et al., 2005; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Reid, 2011; Shannon & Csete, 2010; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Often, rape is the first sexual experience that the victim encounters (Hom & Woods, 2013). The sexual abuse is part of the problem, but the silence that is encouraged confounds the problem (Friedman, 2005). Friedman states the victim learns that her body is to be treated in a sexual way, and she may equate love with sexual abuse. It is hard to know how many commercially exploited women were sexually abused as children because research presents numbers that drastically vary. One study of adult sex workers in Vancouver found that 82% had been sexually abused as a child by an average of four different abusers (Farley, Lynne, & Cotton, 2005); while Hossain et al. (2010) report 15% of their participants experienced childhood sexual abuse. In another study, 57% of participants had been sexually abused by someone outside the family, and 30% had experienced sexual abuse by someone within the family (Williamson & Prior, 2009). Adolescent girls are targets for family members, both immediate and extended, acquaintances, and strangers; furthermore, ninety-six percent of children know their sexual abuser (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

Violence and neglect in the home are additional risk factors (Farley et al., 2005; Hossain et al., 2010). Physical abuse is common among the victims (Williamson & Prior, 2009). The majority of victims report neglect, such as not having enough food or functioning utilities in the home. Many times, the victims are easily persuaded to work

due to hunger or their basic needs not being met. Sixty-four percent had at least one parent with a drug or alcohol addiction. Children whose parents are mentally ill or sexually promiscuous and those living in poverty and in areas where adult prostitution is nearby are also at risk (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

With the home life full of turmoil and/or abuse, children often leave, even agreeing to work with a pimp, because it may be a better situation than they are currently facing (Marcus et al., 2014). Sixty percent come from single family homes, usually having the father absent (Shared Hope International, 2007). Negative self-esteem is prevalent among victims (Hom & Woods, 2013; Reid, 2011). Traffickers and pimps do not want healthy and aware children (Chong Kim, personal communication, June 28, 2014). Hotaling et al. (2006) state, “smooth-talking players target runaways, young women, girls exhibiting acting-out behaviors associated with trauma, and girls that come from abusive backgrounds who have low self-esteem and confidence” (p. 4). Children who have been trafficked are likely to have minimal or no parental support. If rescued, the children may not have a safe place to return to, as their home life is one of the reasons for the victimization (Fong & Cardoso, 2010).

Some women enter the industry to satisfy a drug addiction; wherein, their desire for drugs is stronger than their aversion to prostitution (Reid, 2014). The woman, having to support herself and her children, finds limited job opportunities and knows that there is money to be made in the sex industry (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Murphy, 2010). Oftentimes, they are undereducated and may have limited decision making skills due to

past trauma and drug abuse (Davis, Stoner, Norris, George, & Masters, 2009; Murphy, 2010). According to Murphy (2010), “prostitution may be considered a behavior derived from desperation and determination to achieve necessary resources to sustain life, such as food, clothing, or shelter, or to escape a current lifestyle of violence and abuse” (p. 775).

Outcomes

Those who are in the sex industry are subject to much more than just sexual acts. Sex trafficking victims report being raped, having been anally searched if suspected of hiding money, and being burned (Hotaling et al., 2006). They are controlled by others (Hossain et al., 2010). The majority of victims are forced to take drugs, which leads to addiction and dependency upon the pimp who provides the drugs (Fowler et al., 2009). Williamson and Prior (2009) report that minors who were sex trafficked in Toledo faced gang rape, robbery, and beatings. The majority of their participants discussed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and bipolar disorder.

Research shows that there are many risks to commercially sexually exploited minors. Hossain et al. (2010) found that 80% of their participants had experienced violence, threats, and freedom taken away. Fifty-five percent showed signs of depression, 48% had an anxiety disorder, and 77% showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Another disorder associated with sexual exploitation is split consciousness, otherwise known as split personality disorder, which can be a way to avoid traumatic memories. In addition to mental trauma, the children face hunger, torture, sleep deprivation, witnessing violent acts and murder, and pregnancy. AIDS and

other STDs are a threat since they do not have the power to insist that customers wear a condom (Banović & Bjelajac, 2012). In conjunction with psychological disorders and physical affliction, many victims have diminished decision making skills partly due to their inability to control their own environments.

Adults in the commercial sex industry face similar outcomes. One victim stated that with each act, a part of her dies, leaving behind a meaningless woman who is not worthy of love (Williamson & Prior, 2009). They face serious risks to their health by exposure to violence and sexually transmitted diseases; they develop mental illnesses and are often socially despised (Reid, 2014). Compared to other women, prostituted women are 18 times more likely to be victims of homicide (Potterat et al., 2004). Most commercial sex workers experience depression, bipolar, or other mental health disorders. One study found that 68% have post-traumatic stress disorder (Farley et al., 2005). Session (2015), who has worked with survivors for over 12 years, states that their souls have been murdered.

Commercial sex workers are often dehumanized, even when seeking help. Hotaling et al. (2006), a survivor turned advocate, states that ever since she was 12, she had been in jails, hospitals, mental health facilities, and drug rehabilitation programs. She had been kidnapped, raped, and forced into prostitution. She bears scars from suicide attempts and has a metal plate in her head, but no one had asked about her well-being at these professional facilities. “No one asked me if I hurt, or why I hurt. No one ever treated me like a person. I was just a whore, a drug addict, and a criminal” (p. 2).

Hotaling states that without treatment, women persist in a cycle of mental or medical facilities, jail, and prostitution on the streets. Williamson and Prior (2009) state that 64% of the minors will continue sex work after leaving a pimp, and without intervention, 77% of them will continue with prostitution into adulthood. Murphy states, “Despite the enormity of this issue, little is known about how to interrupt the cycle of prostitution, and less is known about why women choose to engage in prostitution given the risks prostitution presents” (2007, para. 1).

Difficulties in Research

The lack of literature on this topic is partly due to the difficulties researchers face. Bosworth, Hoyle, and Dempsey (2011) shared their complications when seeking participants. After spending an extensive amount of time interviewing police and service providers, they then asked those organizations to send questionnaires to the population in question. The police refused to do so, saying that they had limited resources and were concerned about protection of data. Turning to a prison and a support center for women who had been trafficked, they left 100 surveys with stamped, addressed envelopes. Six months later, not one survey had been returned. Follow-up calls, emails, and redistribution of the surveys led to 10 completed surveys.

No agency would allow the authors to speak firsthand to the population, worrying that the researchers would re-victimize the women (Bosworth et al., 2011). A caseworker feared that the research questions would cause flashbacks and re-experiencing of the events. Bosworth et al. feel that this may be the reason so little research has been done

on this topic. Additionally, this population is used to people using them, so researchers should be clear on how this will benefit the victim rather than use her again. There needs to be a clear reason why she should share and relive her sexual trauma. Although the caseworkers interviewed by Bosworth et al. understood the magnitude of the problem, they did not see how academic research could help. Additional difficulties arise when the victim has been trafficked to a different country and she and the researcher do not speak the same language. The victim may also have had bad experiences with authorities and hold a general distrust for authority figures.

Existing Theories and Commercial Sexual Exploitation

While most empirical studies on CSE do not mention a theory within the research, a small percentage attach a theory to the study. However, no theory stands out as dominant. Among the theories that have been used are Kabeer's theory of empowerment (Swendeman et al., 2015), displacement theory (Heil & Nichols, 2014), economic theory (Seals, 2015), social exchange theory and its resulting theory, network in migration (Jani & Anstadt, 2013), resiliency theory (Buttram, Surratt, & Kurtz, 2014) the theory of abjection (Russell, 2013), and the feminist theory (Beloso, 2012; Cavalieri, 2011).

Reid and Piquero (2014) noted the lack of consistency with theoretical lenses connected to commercial sexual exploitation when they conducted an empirical study on how risks affected the onset age of CSE in males and compared their results to previous studies conducted on females. The authors found differences between genders. For instance, race was a factor with males, with African-American at higher risk, but not for

females. Additionally, drug use predicted an early-age onset of CSE for males and a later age onset for females. The authors note that the differences in gender are important to account for when attaching theories to the phenomenon.

Reid and Piquero (2014) also found that those with mental problems are more susceptible to CSE than the participants without psychological impairments. When mental disabilities coincide with risky behaviors, the combination can be viewed in light of criminology theories, such as criminal career paradigm or the “age-graded theory of informal social control” (p. 1767). The authors believe that a criminologist may also refer to the general strain theory and life course perspective used by other disciplines. Within their findings, they found maternal substance abuse as a precursor to the child’s CSE. They explained that this relates to Agnew’s General Strain Theory, as this theory states that life stressors, such as abuse or drug and alcohol dependency, can negatively affect parenting. The authors state that more research is needed to build a strong foundational understanding of the topic, as “few theoretical models are available to explain extensive and complex interpersonal victimization” such as CSE (p. 1749).

Dalla (2000) conducted a qualitative study using the bioecological theory with prostituted women. The author encouraged readers to look beyond the current life of the woman to the past that has led her to this lifestyle. Stating Bronfenbrenner’s idea that an individual’s interactions with environment will shape development, Dalla sought to find similarities among the backgrounds of the prostituted women. The sample consisted of 43 women, most of whom were approached at intervention programs. After analyzing

the semi-structured interviews, it was found that 63% of the women had experienced childhood sexual abuse within their microsystems. Many women had more than one abuser, and two of the women had become pregnant by someone in their microsystem: a father and a brother. The abuse lasted an average of almost five years, with six of the women stating that the abuse lasted for more than ten years. Interestingly, one participant stated that she chose not to dwell on the abuse since it had no apparent effect on her. Another common theme occurring within the microsystem dealt with abandonment. Sixty-five percent of the participants had experienced literal abandonment of one or more parents or symbolic abandonment through parents not meeting the needs of the children. Nine women were placed in foster care homes, where three experienced further sexual abuse. Of the participants, 88% now had children. Most of the women understood that their children were inheriting a childhood similar to their own, one consisting of abuse and abandonment.

In their study of social work that supports survivors, Busch-Arendarizet et al. (2014) found that the “ecological approach, strengths-based perspectives, and cultural competency framework though a victim-centered focus” are all applicable to social support of trafficking victims (p. 15). The authors note that in social work, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory is used in considering the past and current ecological systems of the victim. The strengths-based perspective deals with the responsibility of the social worker to build trust with the survivor and with each person involved in the care of the survivor. The victim-centered approach is used more with

criminal justice than with social work, and it states that each victim is treated through means that are best for that individual.

I believe that no theory is firmly attached to commercial sexual exploitation because this topic is a newly studied, highly complex phenomenon. Each case must be considered individually, as each person's experience is highly unique. Additionally, many disciplines are studying the topic. Family sciences wishes to understand how family dynamics contribute to victimization. Criminology works to better understand the law enforcement aspect of trafficking. Nursing examines healing physical wounds and identifies possible victims in their care. Social work is concerned with aftercare of survivors, with successful life placement and mental help. With many researchers from different fields attempting to apply preexisting theories on such a unique experience, no theory is found to encompass all aspects of the topic of commercial sexual exploitation. In this study, to avoid tainting the findings with one or more theories and to provide information on a theory specific to CSE, grounded theory will be used.

Grounded Theory

The issue of commercial sexual exploitation is relatively new to scholarly research. A theoretical framework is largely missing from the articles written on the topic; therefore, this study utilized grounded theory. Grounded theory is beneficial when new understandings are needed for under researched phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory to create concepts and theory on data, and it has been a successful research method for over 40 years. These two

researchers eventually parted ways, with Glaser focusing on theoretical ideas, and Strauss, now teamed with Corbin, “focused on developing the analytic techniques and providing guidance to novice researchers” (Heath & Cowley, 2004, p. 142). Being that I am a beginning researcher, I chose to utilize the Corbin and Strauss method of grounded theory, which is laid out in a step-by-step manner and works well for the researcher with a deductive mind, as opposed to Glaser’s more abstract arrangement.

Grounded theory is unique in that the researcher does not enter the study with preexisting concepts. Rather, the theory is constructed after gathering and analyzing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The researcher is grounding a theory from data, hence the name of the technique. Grounded theory includes a cycle of data collection and analysis. Through the continual analysis, the researcher adapts further collection to fit current data findings. Grounded theory attributes meaning to phenomenon and allows the researcher to delve into “beliefs and meanings that underlie action, to examine rational as well as nonrational aspects of behavior, and to demonstrate how logic and emotion combine to influence how persons respond to events or handle problems through action and interaction” (p. 11). A well-constructed grounded theory study provides the groundwork for further quantitative studies.

In grounded theory, the researcher does not begin with concepts and then sets about to prove or disprove those concepts. Instead, the researcher allows the data to bring the concepts to light (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Having been passionate about this topic for years, I have worked with organizations that serve sex trafficking survivors.

Throughout this work, I developed questions about the journey towards victimization that have not been answered in the literature. Rather than asking specific questions from my preconceived notions, I choose to use grounded theory so the data could guide my findings. A researcher using grounded theory must prepare for ambiguities. The data leads the research, not preexisting notions from the researcher.

Conducting the study in a qualitative manner allows for in-depth interviews providing rich data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Qualitative research is used, in part, when an area needs to be more fully researched. In qualitative research, the researcher is as much part of the research process as are the participants, as the researcher aims to understand the participant's world. I chose to conduct qualitative research to allow the participants to speak to what they believe is important, rather than answer preformed questions. I hoped that during the interview process, the participants would guide the research and tell their stories in their own words. Corbin and Strauss (2015) state that "qualitative researchers want the opportunity to connect with their research participants and to see the world from their viewpoints" (p. 5). Furthermore, I wanted to introduce them as real women with genuine thoughts and feelings, so the reader can establish a personal connection with them. When combining the richness of qualitative data and the searching conducted in grounded theory, the results provide a new way of thinking about the topic of study.

Grounded Theory and Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Grounded theory has recently been used to study sex workers in Hong Kong (Yuen, Wong, Holroyd & Tang, 2014). The authors conducted interviews with open ended questions, stating that both the participant and the researcher were allowed to stray off topic if desired. As the theory dictates, data were analyzed while being collected. Previously collected data not only added to the wealth of knowledge, but also guided the direction of future interviews. The authors found that this group of women used similar coping strategies to deal with the difficulties of their lives. Some women reported talking themselves through the situation with thoughts such as, “I will be fine again very soon. I think I have met an even worse person before. I need to see him for half an hour only” (p. 1237). Other women spoke of engaging in relaxing activities, such as reading a book, while not with customers. The women who had families would think of their responsibility to provide financially for their children. The authors stated that the coping strategies equated to resilience factors that allowed the women to persevere throughout the stressors of their encounters.

Robertson et al. (2014) also used grounded theory in a study with female sex workers. Throughout the interviews, a theme emerged of four relationship types to which the women referred: one-time customers, regulars and friends, customers who fall in love with the women, and long-term customers who provide steady income. The authors found that condom negotiation differed with each type of customer, becoming more lenient as the relationship progressed. Sherman, Lilleston, and Reuben (2011) used

grounded theory to study condom usage among sex workers in exotic dance clubs. The authors used grounded theory so as not to be constrained by any past theoretical lens. They found that the lack of condom usage became more negotiable if the woman was using drugs or was financially strapped.

Grounded theory was chosen for this study because there is a shortage of literature on CSE, and theoretical foundations have yet to be developed. Grounded theory is beneficial for under researched phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As previously discussed, current theories fail to capture the full essence of this topic, with different disciplines attempting to attach their own theories, without much cohesion. Heath and Cowley (2004) state, “fundamental to grounded theory is the belief that knowledge may be increased by generating new theories rather than analyzing data within existing theories” (p. 142). Rather than bringing a preconceived notion into research, grounded theory analyzes what the data implies. The first interview is analyzed before the second interview begins. In this way, each subsequent interview is compared to prior ones. Through the use of constant comparative analysis, common themes emerge from the data, creating new theories and questions for further research.

The aim of this study was to explore how adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation spoke about factors that led to their victimization. By using semi-structured interviews, participants discussed details they felt were relevant, rather than only predetermined concepts the researcher has decided upon. This study adds to the current body of research in that grounded theory will be used to build new theories

regarding the victims' perceptions of those factors that may have contributed to their being victimized. This knowledge can be utilized by those working with children and families. In understanding factors that contribute to victimization, parent education and intervention strategies can serve as protection by eliminating some of the precursors. The research question guiding this study was:

How do adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation talk about factors that led to their victimization?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Throughout the world, people are bought and sold like commodities. The United States is no exception. Scholarly research has only recently begun to dissect this phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to examine how adult female survivors of the commercial sex industry talk about factors that may have led to their victimization. Qualitative methodology was used to collect and analyze data. This chapter outlines research design, participant information, participant recruitment, and research procedures.

Setting

The research was conducted in a southwestern state in the United States. Although only 8.5% of the nation's population lives in this state (United States Census Bureau, 2014), nearly 20% of U.S. sex trafficking victims are found there (Office of Attorney General, 2008). This state has several factors that contribute to a high incidence of sex trafficking. Interstate 10, a route that is highly travelled by traffickers transporting victims, runs through this southwestern state. Its busy airports, bus stations, and passage through the Gulf of Mexico make for an easily transportable area (Kimball, Sinitsyn, & Solak, 2009).

A large city within this southwestern state was purposely selected due to its high number of trafficked individuals. The FBI listed the city as one of the top 14 cities in the U.S. for sex trafficking incidences with minors (Swecker, 2005), and sex trade in this city

amounts to \$99 million annually (Ross, 2014). As discussed previously, runaways are at high risk for sexual exploitation. This city has 600,000 runaways each year, and one out of every three runaways will be lured into the commercial sex industry within 48 hours of being on the street (Kimball et al., 2009).

Researcher Experience

Working with a population who has been victimized in the past, I was aware that I needed to take special considerations when interviewing. For several years, I have trained to work with this population. In early 2010, I began attending training sessions on how to support trafficking survivors. One seminar, *Hands that Heal: International Curriculum to Train Caregivers of Trafficking Survivors*, states that its purpose is to “help equip caregivers in responding to the special needs of those who have been trafficked” (Kilbourn, 2007, p. xv). In late 2010, I took my first trip to Cambodia with a social worker from International Justice Mission (IJM), a non-profit organization dedicated to eradicating slavery across the globe. I also worked with Agape International Missions (AIM), a U.S. based organization working to end sex trafficking in Cambodia. I spent time with children who were currently being trafficked and with those who had been rescued. In 2012, I returned to Cambodia with my family, spending the summer working with women who had been rescued from the sex industry and who were in job training. These experiences influenced my research because I was able to spend time getting to know prostituted women as individuals rather than an abstract population. The women I encountered had difficult stories to share, but they also revealed hopes for their

futures. I found myself identifying with them when they spoke of wanting more for their children. My work that summer helped me realize that we have more similarities than I originally thought. I wished to conduct research that would tell of their experiences and build a theory grounded in their words.

Through my experiences in Cambodia, I have met survivors and people who work with survivors. While in Cambodia, I began to discuss my hopes of research with executive directors of Cambodian aftercare facilities. In speaking with the head of one aftercare facility, he stated that he once had to ask a researcher to leave, due to her judgmental attitude with the women. Another confided that he excused researchers who cried throughout the participants' interviews. He stated that the women had been through enough and did not need pity from the researcher. Both men appreciated my demeanor with survivors and invited me to conduct research at their centers, should I ever return to Cambodia. In the current study, I worked to maintain a demeanor that respected, rather than marginalized, the participants.

In this area of study, a measure of trust is needed before a facility allows a researcher to have access to their clients (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010). To establish trust, I turned to a local speaker and author on human trafficking. She knew of my work with trafficking organizations and vouched for my trustworthiness. She also initiated contact with Hope is Here², an organization that works to empower sexually exploited women. I originally made contact through the organization's website, giving my

² The name of the organization has been changed.

background of working with human trafficking agencies and sex trafficking victims. I verified my doctoral candidacy at Texas Woman's University, working under the guidance of my major professor and presented the name of the woman who had referred me. The purpose of my research was disclosed, and I stated that I would like to interview adult females at their facility. Finally, the question of establishing a research partnership was posed. Dr. Carter, the Leader's Circle Coordinator and Spiritual Advisor, responded, stating that the Survivor Leaders were interested in the study.

Facility

Hope is Here was founded 19 years ago to help women exit the commercial sex industry. The organization's goal is to make women feel loved, not judged. The curriculum includes a complete program in which the women receive comprehensive services of education, job skills, attention to physical and mental health, and financial assistance.

In speaking with Dr. Carter, I learned that the women go through three phases when arriving at the facility. In the first phase, their immediate needs are met, and they are assessed as to whether or not they are mentally healthy enough to work with an advocate. This is not to say that they have no mental health issues, explained Dr. Carter, as all women who have been in the sex trade have trauma issues. The second phase consists of long term advocacy in which a licensed social worker collaborates with the survivor to create an action plan. This plan includes whatever the women need, whether it be housing, employment, medical care, child care, a GED, or other necessities. During

this time, Hope is Here supplements the cost of living for each participant. The women pay what they can, and the organization pays the remainder. The women also have access to licensed professional counselors (LPC) onsite. The women and social workers continue this plan for an average of two to three years until the women are self-sufficient and can take care of their families without assistance. At this time, the advocate will transition the women out of the program or into the Leadership Circle.

The Leadership Circle is a place where women can share their stories with others, speak on behalf of the organization, and give talks to larger audiences. At this point, Dr. Carter stated, “they really dive into counseling.” Although the women received counseling during phase two, their focus remained on maintaining basic needs, resulting in little time to devote with an LPC. In phase three, however, the women are more ready and able to focus on the healing aspect of counseling. The participants for this study all came from the Leadership Circle, which is phase three of the program.

One of the dangers of interviewing survivors of the commercial sex industry is that they may be re-traumatized by the interview. This is especially a concern with women who are in the early stages of recovery or have just left sex trade (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010). With this in mind, I interviewed women who have been in the recovery process for more than three years. I explained to Dr. Carter that the IRB process was in place so that I would not unintentionally traumatize the women during interviews. Her response was frank, “I wouldn’t let you traumatize these women” (S. Carter, personal communication, April 6, 2015).

Demographics

At Hope is Here, the majority of women are either African American or White, with an equal mix of both. There is a small percentage of Hispanics and no other ethnicities represented at the time of this study. Hope is Here serves only females, and the average age is mid-30s. Most of the women have at least one child in their custody.

The study included nine adult females participants. Five began commercial sex work when they were minors. Mary Margaret was trafficked by her uncle, a pimp, at eight years old. CC was coerced by a pimp around age 17. Shanee and Spring were also 17 when they started in the commercial sex industry, and Sunny was 16 when she entered the industry. The remaining four women were adults when they began commercial sex work. Monica was 22, Farrah was 26, and Rebecca and Taylor were each approximately 30-years-old.

Participant Recruitment Process

Dr. Carter recruited the participants during their monthly small group night. She read the details of my pending research study to the participants and distributed my contact information to the women who expressed interest. Each woman initiated contact to schedule an interview time. This study aimed to recruit 15 participants, but saturation was reached with 9 interviews. After interviewing and coding nine participants, no new themes emerged, and each category was well represented (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Interpersonal Considerations

Since the researcher is an instrument in qualitative research, I worked to gain trust during the interviews. A qualitative researcher should excel in active listening and patience to show the participants that their perspectives are being heard (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Researchers might overlook important information if they fill in silent periods with their own opinions or knowledge, rather than waiting for the participant to gather her thoughts. Survivors of the sex industry are accustomed to manipulation and consumption. Knowing that the participants may be wary of this research, as it could feel like I am trying to advance my position in life by using them, I opened up the interview by stating that I would like to use this information to educate others on the realities of human trafficking.

I grew up in a stable home with two loving parents. Until I was in my 30s, I was unaware that sex trafficking even existed. Through reviewing scholarly literature and popular press articles, I have learned that it not only takes place through kidnapping, but it also happens as a direct result of poor parental choices. As a parent, I am angered by this knowledge. As a researcher, however, I could not allow this feeling to show in the interviews or to cloud my judgment when analyzing data. I strived to remain as objective as possible. An additional consideration in objectivity was that my two daughters were 9 and 11 years old at the time of this study, which is the age range when many girls are sold to their first clients. When my participants discussed the age at which they first entered

the sex industry, I changed neither my facial expressions nor my demeanor. At the completion of each interview, I journaled my thoughts in a memo housed in NVivo.

Academic Armor

Lerum (2001) writes of her research with adult sex workers. She came away coining the term “academic armor,” which manifests itself in three ways: linguistic, physical, and ideological. Researchers, especially when working with populations very different from themselves, use the armor to distinguish themselves from the participants. I agreed with her assessment, and I strove to stay away from this protective armor.

Linguistic armor is the use of academic language to portray superior intelligence (Lerum, 2001). This sort of language is not only intimidating, but it also creates a clear divide between the participant and the researcher. While I do not normally use academic words during conversation, I was especially aware of my word choice during any contact with the participants. Physical armor also projects an air of superiority with clothing that deems the researcher as more sophisticated, or more affluent, than the participant.

Physical armor can occur with symbols on clothing that project a religious or political affiliation. To avoid this separation between the participant and myself, I wore informal clothing, such as jeans and a blouse or casual skirt and shirt. The third armor, ideological armor, comes in play when the scholarly “expert” exercises knowledge and authority over a subject. I made no pretense in knowing more about the topic than my participants. Although I have studied the topic for several years, the participants have lived the topic.

While I have book knowledge, I cannot understand what it was like for those who have lived the experience.

Research Procedures

Location

The interviews were conducted in a building that is familiar to the participants. In asking Dr. Carter about the interview site, she stated, “This is the place where they come every week. They fellowship, get support, and feel safe and protected. This is where they have shared their stories over the years” (S. Carter, personal communication, April 6, 2015). At this site, they also participate in a weekly get-together over a meal. After the meal, they are offered spiritual support and life skills training. The facility is near where the participants live and does not cause transportation difficulties. Knowing that the women could have job schedules and child care restraints, I scheduled interview times at their convenience.

Participant Time Commitment

Each participant was asked for one interview lasting approximately one hour. The actual interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 80 minutes, depending on how long the participant spoke. Some women stated that they wished to talk longer, as retelling their story was healing to them, and other participants stated that they could only meet with me for approximately 30 minutes. The duration of each interview was set by the participant. As stated in the consent form (Appendix A), there was a possibility that follow-up interviews would be requested, with the right of each participant to refuse at any point.

The interviews were held at weekly gatherings, and I was able to see each participant several times after their interviews. When I had follow-up questions for two participants, I asked if each would meet with me for a moment. Each woman agreed to answer the follow-up questions, with each session taking less than five minutes. Member checks were utilized during the interviews with researcher prompts such as, “Am I hearing you correctly when you say. . . .”

Researcher’s Role

Participants in other studies have stated that it can be therapeutic to share their stories (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010). Others have mentioned that it is difficult to relive the painful experiences. In either case, as the researcher, I understood that my role was to listen and report what was said. I am not a therapist, and I made this clear at the outset of the interview. While more than half of my participants cried at least once during the interview, they did not indicate additional signs of emotional distress. Four stated that they were thankful for the opportunity to talk with someone, as the interview felt cathartic to them. While I was able to remain composed during the interviews, their stories did evoke emotion in me. While driving home from the interviews, I recorded and journaled my thoughts soon after each interview. My emotions did not overwhelm me, in part, because the women were in much healthier places in life. They were no longer in danger and had received multiple forms of assistance.

Protection of Human Participants

This research study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas Woman's University to be sure that the rights and interests of the participants were protected (Babbie, 2011). The researcher completed and submitted an IRB application for full review. The researcher completed trainings in protecting human research participants and Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). The consent form gave the explanation and purpose of the research, a description of the procedures, the potential risks, confidentiality, a description of participation and benefits, and contact information for answers to questions about this study.

Informed Consent

Brunovskis and Surtees (2010) state that because formerly trafficked women have a general mistrust of strangers, the consent form must be clear in the role of the researcher and the participant's ability to say no or to withdraw at any time without consequence. In the current study, the consent form gave the purpose of the study, a description of the interview procedures and time commitment, participant compensation, and listed potential risks and steps to minimize those risks, as detailed in the following section. The consent form also had the contact information of the researcher and the advisor. Participants could choose to read the form or have the form read to them although no one chose the latter option. They were asked to sign the consent form with an X to protect confidentiality. Each participant received a copy of the consent form. The consent forms are kept in a locked drawer in the home office of the researcher.

Risks and Steps to Minimize Risk

Emotional discomfort. A risk inherent in working with participants who have experienced trauma is emotional discomfort. The women were prompted to discuss past experiences, which had the potential of causing painful memories or flashbacks, including significant relationships, their parents, and their victimization. The interviews were held in a facility where the women gather together once a week. The women were familiar with this building, having participated in weekly gatherings over the years, and felt comfortable in this location. Participants were reminded that they could take breaks at any time during the interviews, stop one or more interviews, or discontinue from the study altogether. They were told that any wishes to discontinue the study would be honored, and no harm or retribution would come to the participant. Each participant was told that she could refuse to answer questions that upset her or made her uncomfortable and that she could stop answering questions at any time. None of the participants indicated being uncomfortable with the interview or any of the questions. No one asked to stop the interview or take a break, but two women stated that they needed to be done by a certain time, so I set a timer and ended those interviews at the requested times.

Drawing from both my prior experience working with survivors and knowledge I have received from related trainings, I tried to be sensitive to the participant's needs at all times. If a woman displayed signs of distress, such as outbursts of anger or panic, I was prepared to stop the interview and step into the hallway to ask either Dr. Carter or an LPC for assistance. At the time the interviews were conducted, all staff members were on site.

None of the participants showed signs of distress although five out of nine participants cried briefly one or more times during the interview. These participants have been walking through the recovery process for several years. The members of the Leader Circle have begun educating and leading others on this topic and are accustomed to speaking about it. Counselors are available through Hope is Here, and the participants were provided with a list of additional mental health professionals in their area.

Loss of confidentiality. Another risk inherent in research is loss of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in place of the participants' real names, with the researcher having the one master key file. The participants signed the consent form with an X, so identifiable information is not listed on the forms. Consent forms are stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's home office. All electronic data are stored on a password protected computer in the researcher's home. All recordings will be deleted within five years after the study is finished. The results of the study may be later published in scientific journals, but no identifiable data will be included.

Loss of anonymity. Participants may encounter loss of anonymity. Other women at Hope is Here may have seen the women speaking with me, and might know that they are involved in a research project. While anonymity as a participant cannot be guaranteed, all interviews are kept confidential.

Coercion. Coercion may occur if participants feel that refusing to participate in this study will terminate or impact their relationship with Hope is Here. The consent form stated that participation or non-participation would have no effect on the services provided by the organization. Additionally, I reiterated this fact before each interview.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling, often used with grounded theory, means that instead of collecting all the data before analysis, analysis begins after the first data are collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Following the first interview, the data were examined prior to the next interview. With the constant cycle of data collection and analysis, new concepts and interview questions were constructed. A difficulty in collecting all the data before analysis is that some of the interviews may contain topics or ideas one would like to explore in other interviews. If data collection is completed, the researcher does not have the opportunity to explore those ideas in remaining interviews. Additionally, the amount of data can be overwhelming when analyzing all of it at one time. Corbin and Strauss (2015) describe theoretical sampling as “a method of data collection based on properties and dimensions of concepts derived from data” (pp. 134, 85). This study used theoretical sampling, as I scheduled one interview a week. After each meeting, I evaluated that interview before proceeding to the next. The process was continued until the data reached the point of saturation in which all topics were fully developed, and no new information was being given.

Interviews

In qualitative research, interviews are used to hold a conversation between the researcher and the participant. Although the researcher guides the general direction of the interview, the majority of the talking should be done by the participant. The researcher should not talk more than 5% of the time (Babbie, 2011). Though it may seem easy to conduct an interview, all questions and prompts must be carefully thought out beforehand to avoid researcher bias. For example, researcher bias can be found in the question, “Did your father mistreat you in any way?” A better way to discuss this topic is with an open ended phrase such as, “Tell me about your relationship with your father.”

While interview prompts were chosen for this research project, I also asked follow up questions after hearing the participants speak. I asked questions such as “What do you mean by that?” and “Can you give me an example?” while still allowing the participant to speak freely (Babbie, 2011). Active listening can be a difficult task for researchers, who are attempting to listen, comprehend, and organize thoughts at the same time (Seidman, 2006). Interviewers should not rush to fill a silence since some people need time to process. Corbin and Strauss believe “a skilled interviewer lets the interviewee guide the course of the interview and allows him or her to reveal information at his or her own pace while accepting pauses as part of the process” (2015, p. 40). Even if the researcher feels uncomfortable with the silence, the silence does not indicate participant discomfort. In the interviews, I looked for cues from the participants as to whether a silence had gone on too long, or if the woman simply needed time to reflect and formulate her answer. I noticed

that many participants had a phrase which signaled that they were done with their answer. For instance, Sunny prompted the next question with, “What else do you want to know, Amy?” Shanee finished topics with the phrase, “So that’s how that went.”

Semi-Structured Interviews

This study used semi-structured interviews in which the same questions were asked of each participant (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The questions were adjusted as needed for each individual, as discussed below. Semi-structured interviews also allow for researchers to use prompts to delve deeper into certain subjects and to allow the participant to bring up topics that were not asked by the researcher.

Interview prompts. In this study, the interview prompts were as follows:

P1: Tell me a little bit about your childhood.

P2: Tell me about your relationships with your peers.

P3: Tell me about your victimization.

P4: At what point did you realize that you did not want to be in the situation, but you did not know how to get out?

P5: What do you think was the most significant factor to your being victimized?

The first two prompts were the same for each participant since no one protested the wording. The third prompt proved more difficult. The first participant was trafficked at the age of eight and spoke freely of being victimized. During the second interview, the participant stated that she was not victimized and took responsibility for her actions. I stated that because she was younger than 18 when she began prostituting, she fit the legal

definition of being a victim of sex trafficking. She replied by saying that just because the law reads that way today, it does not mean that it was law when she began prostituting. Several times throughout her interview, she stated that she was a victim of circumstance but nothing more. She took responsibility for her actions. I also found that some of my participants were of legal age when they entered the sex industry, which meant that they did not fit with the legal definition of a trafficking victim. I began adjusting the wording as needed. Based on each participant's response to the first two prompts, I asked the third prompt in one of two ways: (1) "Tell me about your victimization." (2) "Tell me about your entry into the sex industry."

The fourth interview prompt was difficult to construct. I struggled with the wording, initially using words like choice, loss of agency, and free will. I discussed my ideas with my research mentors and presented some of the phrasing to Dr. Carter. She said the problem with words like choice or free will is that some women will say that they chose it all along, which is exactly what happened with the third prompt. Finally, I reworded the question as, "At what point did you realize that you did not want to be in the situation, but you did not know how to get out?" Dr. Carter said, "That's it. Write it down."

The fifth prompt posed the same difficulty as the third because it also contained the word "victimized." In interviews in which I reworded prompt three, I carried that wording over to prompt five. This turned out to be the most difficult question for most of the participants to answer. I was asked to clarify my meaning several times and did so with

phrasing such as, “What do you think was the most important thing that led you on this path?”

Recording

I asked each participant if I could record the interview and stated what precautions would be taken to protect confidentiality. Each participant agreed, and they were informed that they could stop the recording at any time. The interviews were recorded using a recording device provided by the Qualitative Research center at the TWU Denton campus. The researcher’s iPhone was used as a secondary recording device in case of instrument error. I moved the data onto a password protected computer, backed up the files, and labeled all information with pseudonyms, so there was no identifiable data. Once the data was moved to the computer, all prior recordings from both devices were erased. All data contain only pseudonyms, and no identifiable information has been associated with the recordings. The computer recordings will be stored for five years after the completion of the study, after which time, the computer files will be deleted. The trash will then be emptied off of the device, and the recordings permanently deleted.

De-Identification of Data

All participants were assigned pseudonyms of their choosing; however, one participant requested a researcher-assigned pseudonym. One master key file contains the participants’ real names in relation to their pseudonyms. The master key file is kept separate from all other data in a locked file drawer in the researcher’s home. Only the researcher has access to the master key file. The master key file does not contain any

information on the name or topic of the study, nor does it list the interview site or affiliation with Texas Woman's University. All other documents, transcriptions, and recordings contain no identifiable data.

Transcription

The researcher transcribed all interviews verbatim to maintain accuracy. After transcribing, I compared the interview and transcription to check for accuracy (DePoy & Gitlin, 2011). Both recordings and transcriptions are kept on a password protected computer in the researcher's home. The transcripts will be stored for five years. At that time, the documents will be deleted and removed from the trash bin of the computer.

Researcher Journal

The researcher kept a typed journal within NVivo documenting thoughts and debriefing comments immediately after each interview. Pseudonyms were used, and data are not identifiable. The journal is kept on a password protected computer in the home of the researcher. The journal contains the researcher's biases, such as thoughts of my own family, as discussed above, and notes about communication with the participants and my committee. Since I sat in on some of the meetings and seminars the women attended, I spent time with the participants outside the actual interviews, and the journal was a place to keep a record of informal interactions that took place. In the qualitative process, the journal is invaluable, as it "enables a researcher to become more self-aware not only of his or her biases and assumptions but also of the reason for making certain decisions and to obtain insight into his or her own behavior" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 37). The journal contains

my reasoning for creating and collapsing categories, as well as my feelings during the interviews, transcriptions, and coding process.

Compensation

All participants were compensated for their interviews. I asked Dr. Carter what would be most helpful to the women, and she stated that a gift card would be beneficial. When the women are asked to tell their stories to requesting organizations, Hope is Here pays them for their time with a gift card. Dr. Carter stated that it is important for the women to know that they are not being used. Their time is valuable, and they should be compensated accordingly. Each participant received a \$20 Target gift card at the end of each interview.

Trustworthiness

Following the grounded theory method prescribed by Corbin and Strauss (2015), trustworthiness is measured by the terms *credibility* and *quality*. With this research method, credibility “indicates that findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants’, researchers’, and readers’ experiences with phenomena, but at the same time, the explanation the theory provides is only one of many possible “plausible” interpretations from data” (p. 346). A quality qualitative study holds the readers’ interest and introduces new insight on the research topic. Quality research promotes further studies on the topic and is both “scientific and creative. It is research that blends conceptualization with sufficient descriptive detail to allow the reader to reach his or her

own conclusions about the data and to judge the credibility of the researcher's data and analysis" (p. 347).

Corbin and Strauss (2015) list nine conditions that promote a quality grounded theory study: (1) "methodological consistency, (2) clarity of purpose, (3) self-awareness, (4) training in how to conduct qualitative research, (5) sensitivity to participants and data, (6) willingness to work hard, (7) ability to connect with the creative self, (8) methodological awareness, and (9) strong desire to do research" (p. 347). In this research study, I followed the method prescribed by Corbin and Strauss, using concept development and constant comparisons. A core category was developed by using the action-interaction technique. Through journal writing, I remained aware of my reactions and feelings as well as my frustrations and biases. I strove to be sensitive to my participants and data at all times, knowing that the stories were personal and valuable.

Checkpoints should be used when evaluating methodological consistency in a grounded theory study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this study, those checkpoints included a description of how participants were found, how data collection took place, and an explanation of ethical considerations. Additional checkpoints in this study include a detailed "description of how coding proceeded along with examples of theoretical sampling, concepts, categories, and statements of relationship" (p. 351). Major categories were delineated and a core category developed. Member checks during the interview and peer checks while coding add to the methodological consistency of this study.

The quality and applicability of grounded theory research can be seen through the development of a core category that is broad enough to be used in other studies with different populations (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this study, the development of each category was described in detail to provide understanding of the core concept. Limitations are given and the findings lend themselves to future research and education.

Analysis

In grounded theory, analysis begins after the first data collection and continues to the end of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Working with the most convenient interview time for the participants, I conducted one interview each week. Immediately after each interview, I recorded verbal notes during the commute home and later entered the thoughts in my researcher journal. This allowed me to immediately debrief, ensuring better memory of the interviews. This also provided an outlet for my emotions. The interviews were conducted in the evening with the journal and recorded thoughts captured that same night. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and each interview was coded before additional interviews. The nine interviews were gathered in 11 weeks. After initial interviews were completed, I requested two follow-up interviews, which were conducted in person.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) consists of using computer programs to house and manage qualitative data. QDA is beneficial in organizing and coding large amounts of data. Furthermore, the QDA delineates a clear trail of how the researcher has reached

conclusions, allowing for easier replication (Hwang, 2008). QDA saves time and combines human intellect with computer acuity. In essence, Hwang reports, QDA molds the computer into a research assistant. Storing data on the computer also allows the researcher to seek feedback more readily since the data is portable.

NVivo

In this study, NVivo was used to store and manage data. Interview recordings were transferred to NVivo, and transcriptions were typed directly into the program. NVivo gives the option to slow down the playback speed while transcribing and provides keystrokes to stop, play, jump back, and jump forward. The journal was also kept in NVivo. The program offers options, such as a text search throughout all documents and a word frequency count. Colored coding stripes appear on each interview, so one can easily see which categories are represented by each participant.

When creating categories, the information is placed in a node. The researcher is able to store the information in a hierachal manner by creating a parent node, child node, grandchild node, etc. There were three parent nodes for this study: childhood, entering the sex industry, and exiting the sex industry. Under each parent node, the information developed into three child nodes: what is happening, what actions they take, and what happens next. Under each child node, several grandchild nodes were created.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis begins with detailed notations and expands to larger concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In grounded theory, analysis occurs by creating codes and categories and through the writing of detailed memos to explain how the researcher reached conclusions. In this way, analysis provides a rich description of the thought process throughout the research. Meanings will be made and rearranged as new data is collected. This type of analysis allows for continuous reworking of data. The researcher manipulates themes that reoccur and seem important, knowing that these themes may change or lose importance with the introduction of new data.

Open Coding

After transcribing the interview, it is important for the researcher to read the entire document, without analyzing or coding, to fully understand the story being told (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). During the second read through of the first interview, I began my initial coding by looking at a few lines of text conveying a thought. As I coded, I created memo notes for the codes. The importance of detailing the coding process is simply to record the thought process that occurs while analyzing data.

As an example, when coding CC's interview, she stated that she tried to get off drugs and out of prostitution, but she was unsuccessful in her attempts. For this phrase, my initial coding said, "Attempt at being acceptable." However, I did not necessarily like the word acceptable because it required judgement. There are thousands of differing

definitions of the word or idea “acceptable.” Perhaps, I meant “legal” or “traditional job.” I wrote this in the memo to see if other participants were saying the same thing.

Also in CC’s interview, she stated that her pimp had brainwashed her by encouraging her to take narcotics, which left her with an addiction. I coded that statement as “brainwashed” and ran these initial codes by a committee member. She encouraged me to write out a definition for the code “brainwashed,” defining how CC meant the word, not how I define the word. CC connected this word to addiction. I left the code at that point but was not satisfied that it was finished.

Analytic Strategies

When analyzing the data when using the grounded theory approach of Corbin and Strauss (2015), there are four types of questions that the researcher uses. First, *sensitizing questions* help determine the who, what, when, where, why, and how. This creates a storyline for the data. Second, *theoretical questions* help make connections as one compares relationships and concepts with the unfolding story. The third type of questioning, *practical questions*, includes the researcher asking what steps need to be taken to confirm the theory. These include questions about saturation, additional time and interviews needed, and concept development. Lastly, *guiding questions* direct the interviews, secondary data collection, and analysis. Throughout this process, I used all four types of questioning, and my questions changed as more data was collected and analyzed.

Corbin and Strauss (2015) outline strategies that are useful when analyzing. They state that asking questions is a good starting point, especially when researchers have difficulties with the onset of the study. Questions help the researcher understand concepts from the participant's point of view. While the researcher cannot ask questions about every bit of data, common sense is used to decide which phrases need to be questioned and studied more in depth. Corbin and Strauss state, "Examining how respondents use language can tell us a lot about a situation" (p. 99). Consequently, I questioned CC's use of the term "brainwashed." She said that the pimps had introduced her to drugs, waited until she was addicted, then took the drugs away, and told her to prostitute to make money to earn more drugs. At first, I thought that she had used the word incorrectly. In my understanding, brainwashed does not equal drug addiction. However, the more I considered her position, the more interesting her term became. To CC, brainwashed meant that she wasn't in her right mind. Someone (the pimps) had done something to influence her thinking. I came to understand that CC defined "brainwashed" as a state in which someone is controlling your brain and causing you to think in ways that you normally would not, however they arrive there. In grounded theory, using a participant's words to name a concept is referred to as *in vivo* coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). When coding further interviews, I maintained CC's definition.

Each subsequent interview was added to the analysis in the same way. At each step, memos were used to record the ensuing thought processes. As I continued analyzing, there were times when I felt some concepts were difficult to uncover. When

this happens, Corbin and Strauss (2015) encourage the researcher to consider different meanings of words, investigate the situation in a different light, or use theoretical comparisons. Additionally, Corbin and Strauss recommend considering some analytical strategies used by other authors, such as Glaser's 18 coding families (1978).

I conducted peer reviews with a colleague. Since each researcher views the data with the lens of his/her own background and experience, different people may interpret data differently. DePoy and Gitlin (2011) suggest that investigators "convene a group of peers to review his or her audit trail and emerging findings" (p. 280). The authors also note the importance of asking someone else to code a random piece of data to be sure that the coding matches. Dissimilar coding should be discussed and explored.

My colleague scrutinized several different statements and coded them in nodes that were already created. Some coding disagreements were due to not understanding the context of the node or transcript. For instance, the peer read a statement in which a participant stopped bullying a child whose mother was looking out for her. She placed that statement in the node "buffering adults." I explained that buffering adults referred to adults who were helping the participants. Since my participant was not helped by that mother, it did not fit in that category. Other disagreements occurred when she placed one statement in several categories. For much of the coding process, I had placed statements only in one node. My colleague, who is more familiar with NVivo, pointed out that many statements can fit into more than one category. I then recoded with her advice in mind. After discussions and recoding, and we unanimously agreed.

In initial coding, the researcher must mull over questions such as: Who is doing what in this section? Why are they doing this? The answers to these questions are then compared with the earlier main theme of the section. When original themes are validated in this process, concepts begin to emerge. Corbin and Strauss (2015) state that these initial concepts are not likely to be the overarching themes of the research, but sometimes, it may happen that way. However, the researcher does not know the importance of the themes until much later in the process. This open coding allowed me to begin identifying concepts.

Concepts

Corbin and Strauss (2015) state that grounded theory uses three levels of concepts, lower-level concepts, categories, and core categories that work together to form a pyramid, providing structure to the theory. Lower-level concepts refer to the primary data. I conducted nine interviews, totaling eight hours' worth of material. These lower-level concepts provide a foundation and ground the theory, since they come directly from the participants' thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of events. Corbin and Strauss state "basic-level concepts provide the detail, interest, and variation that make theory relevant" (p. 77). The participants talk and think in a way that is far removed from my own life. By continually looking at the raw data, I was able to stay true to their frames of mind. However, the participants provided 127 pages of transcription, which becomes an unmanageable amount of data if not grouped in some way. Some lower-level concepts used in this study were lack of guidance, more attention, and reliance on self.

The next block in the concept pyramid is categories. Categorizing the information allowed me to group ideas that shared commonalities. Upon completing transcription of the second interview, I repeated the process of analysis then compared the two interviews to create categories. Some ideas were repeated, and I found confirmation of original concepts, providing more data to expand upon those ideas. I continually derived the meaning behind what the participants were saying, rather than focusing on descriptions they provided (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For instance, the first two interviews looked different at first glance. CC came from a two parent home with no mentioned substance abuse. Monica was quite the opposite; she was raised by her father after her mother left when Monica was seven. Monica's mom and dad were both drug addicts. On the surface, I could choose to report the descriptions of their home, as just given. Describing is simply that: describing what's going on. While this is one part of the process, grounded theory still asks the researcher to generate the theory portion.

Theory will describe what's going on and give reasons as to why these events occur.

To go beyond description to theory, a researcher must keep in mind action-interaction. What is happening, how participants are responding to the stimuli, what actions do they take, and what is the outcome of those actions? Corbin and Strauss (2015) state, "we have to begin with the premise that when persons act and interact they are consciously responding to something that calls for a response" (p. 153). Instead of separating the experiences of CC and Monica, I found similarities in how they responded to their situations. CC was upset because she was adopted by her birth father, but her

siblings were his natural children. She stated that the knowledge upset her, and she acted out with promiscuity. When she got pregnant at 14, her mother did not speak to her for months, causing a rift in the relationship. After having the baby, there was a further divide when her mother continued to treat her as a child rather than as a fellow mother. CC ran away from home at that point. Monica was involved in a custody battle, which ended with the disappearance of her mother and being raised by her drug addicted father. Monica had to be the parent in the family, taking care of her father and her siblings. She says she was tired of being drug into her parents' problems and decided that nobody would control her, so she began doing what she wanted, when she wanted.

Looking at both women, a category developed. I noted that they were both unhappy with how their parents had treated them, and they chose to rebel. Although only two interviews had been coded at this point, tentative connections were made. Corbin and Strauss (2015) emphasize that these linkages are only temporary and will be worked out with subsequent interviews.

I continued asking questions. What meaning did the participant give to that something? Corbin and Strauss (2015) state, "When analyzing data for the purpose of constructing theory, we look for events or happenings (sets of conditions) and how persons define or give meaning to these (as problems, challenges, obstacles, goals, etc.). We look for the action-interaction they take to manage or handle the problems, challenges, or goals" (p. 154). As the process moves further, the final part of the pyramid, core categories, is revealed.

Theory

The theory emerges when clearly developed categories begin to fit together, as if they are nestled under one umbrella (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The researcher then names the umbrella, as it were. This is referred to as the core concept, and it houses the underlying concepts. Theory construction is an ongoing process of working and reworking the concepts found in data. Corbin and Strauss believe, “at the heart of theorizing lies the interplay between researcher and data out of which concepts are identified, developed in terms of their properties and dimensions, and integrated around a core category through statements denoting relationships between them all” (p. 63). It is the responsibility of the researcher to give a voice to the participants, and the theory that educates others becomes that voice. The core concept for this study was developed after using action-interaction to describe what was happening and how participants were responding to those events.

Ethics

Ethical research not only applies to data collection, but also to the analysis of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A researcher must be responsible for accurately interpreting the data rather than suggest themes or concepts that are not clearly emerging. This means that the researcher must put aside personal biases or pre-constructed ideas about the topic. Additionally, participants have spent their time sharing difficult experiences, and I tried to treat the participants with respect by carefully considering the data rather than doing a quick analysis. Corbin and Strauss also speak about a cross-

cultural aspect that researchers face. While residing in the same country and speaking the same language, researchers and participants come from very different cultures. When there were parts of the interview that I did not understand due to cultural differences, I asked for clarification to be sure the findings were reported accurately. It is the responsibility of each researcher to preserve the accuracy of the data.

The data were analyzed and coded throughout the research process. This study employed grounded theory, a framework that can be used “to study new and emerging areas in need of investigation” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 11), which provides an opportunity to build theory based on raw data. Grounded theories are changed and revised as more research is conducted. Constant comparative analysis was used to build a framework based on the participants’ words.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Findings

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question:

How do adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation talk about factors that led to their victimization?

The nine participants have all worked in and exited the sex industry. They were recruited from the organization Hope is Here, which assisted them in their efforts to leave the sex industry. In deciding how to tell their stories, I firmly believed that each participant needed to be heard. I struggled with whether or not to change their manners of speaking to a more formal style, not because I was put off by it, but because I worried that others would judge them based on their distinct language. Ultimately, I wanted to portray their stories in their voices. This choice was reiterated by one of the participants saying, “I sure I’m talking too freely. I hope I’m not supposed to sugar coat. I mean, I hope I’m not supposed to like, dress it up something to make it sound like something that it isn’t.” Their words are included, and the ideas presented are not restated in academic terms. These are their words and their stories. All quotations are given verbatim.

Initially, my coding began with the guiding questions in the interview. I created five parent nodes: (1) Tell me a little bit about your childhood. (2) Tell me about your relationships with your peers. (3) Tell me about your victimization. (4) At what point did

you realize that you did not want to be in the situation, but you did not know how to get out? (5) What do you think was the most significant factor to your being victimized? The question coding remained the same for each participant even though the questions asked during the interview were modified slightly depending on the participant's story. For each piece that was to be coded, I created a child node under one of the five parent nodes. After the first interview, I felt that the information was better categorized in chronological order, and the parent nodes were collapsed into three renamed nodes: childhood, adult, leaving the sex industry. When coding the second interview, I encountered a problem. The first interviewee, CC, had been trafficked as a minor, and the second participant, Monica, entered the sex industry at the age of 22. With my current labels, childhood and adulthood, the entry into sex work was now split between two categories, so I renamed the codes, once again ending with three main parent nodes: childhood, entering the sex industry, and exiting the sex industry.

As I created child nodes under each of the three parent nodes, I collapsed and renamed codes. For instance, I had nodes of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, mom was abused, sister was molested, father was abused when younger, and so on. In looking at the commonalities among these topics, I heard the participants saying that not only had they been abused, but abuse had also affected their families. The node was renamed abuse in family. It continued to be re-categorized as it housed more participant thoughts, and it ended up as endangered with lack of protection and guidance. Likewise, under the parent node of childhood, I had created child nodes of kicked out of home, ran

away, taken from home, and lived elsewhere temporarily. These all referred to the idea of movement and non-permanence, so the node was renamed as transient. As coding continued, I saw that adults came and went from the home, and the node was renamed transient household.

Other child nodes were named through a participant's direct wording. Monica said that she entered the sex industry because she "didn't have the guidance that I needed." I used her wording in creating the child node lack of guidance. It was later changed to lack of protection and guidance when Rebecca added that her mother "should have protected" her. This category was one of the most difficult to code because it evoked anger in me. I feel that children must be protected and guided by the adults with whom they live. Likewise, when conducting the peer check, my colleague was angered. She asked, "Where are these kids' parents?" When Taylor spoke of being molested by her grandfather and "being really pissed, wondering where in the hell my grandmother was," my maternal instinct rose up, and I felt indignation for the little girl, frightened in her bed. Because this topic is emotionally charged, I continually reminded myself to report their words, their stories.

After the fifth interview, I revisited the idea of action-interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) which includes: What is happening? How are the participants responding to the situation? What actions do the participants take? What is the outcome of those actions? A committee member advised me that the third question implies correlation and needed to be reworded. At this point, I clarified the vision of the overall phenomenon

and asked three questions in each parent node: What is happening? What actions do they take? What happened next? These three child nodes were now under each parent node. Previous child nodes were then housed as grandchild nodes. For instance, lack of protection and guidance was held under childhood (parent node), what is happening (child node). Although the grandchild nodes changed throughout the process, the parent and child nodes remained stable after the fifth interview. A breakdown of each node is given before its discussion. (See Figures 1, 5, and 8.)

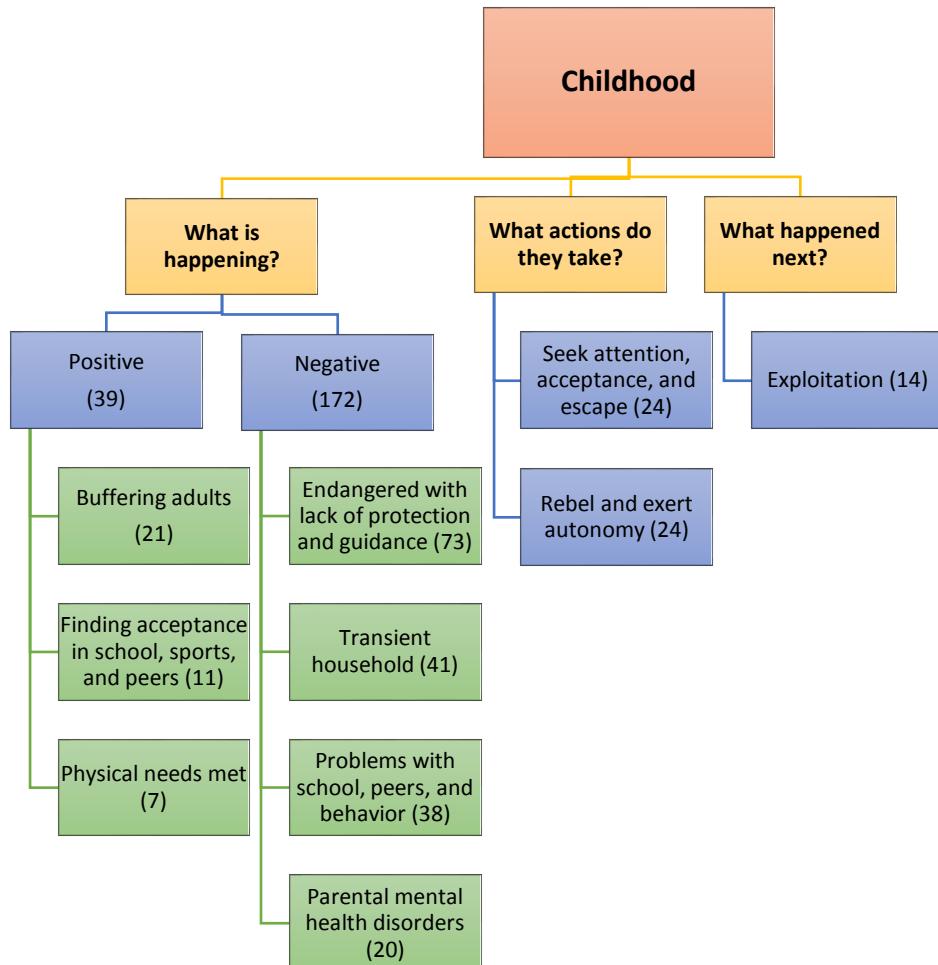


Figure 1. Childhood node structure

Childhood

Initially, I defined childhood as activities that happened when the participant was a minor. This became muddled as Farrah married at the age of 17. Since she was married and moved out, should I count her as an adult? Likewise, Shanee had a child and lived on her own when she was 17. Even though she was still in high school, she lived the life of an adult. After much debating, I felt that although the length of their childhood seemed to be shortened, and they made decisions as adults, it did not mean that they were adults. This was reinforced by Farrah saying that she could not stop her husband's abuse because "I was so young. That's why teenagers shouldn't get married. And I never even realized I was a teenager until just recently." Even though she considered herself an adult, by law, she was a minor.

In the end, I stayed with my original definition of a child being under the age of 18 if the participant had not yet entered the sex industry. If she was trafficked before the age of 18, once the commercial sexual exploitation began, her statements moved to the next phase, entering the industry. The only exception to this rule was Mary Margaret, who was trafficked at the age of eight. Since she was still living under a family member's household and authority and since she was so young, her comments were coded under childhood. When she left her uncle's home as a teenager, I moved her statements into the sex industry node.

What is happening? After studying this topic for years, I thought the participants would tell stories that were comparable to each other. I expected the

responses to be similar and easy to group together. I quickly found that it was not so clear cut. Some women lived with two parents, others with just a mom, and some with just a dad. A few participants talked about popularity in school; others spoke of neutral or bad relationships with peers. I looked beyond merely describing what participants said to find the overarching concept. Ultimately, I realized that when the participants were children, they had lived with many negative or risk factors and very few protective or favorable factors. The positive factors presented were (1) buffering adults; (2) finding acceptance in school, sports, and peers; and (3) having their physical needs met. The negative factors fell into four main categories: (1) endangered with lack of protection and guidance, (2) problems with school, peers, and behavior, (3) parental mental health disorders, and (4) transient household.

Positive factors. Eight participants spoke of at least one favorable factor in childhood. The only exception was Mary Margaret, who was first trafficked by her uncle at the age of eight. She did not share any positive memories of her childhood. Thirty-nine statements were coded as favorable memories or protective factors in childhood. The positive comments about childhood fell into three categories: buffering adults, physical needs met, and finding acceptance in school, sports, and peers. (See Figure 2.)

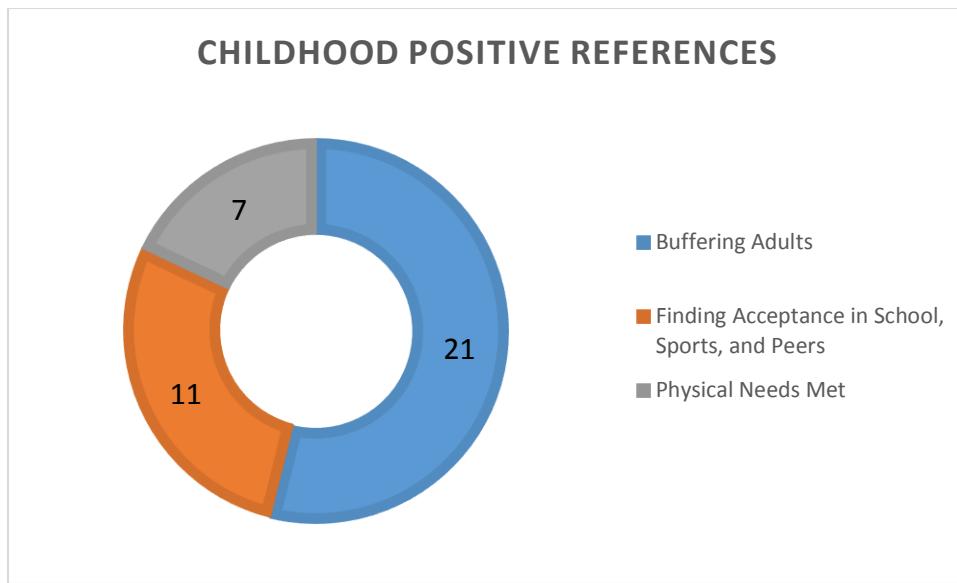


Figure 2. Childhood positive references

In Spring's interview, she spoke fondly of a family that had taken her in during various times in her life. She stated, "They knew Mom was single and pregnant with the fourth child, and didn't know what she was gonna do. And so they offered to adopt me. But Mom didn't want to give me up. So they just shared me." Although there was no familial relation — they were friends of her mother — she still refers to her "adoptive" family members as her dad, step-mom, and two brothers. In her adoptive family, the man worked, and the woman ran the household. The family sat down for dinner together, something Spring never experienced at her own home, and a tradition she carries on with her children today. Her adoptive home was a place in which she felt completely safe. She spoke of her adoptive parents 13 times in the childhood portion of her interview, more than any other topic except for her transience. "They were always there for me, always there for me," she said. When Spring was in the fifth grade, her mom moved to

Arizona, and the family offered to officially adopt her. Her mother left the decision up to her.

I knew that that was the family that was stable for me. I knew, because when I went over there, things happened. Routine, and learning, and you could just feel love and family. And all their family was my family. It wasn't like I was the little orphan child or anything. I was like their daughter. So I said, okay, and I let them adopt me.

Just before the adoption was finalized, Spring changed her mind, saying she missed her mother too much. She cried as she related this story during the interview.

They loaded me up and drove me all the way to Arizona. When I got there, I was like, shit, I made the biggest mistake. Because when we walked in, the house was a wreck. You could tell that she might have had a party the night before. And I was thinking, she knew I was coming. And she knew how they lived and what I was coming from. I didn't know why she didn't try to do better for me to come.

Her adoptive parents asked if Spring was sure she wanted to stay, and she said yes, even while knowing that it was a mistake. In the interview, she wondered what her life might have been like had she allowed them to legally adopt her instead of returning to her mom.

Spring said, "It was my Mom. And no matter all the stuff that happened, she was still my mom." Throughout the interview, even up to present day, the story of this family's involvement weaves in and out of her life. Spring remarked, "Even though I had family, I had a special family. And other people didn't have that. I don't know where I would have been without them."

Originally, I labeled this category as positive adult influences, but as I continued to process through Spring's interview, I saw that her adoptive family had buffered some of the risk factors she had experienced. Although they were unable to save her from the

sex industry, her thoughts of where she would have been without them indicate that she believes they protected her from a more difficult path. When two additional participants spoke of adults who helped in some way, I changed the node to buffering adults. In each case, the adults provided some means of help either through emotional stability or food and shelter. Out of the 39 positive statements coded, buffering adults held 21 references which comprised 54% of the positive factors mentioned.

Another positive theme during childhood emerged as participants spoke of finding acceptance in school, in sports, and with peers. Six participants contributed 11 ideas to this category, leaving this theme with 28% of the 39 total positive codings. Taylor added the most references to finding acceptance, mostly in sports. She stated that her attention span was short, and she had trouble sitting still, which caused her to be a poor student. Sports were the perfect outlet for that energy. She enjoyed jump rope, basketball, swimming, volleyball, and racing against other children in the neighborhood. She said, “When my mom remarried, there was enough money for me to be in extracurricular, soccer. And I loved it, because I just ran, ran, ran, ran, ran.”

Positive factors were often interlaced with negative memories. For instance, Rebecca recalls that she was thought of as the smart and funny girl. She was well liked by different cliques at school, but she was “a different person with everybody without realizing that I was a different person.” Depending on what group she was with at the moment, her personality changed to fit that group. No one knew that Rebecca struggled with depression, holding a gun to her head in the seventh grade. She was viewed as the

“happy one,” but she admits that she remembers being truly happy only one time as a child, when she received a bike at age seven. Memories like these, with two distinct themes, were coded both in the positive childhood area and the node that corresponded with the remainder of the statement. This statement of Rebecca’s was housed in both finding acceptance with peers and problems with behavior.

In terms of references, the least mentioned was physical needs being met. Seven of 39 references, 18%, were coded to this area. Although this category did not receive much contribution in terms of frequent or lengthy responses, I included it because much literature speaks of prostituted women and children coming from desolate living environments, homes in which there was no food or electricity, and the children either prostituted themselves to buy food or ran away in order to meet their basic survival needs. While four participants did speak of being poor, five of the women spoke of having enough money in the home. Another instance of a positive memories linked to negative factors appeared in Shanee’s story. She stated, “My childhood was glamorized because both of my parents sold illegal drugs, so you know, I had all the nice things and things like that. And we lived in the hood, but you couldn’t tell by the inside of our home.” Interestingly, this early wealth was one factor that led her into prostitution. When Shanee was in third grade, her mother went to jail for five years. When she was released, she did not continue her illegal activities. Instead, the mother worked in a cafeteria, bringing home minimum wage. Shanee had become accustomed to lavish

living and said, “I think that easy and fast money is what drove me into the lifestyle that I was living. Cause I was so used to seeing that.”

These three categories, buffering adults; finding outside acceptance in school, sports, and peers; and physical needs met, relay the main ideas of positive factors in childhood. Eight out of nine participants added thoughts to this theme. In all, 39 references were made regarding positive aspects of childhood, with Spring contributing 13 thoughts, mostly about her adoptive, buffering family, and her love for sports. Mary Margaret was the only participant to have no remarks coded as positive.

When the participants spoke of the positive aspects of childhood, it was intriguing because when discussing the childhoods of women who have worked in the commercial sex industry, literature focuses on negative aspects such as sexual abuse (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Reid, 2011), violence (Farley, 2003; Hossain et al., 2010), and poverty (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Williamson & Prior, 2009). However, the majority of participants in this study shared positive memories of childhood.

Negative factors. In contrast to the 39 mentioned positive factors of childhood, 172 statements are included in the category of negative factors in childhood. All nine participants shared childhood events and qualities that they viewed as negative. Mary Margaret, who shared no positive experiences, discussed 23 negative childhood experiences. There were four main ideas in this category: (1) endangered with lack of protection and guidance; (2) problems with school, peers, and behavior; (3) parental

mental health disorders; and (4) transient household. (See Figure 3.) The participants spoke of childhood memories that were painful and far reaching.

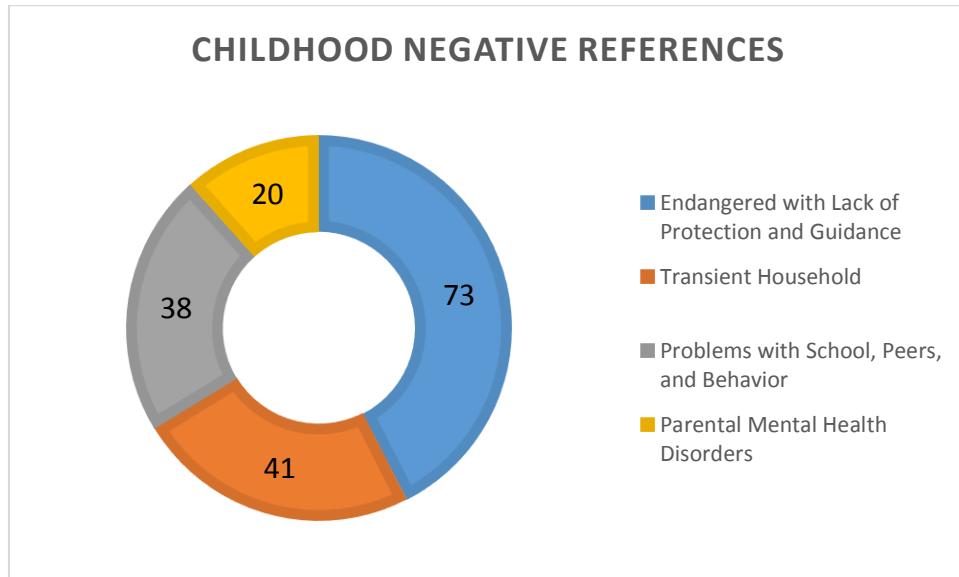


Figure 3. Childhood negative references

Endangered with lack of protection and guidance. With constant comparative analysis, this concept transformed many times. Originally, it was broken up into such categories as sexually abused, physically abused, mom abused by boyfriend, and so on. The abuse topics were then collapsed into one node, entitled abuse in family. Seven participants used the word “abuse” when speaking of their experiences as children. This category was the most referenced with 73 coded statements making up 42% of the total 172 negative childhood references.

Rebecca experienced sexual abuse at the hands of her brother. She believes that he was molested as a child, leading to his abuse towards Rebecca and their sister. When the sisters told their mother about it years after the fact, the mother blamed it on the girls,

who were toddlers when it began. Rebecca stated that it was not the sexual abuse, but her mother's physical and emotional abuse that did the most "damage to my psyche." Rebecca and her sister were adopted into the abusive family. She remembered her adoptive parents as "very physically abusive. My mom was just a very mean person. She used to beat us, hit us, it didn't matter. She was just, just a hateful woman."

Taylor spoke of a web of sexual abuse in the family. She and her sister were molested by their grandfather. When Taylor told her mother and aunt, years later, that their father had abused her, Taylor got the impression that they had been abused by him, as well. She said, "My mom and she had this fake surprised look on her face, because I believe she had experienced it to some extent." When Taylor's father was a teen, he experienced abuse at his place of employment when his boss traded goods for sexual favors. A customer would perform sexual acts on the employees, including her father, at the request of the boss. She believes "that really jacked up my dad's brain a little." Her father, knowing that she and her sister were molested by their grandfather, later repeated the cycle. Her dad "ended up justifying sexually abusing his step granddaughter because it happened with me and my sister, and we came out okay. That's what he said. That is what he said when he got caught."

An additional node was titled "unwanted, unloved, neglected" and included participant statements such as, "[my mom] never loved us" and "I was lonely. Neglect." The women spoke of parents who did not want them, did not provide for their physical needs, and were emotionally unavailable. When CC became pregnant at age 14, her

mother was “hysterical. She didn’t talk to me, or look at me for about a month. She would fix my dinner, my plate, I would eat by myself, like a punishment.” The participants were not just sharing these memories as one time instances. Instead, the women spoke of far reaching effects from these parental actions. For instance, when discussing her mother, Mary Margaret stated:

I was treated badly. I was used, forgotten about, or just wasn’t there. Cuz she would tell me at like nine, she say, well go find somebody who want you, because I don’t. She would say things like that. I don’t want you, so go find somebody to take you. And I just thought that was it. You know, fuck it, your own mom don’t want me. Besides, the more I wanted to reach out, it’s like a slap in my face or a kick or get out or go over to they house, or some shit like that. For a lifetime of mine, I’ve been abused, neglected, beaten, stripped of my dignity, stripped of who I thought I was.

Mary Margaret’s words portrayed a deep and lasting impact of her mother’s actions. Now a mother herself, Mary Margaret never uses physical punishment because she is afraid of repeating that pattern. She said, “I know that I cannot raise my hand to hit my children, because I probably would hurt them.” As a researcher, I chose the term “unwanted, unloved, neglected” to portray the mother’s actions and words while accounting for the lasting pain that Mary Margaret discussed.

A form of emotional abuse that was discussed was being blamed or belittled by parental figures. The women spoke of parents making decisions that made the child feel insecure or unimportant. CC stated that after she had a baby at 14, she left home. She wanted to take her baby with her, but her mother wouldn’t allow it.

I think that’s what made me feel insecure about myself, because she always said, ‘oh you’re not meant to keep the baby or raise the baby.’ And that’s how I think I

got drawn to the pimps and the drugs, because they kinda make you feel like you somebody.

Two participants spoke of their mother's blame of the child for the hurtful events. Other thoughts of being belittled surfaced. Rebecca notes, "Even when I was like 18, a senior in high school, if I wanted a cookie, I had to ask for permission. And if I wanted two cookies, I had to ask for two cookies. I had to specifically ask."

Additionally, two participants spoke of being effected by the murder of someone close to them. Shanee spoke of refusing to visit her father in jail after she witnessed him murder her cousin's husband. She stated that as an adult, she discussed him in her adult therapy sessions, portraying that his actions followed her into adulthood. Although the murder took place when she was a child, the effects were far reaching. Shanee had carried this memory with her throughout her childhood, commercial sexual exploitation, and adulthood. My goal was to create a term that discussed not only physical and sexual abuse while the participants were children, but also traumatic events that evoked emotional damage.

Another idea that surfaced in this theme was lack of protection. For instance, some mothers brought boyfriends or husbands into the home, and these males molested the participants. Taylor expressed anger at her grandmother, who did not protect her from sexual abuse at the hands of her grandfather. She remembers "being really pissed, wondering where the hell my grandmother was." Shanee's mom was imprisoned for five years for selling illegal drugs. While Shanee and her siblings were well cared for by relatives at that time, her mother was absent when Shanee was between the ages of eight

and thirteen. Shanee spoke well of her mother and praised the fact that once she got out of prison, she turned her life around. Her mother “changed because she felt she let us down. And once she told me, I was just trying to survive and take care of my kids, and all I could do was respect that. Even if you were going about it the wrong way.”

In the same realm as lack of protection, some participants spoke specifically about lack of guidance. The women longed for an adult to help them navigate the various forms of abuse and neglect as well as everyday life challenges. Shanee stated, “I think if one thing I think I would’ve seen [my mom] do different, and I tell her this all the time, if she would’ve got counseling for me and my brothers, a lot of the things would have been different.” Monica discussed having no guidance. She did not know right from wrong.

Their stories portrayed the idea that at least one of the parental figures in their lives felt unsafe, and other parental figures refused to protect or guide their children. The participants suffered physically and/or emotionally at the hands of at least one parent. They also expressed anger or sadness about the lack of protection. With constant comparative analysis, the node now held ideas of abuse, neglect, and lack of protection. The node was renamed: endangered with lack of protection and guidance. It contained participant statements regarding physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and discussions of being unwanted, unloved, neglected, and unprotected, both through direct statements from the parents and mentions that the parent ignored or spent little time with the child.

CC: [Mom] didn’t talk to me, or look at me for about a month. She would fix my dinner, my plate, I would eat by myself, like a punishment. Cuz she didn’t want the other kids, at first, to know. So it was like, she kinda kept me out, in my room. She was very hurt. Very, very hurt. She got over it. [Dad] gave me my

speech, but he never said too much. He never was the type that ever really talked. He always let the mom do all the talkin. It's whatever the mom said.

Farrah: My mom was a workaholic. She was kinda self absorbed. So, I was bored, I was lonely. Neglect. Like, I made bad grades, she didn't even care. She probably didn't look at the report card. No big deal. [My dad] came and got us on the weekend, but he didn't stay the whole weekend. We stayed Friday night and he took us home on Saturday morning, because he played golf every Saturday.

Mary Margaret: [My mom would] say, well go find somebody who want you, because I don't. I remember that I was 8 years old and I know my mom kept me going back and forth to my uncles' house; they were pimps. That's basically where I grew up at.

I don't know exactly how it went down, but I know that I was fondled, you know, with the fingers started. And even at 8, 9, and 10, I was being raped. At 11 years old, I had a full makeup, high heeled shoes, and lookin like a grown ass woman, going out here to do whatever I need to do. Or what somebody wants me to do.

Monica: My parents were addicts and my mom prostituted herself, and at some point, my mom left. [I saw] my mom prostitute, sleep with men on [her] bed. But your money made was your addiction issues. And you fed that before you fed your kids. I would say [my dad] was there in present, but in his addiction, he was always in himself.

Rebecca: I don't know if our mom ever loved us. I don't know if she really knew what love was. Pretty much what you saw on Mommy Dearest was my mother. And she was just, just a hateful woman. The sexual abuse [from my brother] has been nothing compared to dealing with the abandonment issues and the feelings of not being loved and being adopted by someone who treated me the way she did. And the fact that, maybe she should have protected us. Maybe I thought she should have known.

Shanee: My mom and my father went to jail when I was like in the third grade. [She] spent 5 years incarcerated. Yeah, I always knew [my dad] loved me, but the thing that he did, like he killed my cousin husband in front of us. And this was his niece's husband. Her boys are without a father now. Then, we're all close. We grew up together. We're all close, and you don't want us talking to them, cuz you killed their brother. My father spent 18 years in prison.

Spring: I did go to my mom's first husband, with him for the weekend. Not every weekend, but some weekends he would take all four of us, like we were all his kids. That's when he would molest me and one of his other step daughters. On weekends that I didn't go, and I stayed with Mom and her third husband, he would molest me. So it was almost like, any weekend, I was going to be getting something, if it was gonna be from the first one or the third one.

Sunny: My mom never paid attention to me. When I was 12, [my mom's boyfriend] came in my room, and I was sleeping, and he was standing over my bed naked with his dick in his hand. And he tried to touch me. And so I just tried to pretend I was sleeping and roll over.

Taylor: There was physical abuse from my dad to my mom. And sexual abuse from my mom's father. So sometimes I would go [to my dad's] on the weekends and he would be timelessly drunk the whole time. Three square meals a day? That was gone.

All nine participants discussed ideas concerning lack of protection and guidance. The participants were not developmentally ready to handle issues such as sexual abuse, neglect, and traumatic events, and adults were not providing assistance.

Parental mental health disorders. When referring to abuse and neglect, two prominent themes emerged. I contacted a professor in the behavioral health department and told him what I was seeing. Some parents had mental illness, and some had substance addictions. He explained that substance abuse is classified as a mental health disorder, and the ideas of mental illness and drug abuse became the node parental mental health disorders. Seven participants made 20 total references (12% of the 172 total negative childhood references) to parents who had mental health disorders which negatively affected the parent-child relationship. Rebecca believes that both her parents suffered from mental illness:

My dad was type A and then later was diagnosed as manic depressive, which is now bipolar. He got diagnosed when I was a senior in high school. So until then, the beatings were pretty severe. He was the type that would, he wouldn't beat you for no reason, but he went over and beyond what it was. In my own research about my mental illness, I've learned some things about [my mom] that I think I really do believe that she was borderline personality. Pretty much what you saw on Mommy Dearest was my mother.

Six women spoke of drug abuse by one or both adults in the home. When the parents were using drugs, they were unable to care for the children, lashed out violently, or "acted like fools." The participants expressed feelings of abandonment and bitterness. Monica stated:

So I had an absent parent, a drug addicted parent. I wasn't really guided or cared for, taken care of much. I was kinda the one that had to take care of everyone else. I had a brother and sister that were babies when my mom was gone, so I didn't really have a childhood even though I was a child. In all of this, I got lost in being somebody's parent, to siblings. You know, I had to take care of my dad when he was drunk all the time. You know, I had to set myself aside all my life. I had to give it to everybody else. I couldn't give it to myself. And so I got out because I wanted more for me.

The parents' mental health disorders not only led to some of the abuse and neglect, they also interfered with guidance issues. In the participants' interviews, mental health was spoken of in connection with divisions in the parent-child relationship and endangerment to the child. It manifested in the parent inflicting abuse or not protecting the child from abuse by another adult.

Problems with school, peers, and behavior. This category stemmed from the second interview prompt, "Tell me about your peers." All nine participants contributed 38 statements to this category, making it 22% of the total 172 negative childhood references. The participants mostly shared information about peers from school, which

led to talk about behavior and performance in school. As noted above, six of the participants spoke of finding outside acceptance with peers or in sports, but all of the women spoke of difficulties with peers and school.

The problems in school were attributed to several factors. By the time Spring was in first grade, she felt “really, really scattered” after being molested by two men, living in an orphanage for a year, and living with her grandmother for a year. After she failed first grade, it was “almost like never recovered to get my education back. It was really hard.” She barely passed junior high and dropped out during the ninth grade. While living with her protective family in the fifth grade, the parental figures promoted education. They required a lot from her, “but I’m just like, I’m not like this. I didn’t even know how to act with her coming to school with me, because I never had that kinda stuff before.” She wonders if her schooling would have been different had her mother permitted the protective family to adopt her at the age of four, “before I ever started school. Would they have made me learn differently? Or got me help that I needed for my learning disability?”

Taylor also had difficulties in school, failing the fifth grade. She lists several possible culprits for her educational difficulties.

It mighta had something to do with going to my drunk dad’s every other weekend. My sister sneaking out. I don’t even know. I don’t know. Maybe I was confused. I had trouble sitting still. My attention span was short. And my mom would not put me on medication. She refused.

Her mother tried natural remedies and dietary changes instead of medication. Taylor expressed frustration with this, stating that her own daughter experienced the same

trouble focusing. She said, “When they suggested it to me for my daughter, I tried [the medication]. And what do you know, she learned how to focus and study and was able to get off of it by the end of second grade.” Four participants spoke specifically of struggling with issues of hyperactivity, depression, anxiety, and a learning disability, which made school more difficult for them.

Some participants also had trouble fitting in with peers at school. Monica “didn’t have friends, didn’t associate with people, wasn’t in a clique. Didn’t fit in, skinny, buck teeth, stringy hair, crappy clothes.” When Sunny was molested by her mother’s boyfriend, she immediately told the counselor at school. Child Protective Services (CPS) placed her with a wealthy foster family, and she continued going to the same school. Her peers were intrigued by her move from the trailer park to an upscale neighborhood and asked why she had moved, so she told them the truth. Her peers responded, “Oh! You’re molested! So I was like the little molested girl. So I started acting out and being bad.”

Mary Margaret laughed as she answered my question about her peers.

I really didn’t have a lot of friends, cuz I was a bully. Lord, I forgot all about that. You know, I was, I hated the girls that were, that wore the pretty dresses, and the little ruffle sides and black shoes and little pig tails in their hair. I hated them. I really, really did. And this is something I thought about maybe a month ago. And I remember one girl, I hated her. I remember me telling her, I’m gonna kick yo ass. (Laughs.) Or something like that! And it bothered her enough for her to tell her mom. We had a parent conference, my mom had to take off work and come over to the school. I don’t remember me botherin her anymore. Yeah, cuz she had someone to stand up for her.

All nine participants spoke of having some trouble with school and peers. They attributed these difficulties to their home lives, mental health difficulties, and not fitting in. In discussing her bullying, Mary Margaret goes on to explain

I was jealous of them period, because I, well I assumed that they, that their life was much better than mine. They didn't have any molestation going on, or they wasn't meeting up with older men to have sex with them or anything. I just assumed that they wasn't by the way that they looked. I didn't dress like that, you know.

The theme of trouble with school and peers holds some relation to lack of protection and guidance and feelings of insignificance, as discussed previously. They report feeling different in how they looked, how they behaved, and in their life circumstances, and they were unsupported in how to deal with these differences.

The question of peers held another line of thought in the participants' lives. Six women spoke of finding a group in which they fit once they were teenagers. CC unwittingly found acceptance with a pimp and "got in with the wrong crowd." The six women spoke of bad friends, friends who introduced them to and promoted the sex industry, and friends who were "drinking and drugging." Farrah's boyfriend robbed her parents' house. Each participant now sees the bad influence brought on by these peers, but at the time, they appreciated being accepted. Monica knew "the people I was hanging out with weren't good, but I thought they were cool and what they were doing was cool, so I was gonna do what they were doing."

Transient household. Another theme that emerged under childhood, what is happening, was a consistent pattern of the child moving homes or going back and forth

between residences. Due to previous research, I knew that many runaway children are trafficked, and while two participants did run away, the others always had a home but were moved from place to place throughout childhood. I did not expect this theme, and only recognized it halfway through the comparative analysis, causing me to go back and look through previously coded interviews. This theme of transient home life was present in all nine participants, with 41 out of the 172 negative references. As children, some of the participants chose to leave home, either through running away or asking to live with the non-custodial parent or a buffering adult. The remainder were moved at the request of the parent, through parental circumstances, or by CPS. Farrah reports going back and forth several times between her two parents when she got bored or rebelled, or when one parent couldn't manage her behavior.

Spring spoke of the most transience, with 12 mentioned moves with varying guardians, including a her mother, two abusive step-fathers, an orphanage, her sixth grade teacher, her buffering family, and an additional family who housed children from the orphanage on the weekends. Her mother continually moved to different residences in different states, and each time, Spring had to choose whether or not to go. Sometimes, she chose to stay with local adults, and other times, she chose to be with her mom.

And I'd go back and forth. And even when I was in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade in Arizona, they would fly me home to Dallas over the summer so I could have decent time down here. And I don't, if we'd have all stayed in the same city, I think it would have been different. But mom moved. And I didn't want to be that far away from her, even though I knew in my heart that this was better for me. But it's your mom, you know?

Each participant spoke of their movements in a negative light. They expressed sadness at being away from their mothers, feelings of rejection and abandonment when sent to live elsewhere. Monica resented being “drug into” custody issues.

We were supposed to have court ordered visitation with her. I know that anything that would have been normal never occurred, because he didn’t want us to be with her and she didn’t want us to be with him. And it was a tug of war. We were always hidden from each other or kidnapped from school or moved around, you know, just victimized. In the midst of their problems, we got drug into it.

In addition to the participants moving homes, three women also spoke of men coming and going in their homes. Mary Margaret spoke in an indifferent way about the men who were in and out of her mother’s house. She stated, “My mom having a lot of men in and out, you know. Didn’t phase me.” Interestingly, Mary Margaret later stated that she gave up custody of her first son because he deserved someone who could give him “stability.” The other two participants expressed anger and frustration about men who came and went from the home. Spring’s mother was married five times; two of those men abused Spring, and “some of the husbands” beat her mother and stole from the household. Sunny also spoke of two men in her mother’s life, the second of whom abused Sunny.

What Actions do They Take?

The participants’ memories of childhood led from difficulties in the home, in school, and with peers toward actions they had chosen in light of their circumstances. Originally, nodes were created by using topics that were discussed, such as sex or drugs. However, the thoughts were recoded when I read for the participant’s meaning. Were

they using drugs to escape or rebel? Were they having sex to find acceptance or exert autonomy? When the statements were coded, they presented two different topics: (1) seeking attention, acceptance, and escape; and (2) rebelling and exerting autonomy. Each of these two categories held exactly half of the references. In the first category, participants spoke such things as leaving in search of something or using drugs to escape a situation. Statements about “acting up,” “didn’t want to be controlled,” and “I didn’t want to follow the rules,” were categorized as rebelling and exerting autonomy.

Seek attention, acceptance, and escape. One theme came from the participants speaking about looking for something. They discussed three main things that they sought around the time of adolescence: attention, acceptance, and escape. The participants sought attention through sexual relationships and peer relationships. CC related that she “wanted more attention after I found out that I didn’t have the same father as the other kids. I think that kinda struck a nerve when I was about 11. I started kinda acting up, you know.” CC became pregnant at the age of 14. After the baby was born, she ran away and was approached by a young man. She was drawn to him because he made her feel like she was “somebody. I think it was something with low self-esteem, thinking insecure, and didn’t think no one loved me. Lookin for love in the wrong places.” Her story spoke of how he promised his attention.

He picked me up and I was sitting at the park. He drove up, and it was kinda late. About 7:00 at night, on a summer night. And he go, I been watching you, and I notice you spend a lot of time at this park at night. He says, is it because you don’t have nowhere to go? And I go, not really I don’t. And he says, well I have a room up the street, right by the airport. And he go, would you like to come and spend the night? So I say, yeah, I do need to take a shower and freshen up. So he

said, well, if you come, I'll buy you some new clothes and fix you up with things to help you some. I thought he was being just a nice guy. Not knowing that he was doing all this to introduce me to other guys. He had other women there, at the room. They were lookin at me crazy, and giving me the eye, and rolling their eyes. Cuz they knew what was going on, but I didn't. And I was wonderin why they was being jealous and not being friendly. And he said, they gonna be like this for a minute cuz you gonna get more of my time. Cuz you need more of my time and attention, and they kinda be jealous of that. And then I'm like, they gonna jealous? Cuz I was like 17, I was young. I didn't really know what was happening.

As CC spoke, she wove together a story of wanting to be special and desiring more attention. Farrah spoke of having sex in the eighth grade and obsessing over that boy in the following years. She remembered, "I saw a guy, I fixated on him, I wanted him, I made it happen. And then I'm like, why doesn't he like me?" She now knows that he most likely did not love her but kept seeing her for sex. She spoke of sneaking out to be with him. She became pregnant when she was 17, and when she found out that her city allowed marriage at that age, she left school and married him. She stayed with him for seven years, enduring abuse at the hands of him and his relatives. Her marriage "was terrible." She spoke of that time with sadness and said, "My brain just wasn't through growing. I mean, I look back now and I'm like, what the hell was I thinkin?"

Mary Margaret, the child who used to bully those who were different from her, found temporary acceptance when she made a friend who shared her life circumstances.

Well, I remember a girl named Tania. And I knew that she was sleeping around with older men and boys. And I remember the guy she was sleeping with. I think Tania was about my age, seventh or eighth grade, and he asked me, have you seen your friend Tania? I said, no, but he'd taken clothes, like her panties and shorts and that out of his truck and say well, when you see her, give her these back. So I never thought a thing of it. He could have raped her, now that I'm thinking about it, he could of, cuz she had a childhood seem to be a lot like mine. But she ended

up killin her mom. Yeah, she did that, she put her mom in a closet. Yeah. I seemed to like hanging with people like that.

Mary Margaret made no further mention of peers after sharing this story. Her attempts at feeling accepted were not the main part of her contribution to this category. Instead, she spoke repeatedly of escaping through drugs.

As mentioned previously, there were several references to drugs. They were mainly discussed in reference to rebelling and wanting to fit in with peers, but Mary Margaret used them to escape. At the age of eight, she was the youngest participant to be trafficked. She lived in her uncle's home. He was a pimp, and he had several trafficking victims there, most of whom were in their early teens. There was a constant stream of men coming to have sex with the girls, and "even at 8, 9, and 10, I was being raped." To escape the situation, she turned to drugs. From ages eight to nine, she inhaled "a lot of liquid paper."

But I know by 10, I was smokin cigarettes, I was smokin weed. At 12, I got introduced to cocaine. I loved it. That just took me away from reality. Took me to the world I was in. I was numb. Oh, my god, whew Jesus! I was so happy to know that cocaine exist. You know, really, cuz I could snort me a couple of lines, and I was gone. Keep me high. Keep me numb. Cuz I know what's about to happen in that room. When I did the cocaine, it was like, okay, this is where I am. The abuse and the rapes and the beatings. But when I wasn't high, it's like, oh damn, is this really happening? Oh, I need some shit.

Six participants spoke of doing things that helped them escape, either physically or mentally. They discussed events such as wandering the neighborhood so they didn't have to go home, going to live with another parent or family, and thoughts of suicide.

While there were several smiles and laughter infused throughout some interviews, each reference in this category was tinged with sadness. There were no good memories portrayed here.

Rebel and exert autonomy. The second category of actions they took involved rebelling and exerting autonomy. Seven participants contributed references to this category, with five of the women contributing thoughts to both this category and the previous one of seeking attention, acceptance, and escape. For instance, when CC spoke above of wanting more attention and acceptance, she also mentioned acting up and leaving home because “I think I wanted to be grown, because after I had that baby, I didn’t wanna be told, I thought I was grown. I didn’t wanna follow instructions or rules.” Her discussion of wanting to make her own decisions placed her comments in this node, as well.

The participants spoke of rebelling by sneaking out, hanging out with the wrong crowd, lying to parents, having sex, and doing drugs. Monica spoke several times throughout her interview of doing what she wants to do. Even as an adult, she does not like others to care for her or her children. She assumes charge of her own life. Her fierce desire for autonomy was discussed repeatedly when she spoke of her actions during the teenage years.

But as a teenager, I did what I wanted to do and I had a lot of sex and did a lot of drugs and I didn’t want to be controlled, you know. I didn’t want to have a time to be home. Just did what I wanted to do.

Like I just did what I wanted to do with no regards for myself. And not that I didn’t care about myself, it’s just, I wanted to do what I wanted to do. I wanted to do what felt good. And I didn’t feel like I could suffer any consequences. Like I

was invincible. Like, no that's not gonna be me, or no, that's not gonna happen. And I took no precautions for anything.

I did drugs and the younger teenage things because I did what I wanted to do. Not because I was an addict or because I had to have it to cope or to get through the night. I just did it because I wanted to have a good time.

The desire for autonomy meant that most participants left home before the age of 18.

Several ran away and were taken in by others. One got her own apartment, and one was emancipated at the age of 16. Spring summarized her thoughts of autonomy with her statement, "If I want something, I'm the one that has to work hard for that. Because of the way I was raised, I'm like, I don't need anybody, because I was taught to rely on myself." The issue of seeking autonomy weaved throughout the remainder of their stories, and they continually struggled with trusting others.

What Happened Next?

After discussing the events of their childhood and how they reacted to those circumstances, they spoke of what happened next in their lives. The women spoke of being taken advantage of and being offered drugs. Two of the women were raped, and the majority had children before they were 18. The main theme that was discussed was exploitation. As discussed before, CC sought attention and acceptance and found it when a pimp took her in. What happened next detailed the beginning of her exploitation.

So, as the time went on, I didn't do drugs or anything, I just smoked a little pot. And one of the girls came in one day, and she said, why don't you try this, she had some cocaine. And I go, I don't really wanna. And she goes, oh, it's not bad. Just put a little under your nose and snort it. So I did, and my leg shook all night. And I go, oh, I kinda think I like that. And from then, he introduced me to the IV drug, it's called Prelude. He said, you're gonna need to be up for a few days, and this is gonna help you stay up and make money and all this. And he said, give me your arm. And I was also scared of needles. And I was like, scared, and he was

tellin me somethin in my ear, you know. Massaging, you know, all confident. And he said, I'm gonna give you a little bit. You gonna be up for awhile. It's gonna help you make money and make you wanna think fast. He's talkin all this street fast talk. And I let him do that. And then after it wore off, I wanted some more. And that's when they started givin me the rules about what you have to do to keep gettin it. He said I was gonna have to go out with the girls and I was gonna have to make this much money every night. Because if I wanted him to give me the drug, that's what I have to bring home to get it.

Eight participants spoke of having children or experiencing a form of exploitation while they were still minors. The thoughts coded in the category of what happens next were brief because their stories moved quickly to the larger exploitation of the sex industry.

Childhood Summary

The ideas shared regarding each participant's childhood fell into three ideas: What was happening? How did the participants respond? What happened next? While some events occurred simultaneously, others happened in a chronological succession. The first grouping fell into the idea of what had happened to the participants. As discussed above, the participants did have some positive memories of childhood. The favorable factors were shared by eight participants, with Mary Margaret being the only participant who did not share any good memories of childhood. The positive factors included: having their physical needs met; finding acceptance in school, sports, and peers; and having buffering adults at some point. Six participants shared memories of enjoying times at school, in sports, or with peers, but for some, the positive came with negativity. Rebecca had many friends, but she never knew herself. Five women stated that they had enough money to provide decent or luxurious living arrangements, and Shanee grew accustomed to the money and cited that as a main reason for entrance into

sex work. The buffering adults provided help through offering emotional stability, providing a place to live, and assisting with basic necessities. Spring stated that she does not know where she would be today if it weren't for their influence in her life.

The negative references in childhood far outweighed the positive references. (See Figure 4.) The participants spoke of abuse and neglect. They discussed sexual, emotional, and physical abuse at the hands of someone in the childhood home. The participants found that other adults in the home were unwilling or unable to protect them from the abuse. They expressed anger over not being protected and at times being blamed for the abuse that was inflicted upon them. They also wished that they had been given more guidance on how to deal with difficult experiences. Another area discussed was feeling unwanted, unloved, and neglected. Mary Margaret's mother stated outright that she never loved her daughter and didn't want her in the home. One participant felt neglected when a parent ignored her as a form of punishment and another participant spoke of her mother's refusal to take an interest in the child's life. Their stories showed a theme of being endangered and having a lack of protection and guidance.

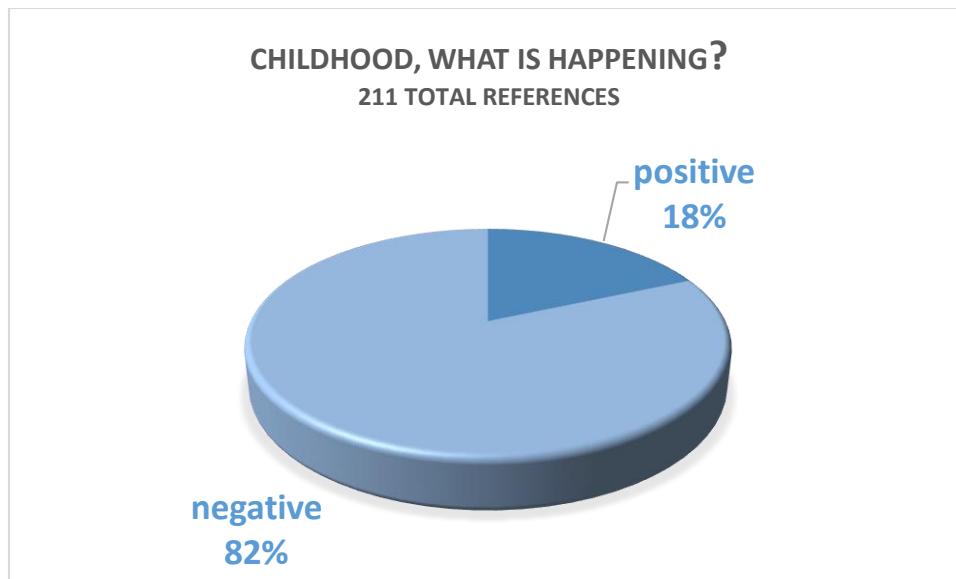


Figure 4. Childhood, what is happening?

Another category that emerged was the presence of parental health disorders. These were seen through mental illnesses, such as manic depression and borderline personality disorder. Parental substance abuse was common in the childhood home. The participants discussed times when the mental health of the parent contributed to him or her actively abusing the child or rendering him or her unable to care for the children. According to the participants, mental health issues were the main reason parents could not or would not care for the child.

The participants discussed problems in school and with peers. School difficulties were attributed to learning disorders, depression, life circumstances, and transiency. They did not always find acceptance with the other children at school, saying that they did not fit in because of their unkempt appearances or feeling different due to behavior difficulties associated with the home. When their adolescent peers accepted the

participants, unhealthy relationships developed, and the friends introduced them to sex and drugs. Although they appreciated the camaraderie at the time, they recognized the bad influence. Farrah mused, “All it takes is one bad friend.”

The last theme that presented itself was the idea of a transient household, either through the physical location of residence or by the movement of adults in and out of the house. Each participant spoke of the movement negatively. They raised issues of custody battles, feelings of abandonment, and feeling “scattered.” Mary Margaret said she did not mind that her mother had men in and out of the home, but she was hurt when her mother made her leave the home. Sunny’s transience caused problems at school when her peers discovered why she had been taken from her home.

After discussing what happened in childhood, the participants shared what actions they took in those situations. Those actions fell into two categories: (1) seeking attention, acceptance, and escape; and (2) rebelling and seeking autonomy. The women spoke of seeking acceptance and attention through peer and sexual relationships. CC believed that nobody loved her and was drawn in by a pimp who showered her with the attention that she craved. Mary Margaret spoke at length about how drugs helped her escape the abuse and rapes. She first discovered liquid paper at eight, moved on to cigarettes and weed by 10, and began using cocaine at the age of 12. Other participants spoke of seeking escape in terms of physically leaving the house for short or indefinite periods of time.

The other theme that emerged was that of rebelling and seeking autonomy. The majority of drug use references were connected to this theme. The women discussed bad

peer influences and unhealthy relationships. At this point, they had learned that they could not depend on others and took matters into their own hands by running away, seeking emancipation, and choosing autonomy. More than one woman stated, "I did what I wanted to do."

The aftermath of these events included the women being taken advantage of, experiencing rape, having teenage pregnancies, and being exploited. The discussion of childhood aftermath was short because their stories quickly turned to entering the sex industry.

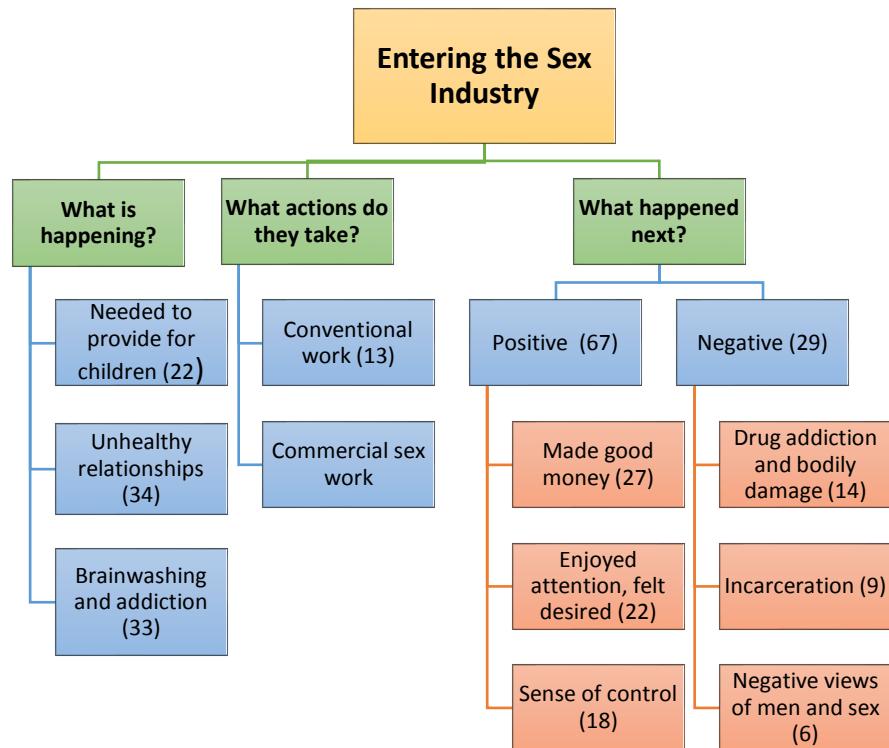


Figure 5. Entering the sex industry node structure

Entering the Sex Industry

As with the topic of childhood, when the participants spoke of their time in the sex industry, it was divided into three categories: What is happening, what actions do they take, and what happened next. At times, this category was difficult to decipher, because some of the comments occurred immediately before entering the sex industry and others happened during their time in the industry. Ultimately, entering the sex industry was defined as just before they entered into the industry to just before exiting.

What is Happening?

Three main events happened at this time. (See Figure 6.) The participants spoke of needing to provide for their children (22), brainwashing and addiction (33), and being in unhealthy relationships (34).

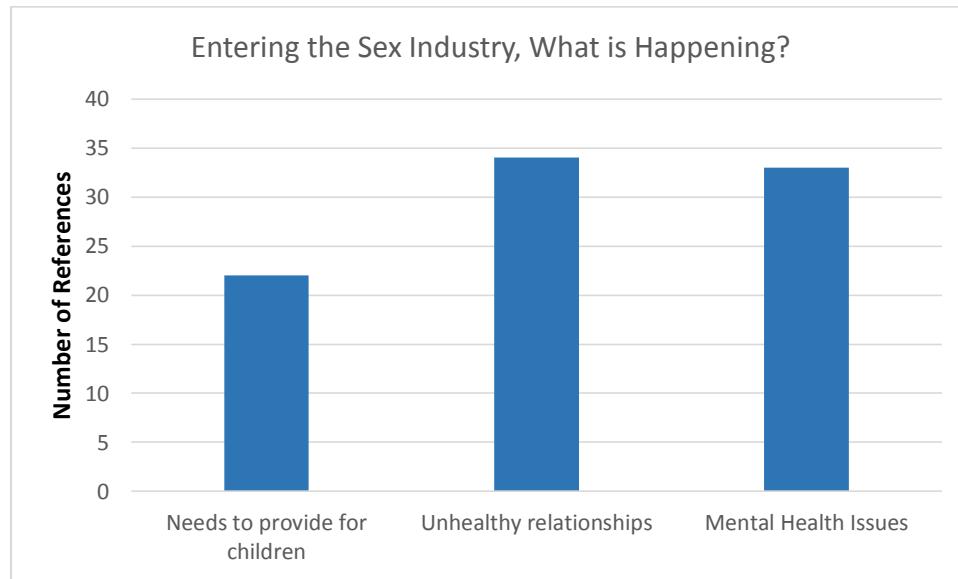


Figure 6. Entering the sex industry, what is happening?

Needs to provide for children. With the exception of CC, whose mother kept her child when CC ran away, all the participants spoke of needing to provide for their children. They made no mention of available support from their families, and the fathers of the children did not contribute enough or any child support. Rebecca's ex-husband had primary custody of their child. Rebecca spoke mainly of working to provide for her own needs, but she did contribute funds towards her son's upbringing. Eight of the nine participants included statements about their responsibilities to provide for their children.

Farrah: So I drive the car to work and I get the flat tire. I don't have money to fix the flat tire. So then you can't go to work. If I get a run in my panty hose, you gotta wear those same pair with the run in them all week long. Like, I was working really hard and was not getting anywhere.

Mary Margaret: I had my youngest, yeah. And I'm walking in the snow. Thinking, what am I going to do at night? I can't live like this anymore. And a truck pull up, you know, you working? Looking at me and I see my son, and I think, lord. Yeah, I'm working. When I wanted to get out, something just always pulled me back in.

Monica: All by like 22. Yeah, so three kids, two men, divorced. It was hard, because five and a quarter back then couldn't even get rent paid, couldn't pay daycare. I had to make choices. I couldn't see how I could work two jobs with no ability to pay the daycare. And if I did pay daycare, would I be gone 24/7? A single mom who's going to be there for my kids, like, I can't let the daycare raise my kids. I wasn't good with that and I didn't trust family. My responsibilities to three kids meant getting up and doing whatever I had to do.

Rebecca: I had wrecked my car, and I didn't have a job. And so I was behind on my rent, like two months, and I had answered an ad on Backpage, to answer the phone for an escort service. So I would answer the phone and call the girls. And then I was like, man, these people are making some good money.

Shanee: I did what I did because I chose to, you know, I wanted for me and my daughter to have a good lifestyle. It was just to provide for me and my daughter. [My daughter] was my pimp. That's where all my money would go to.

Spring: I'm pregnant, and I'm 17 years old. And I have no job, I haven't been to school since I was in 8th grade. What the hell am I gonna do?

Sunny: But I still want [my daughter] to know that whether I'm a hooker, a ho, a whore, a prostitute, any of those things, I'm still your mother and I'll always love you. And if I did those things, it's because I wanted to take better care of us.

Taylor: I'm the single mother of three! With not very much education. And the husband really wasn't paying much attention to child support. So I'm looking on the ads. If I could've found a job that paid decent right away, I never would have in the first place.

In each of these statements, the women indicate a feeling of desperation. They needed to provide for themselves and their children and felt that they had few options. They stated that it was necessary to somehow earn money without having a proper education, the backing of extended family, or child support.

Brainwashing and addiction. As when discussing the mental health issues of their parents, different factors were presented when the participants discussed issues surrounding their entry into the sex industry. The participants spoke of two main ideas concerning mental health: addiction and brainwashing. One participant, Rebecca, mentioned another issue. She spoke of having life-long issues with depression. This, combined with "self-esteem issues and control issues; not being loved by my parents" directly preceded her entry into sex work.

Five participants spoke of being controlled by an addiction. Shanee, who grew up in the "fast and easy" lifestyle, stated that her addiction was money. The other four spoke of a drug addiction controlling their decision to enter or to remain in the industry. As seen with CC, her pimp introduced her to narcotics. She quickly became addicted and

was told to prostitute if she wanted more drugs. After that initial introduction, her story was infused with references to drugs.

Like, as long as you was on drugs, it was always in the dark. Everything was, I mean, some of the things that you done on drugs. Now I think about, I can't believe that I did some of those things. When you on drugs it's like something over your face. I mean, it's got you in, you're blind. That you don't know what's really going on around you. Not really aware, you're not focused. It's just a lot, from being on drugs. It takes a lot out of you, and I think that was my main thing. Until I got clean and everything, it was the drugs that controlled my life.

When the participants were addicted to drugs, they made decisions that today seem foreign to them. The drugs controlled their choices and overwhelmed their thought processes. Another way in which their decision making was influenced was through brainwashing. CC first spoke of this term when referring to her pimp.

[I tried to leave] many times. I cried, especially when the guy beat me. If I didn't bring him enough money or didn't perform oral sex with him and whoever they brought. I just couldn't see myself at that time, because you know, I was still new at it, and I had some horrors about some things I didn't want to do. And I would get beat up, and I would go cry and want to leave, and try to leave. I did try to leave one time. They said to me, girl, they conned me back. They said, oh, he wants me to take you shopping, and he's sorry. And I fell for it, and went back, and it was worse. I stayed there. He threatened me and told me different stuff and I was thinkin about, I called my mom one time. She told me to come home, and she kept saying where are you? And he told me that if I ever told or someone came, that he would kill my family. And you know, how they bluff you? That was the way of working with my mind, I guess, where they had me brainwashed.

In reading her story, it became clear that her definition of brainwashed referred to the power the pimp had over her mind and her actions. Her pimp not only provided her with access to drugs, but also used physical force, attention, and threats to influence her decision making. Other ways in which the participants spoke of being influenced included not understanding how to make healthy decisions when in love and a continued

seeking for approval and acceptance. When Sunny voiced her concern for women currently in the sex industry, she stated, “[They] are brainwashed. They really are. I know for a fact they are, because I was.”

Unhealthy relationships. All nine participants spoke of unhealthy relationships that surrounded their time in the sex industry. (The relationships discussed in this category do not include interactions with johns.) Those relationships contributed to their entering into commercial sexual exploitation, remaining in the industry, or re-entering after attempting to leave. The category was named after Taylor mused that she had been in a “terribly unhealthy relationship.”

Eight of the women discussed multiple unhealthy relationships with men. The participants experienced physical abuse from boyfriends, including instances where two participants were thrown down a flight of stairs. One was pregnant and pressed charges, and the other ended up in the hospital with broken ribs. Farrah’s boyfriend drove her to a deserted field and detailed how he would kill and bury her there. Sunny recounts:

My oldest one’s dad was my pimp. He was mean. He was really mean. He would wake me up at like 7:00 in the morning cuz we’d be in a hotel. He would kick me. He’d be like, hey bitch. It’s 8:30. I’d be like, I don’t fuckin care, leave me alone. He’d be like, bitch, checkout time is 9:00. You need to get out there. Get up! And he’d make me go out there and turn a trick.

Women also expressed being hurt when their boyfriends or husbands had affairs. CC talked about having finally left her pimp and meeting the father of her children. She was back on the right track, having received her GED and 12 college credits, when she discovered his unfaithfulness. She remembered, “And that triggered me back, and I

started back doin drugs, and that's when I started prostituting on my own. And doin the drugs. Trying to block out everything.” A second participant was in a relationship with a married man, and it was hard for her when her boyfriend would go home to his wife. A third participant, Spring, felt that something was not right with her relationship with her husband, but she wasn’t sure what a normal response to the situation would look like.

He liked the bar as much as I did, so it was too easy. He trusted me 100% to come home every night. As a matter of fact, he was almost too lenient. Sometimes I wanted him to like say, girl, quit! Come out! What the hell is that dude looking at you like that for? He would almost be crass and bring friends to my work and say, this is my wife. Like it was a joke, and I’m thinking, you’re letting these people see your wife. That’s not really proper, I don’t think.

Drugs were once again a theme in the discussion of unhealthy relationships with men. Shanee recounted that drug dealers were “always attracted to me. And I was like, okay, whatever. And that’s why now, I’m trying to learn how to build healthy relationships because I never had a healthy relationship with a man.” Taylor was initially drawn to a man, in part, because of his drug use.

And he was a pothead and he drinks, so I thought, you know what? I’m cool with this, I know this, because of [my dad]. Because I know how to deal with pot smokers. They don’t really go anywhere, they don’t really do anything, so there’s no unknown. [But later] I moved out because my kids were starting to smoke weed. My teenagers. And steal from his stash. I’m like, wonderful! Great! So, you know, I regretted that, then.

Taylor’s decision to leave strained her relationship with her children. They were upset with her for moving out because they left a large house and moved into a small apartment.

Rebecca was the only participant who did not talk about men when discussing several unhealthy relationships while in the commercial sex industry. Her mother continued to verbally abuse her even while Rebecca was an adult and attempted to nurse her mother through cancer and chemotherapy. Rebecca stated that she has always had unhealthy relationships with friends who take advantage of her. She eventually shied away from forming any type of relationship. She said, “I didn’t go and get involved in abusive relationships, but instead, I went to the other extreme. To cut out relationships altogether. And recently learning that the main relationship that I’ve avoided my whole life was with me. I never wanted to be alone.”

Each participant discussed relationships that were unhealthy and harmful. They were aware that things were not right in those relationships, but at the time, they lacked the desire or ability to sever them. Due to a lack of protection and guidance in childhood, they were at times not clear about what a healthy relationship would entail.

What Actions do They Take?

Overwhelmed by the difficulties they were facing with having to provide for their children and navigate through addictions and unhealthy relationships, the participants tried to meet their needs through conventional work and sex work.

Conventional work. The idea of conventional work spans a large time frame. After CC spent time in prison for drug use, she “tried to work, tried to live in the society.” She tried a more conventional approach with work and schooling throughout her time in the sex industry, but her attempts were not lasting, because “I still had that

crave for drug. So I started working in those strip clubs as waitress, and kep on doing the drugs and prostituting.” Participants spoke of holding jobs at Burger King, Waffle House, Tom Thumb, an apartment complex, and delivering phone books. Conventional employment was discussed 13 times, in contrast to 31 references of commercial sex work. In the end, the conventional jobs could not offset the difficulties they were facing. Taylor remembered “I was working really hard and was not getting anywhere.” Of the seven participants who spoke of attempting conventional work, only two stated that they needed more money for drugs. The remaining five women talked about the difficulties of providing for themselves and their children with low-wage employment. Monica discussed the transition from conventional work to sex work:

I think I just got into it because I heard there was good money. And it's like, money is the solution to my problem. Money I don't have, money I need. So, I went and did it, and the first night I made \$700. It's like, there's the rent money in one freakin day. I can't make that in a freakin month. Why am I flipping cheese burgers at Burger King with three kids going through a marriage that's not going anywhere? Why am I doing this? I did what I knew worked. And that was goin to the strip club. And I didn't really find anything wrong with it. I didn't find anything wrong with surviving. I found something wrong with being there, but I couldn't find another method that would work.

Back then, as young as I was, with the immaturity, no guidance, not enough support, family didn't condone it, but it's like, hey, you don't like what I'm doing, but you can't pay all my bills for me, and hey you can't put gas in that car for me, and hey, you can't put diapers on them. Hey, you can't make their dads come back and do what they're not doing. I'm gonna do what I need to do. It wasn't about what I want to do, then, at that point, it was what I needed to do.

She stressed that she did not want to be a sex worker, but with no one to help her, it was the option that worked best for her children. She spoke many times about wanting to

spend time with her kids and to raise them herself instead of putting them in child care.

To balance the needs of the family, she did what she needed to do.

Rebecca was a substitute teacher, and she could have survived on that income, but her problems with anxiety and depression overwhelmed her. She could not handle working the entire school day and found “it was easier to get paid \$200 for an hour than to go to school all day.” When Sunny was 15, she lived with her aunt who introduced her to different types of available employment.

My aunt was a leasing consultant at an apartment complex during the day. Boring! I would go in there to hang out with her at her office. I had to be quiet or I’d get in trouble with the manager. But she had a night job. She worked in a nude modeling studio, so I would go there. At the night job, we would order pizza, we’d watch movies, we’d have so much fun! And my aunt would only be gone for like 20 minutes and she’d be right back and everything would be cool. I was like, whoa, look at that guy’s nice car! Mercedes, Porche, all kinds of nice stuff, okay?

When Sunny was emancipated at 16, the modeling agency offered her a job, and she accepted. Mary Margaret, trafficked as a child, and Sunny were the only participants who did not hold conventional employment until exiting the sex industry.

Commercial sex work. Eventually, each participant entered the sex industry. In this section, each participant has a paragraph summarizing her entry into the industry. Each paragraph ends with each individual’s answer to the question: What do you think was the most significant factor to your being victimized? The question was rephrased at varying degrees to fit with the participant’s story.

Mary Margaret was eight, and her uncle was her pimp. When she was a teen, she left his house and continued prostituting on her own. She answered, “I don’t really know about the young part, but I know when I was about 15, I knew it was the drugs and the money.”

CC was approximately 17 when she met a pimp who brought her into his home with promises of affection. He made her feel special. After less than a week in his home, he talked her into taking drugs even though she was frightened. She enjoyed the feeling drugs afforded and quickly became addicted. Then, her pimp told her to go work so she could buy more drugs. She stated her most significant factor as, “The drugs. The drugs. Cuz needin the money for the drugs.”

Shanee had grown up with “fast and easy money,” and she found that working conventional jobs did not provide what she wanted for herself and her daughter. She discovered that men in the neighborhood wanted to be with her. At 17, she began waitressing at a topless club, turned tricks until two or three in the morning, got a couple hours of sleep, and attended high school the next day. Her mom did not know about Shanee’s sex work, but she made comments that indicated suspicion. She related, “I wasn’t victimized. I was just a victim of circumstances. I did what I wanted to do because that’s what I chose to do. To get money to provide for me and my daughter.”

Spring became pregnant at 17 and had no support from the father or her family. She only had an eighth grade education and was unsure how she would support herself

and her child. Her friends talked her into dancing and helped her attain a fake identification card. She said, “I just went there for my bills, for my money.”

Sunny was introduced to the sex industry when her college-aged aunt took her to a nude modeling studio. Sunny was offered a job when she turned 16. When she first began, she took a client into a private room and danced for him. When the johns began to pick other girls instead of her, Sunny inquired about it, found that the other women offered more explicit sexual acts, and followed suit. Sunny thought, “Well, I gotta get money. And it’s like, you’re getting yourself from one meal to the next. And some people don’t understand that.”

Farrah was 26 when she began working in a strip club. She found that being an apartment manager did not provide enough money to support her children and her drug addiction. Farrah’s friend told her she could make good money stripping, and although she was hesitant at first, her friend talked her into it, stating that stripping is not the same as prostitution. Her answer to the question of most significant factor was “money. It made me feel wanted. Being in control after not having control in that bad relationship.”

When Monica was 22, she was divorced with three children. She did not want to work several low paying jobs because she wanted to spend time with her children. She “did the math” and began working at a strip club. She needed “to survive. Just needing to know that when I laid my head down at night, my bills are paid, my kids are cared for, because their dads aren’t around. And my family couldn’t do it. And it was me against the world. And that’s how it’s always been.”

When Rebecca neared 30, her depression and anxiety made it difficult to hold a steady job. She had answered phones for an escort agency, “and then I was like, man, these people are making some good money.” Being overweight, she felt as though she was undesirable, “but I’ve always kinda had a pretty face, and apparently being big is kinda a thing for some guys.” She began making the same amount of money in one hour as she had earned working four full days at her previous job.

Not being loved by my parents. I think that the sexual abuse certainly didn’t help. I think that it was a factor. But I think even if the sexual abuse didn’t happen, I would have still gone that way. Because I just, you know, I think my dad loved me. It’s just, when I think of parents, I don’t think about him. I think about my mom. Even me and my sister, we don’t ever wonder about our birth father. It’s not even an issue. I think that my mom just did so much damage to my psyche. That’s probably the main factor. I think that if there was no physical abuse, there was only sexual abuse, I probably still would’ve gotten into it because it would’ve been a control issue. But since the physical abuse started first, I think that is probably the biggest one. Just not ever feeling loved.

Like Rebecca, Taylor was nearing 30 when she began waitressing at a strip club until she could figure out another way to provide for her children. She quickly discovered that while a waitress made, at most, \$80 per night, the dancers earned ten times that much. When a well-dressed business man asked if she would go to the VIP room with him, she transitioned to dancing.

You know, I feel like my circumstance is slightly different than a lot of other women, because I made a conscious decision to go into it, so. And I apologize if that twists the study any. Under educated. Because if I had gotten my degree before I had three kids, I could’ve probably gotten a job pretty quickly. And maybe the feeling of defeat. I just felt defeated. You know, it was right before Christmas, what are you gonna do? I had to do something. And 9-11 had already happened and it had been going on a few years. And the economy was steadily going downhill. So I just think I was undereducated and feeling very defeated at the time.

The participants found that sex work took care of the overwhelming issues they were facing. It provided the money needed to meet addictions and provide for their families. Although they entered the industry at different ages and under different circumstances, commercial sex work temporarily solved the combination of providing for needs while equipped with limited resources.

What Happened Next?

The participants cited both positive and negative elements about their time in the sex industry. Interestingly, more positive references (67) than negative references (35) were made in this category. Entering the sex industry solved some of their problems at this point, and that felt liberating. (See Figure 7.) They spoke of enjoying a sense of control, liking the attention, and feeling desirable. Additionally, they made enough money to provide for their children, addictions, and some luxuries they had never experienced. Four women spoke of making a distinction between themselves and other prostituted women. Taylor would “look around and I was like, uh! I’d never! I like to sleep at night, thank you! Can you believe that? I was passing that judgment. And I meant it.”

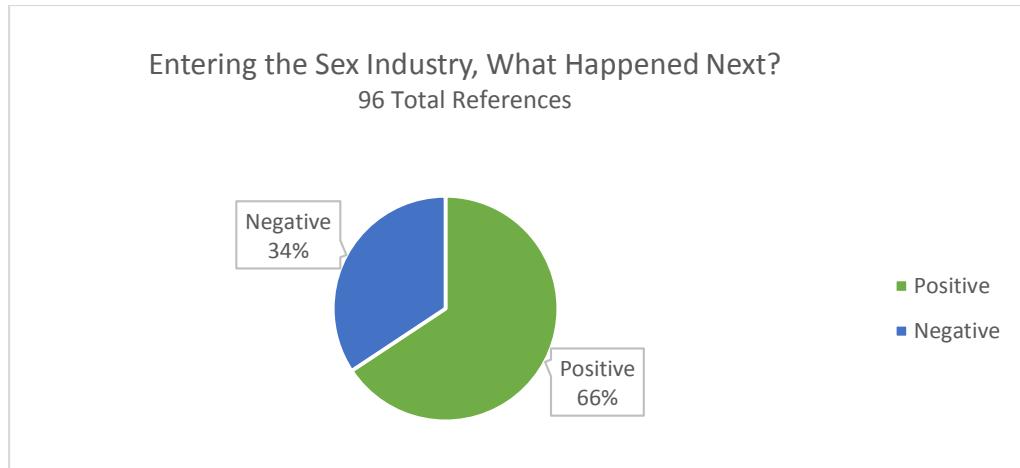


Figure 7. Entering the sex industry, what happened next?

Positive. The participants talked about three main positive events while in the sex industry: a sense of control, enjoying attention and feeling desired, and making good money. Seven participants enjoyed a sense of control. The only two that did not discuss an aspect of control were the two who started out with pimps. The others decided what days and hours they worked. Farrah said, “I could come and go as I wanted! I was making money. People were looking at me, and I finally had control.” She experienced a sense of freedom and was happier while stripping than she had ever been with her abusive husband. She had no control in her marriage, and she clung to this new feeling. Spring stated, “Only wanted to do it if I really wanted to. And sometimes even if you were giving me the money, and I wasn’t feeling it, I’d just be like, I’m not doing that! You’re crazy. Or, I’m not gonna let you look at me like that, or whatever.” Taylor pointed out that the sense of control was an illusion. She stated, “I felt powerful or empowered, because I was in charge. But really overall, you’re not, cuz the person that’s got the money’s in charge.”

Four women spoke of enjoying the attention and feeling desired. At first, it was easy for Rebecca

because of my issues with wanting to be loved and wanted, cuz I've always thought I was ugly and I've never really had relationships very much. And at the time, it gave me some self esteem, because to me, it felt like I was being picked. But I think that the attention and the sex was addictive, cuz I wasn't of the thought that you can't enjoy it when you had a client. To me, I'm like, if I'm gonna be here, I'm gonna enjoy it! And I never had boyfriends, so it didn't matter to me. So it was a way for me to get sex and not have to worry about having strings attached or having someone bugging me or calling me or coming over or all the stuff that I'm not good at.

Sunny enjoyed the attention she received from men. She remembered "they'd line us up and the guy would be like, hmm, do I want her? Let me see. Can you turn around? Okay, I'll take Sunny. I'm like, oh, goody! He picked me! It fed my ego, because I thought, I'm so friggin hot." Taylor said, "I must have needed an ego boost."

The third positive aspect the women spoke of was making money. All nine participants stated that the money allowed them to take care of the pressing needs they felt, whether it be to provide for her children, feed her addiction, or both. Farrah remembered her elation when she first began stripping. Suddenly, "I had bubble bath and toilet paper AND conditioner! And conditioner! Conditioner! On top of the shampoo! I had food to eat, I had clothes!" Monica felt that the money made her a better mother.

If I could make enough money in a week, still be a mom, and still be at home and still be available, to minimize daycare, to minimize every family member I didn't trust, to minimize all of the extra drama, I would rather go to the strip club. And I think if I had to do this all over again, I'd do it the same exact way.

Spring was proud that at the age of 19, she had a two bedroom apartment for her and her daughter. Taylor made enough money in two days to cover her house payment. She then remodeled the entire house, but “the money didn’t roll in for doing nothing.”

Negative. Several negative attributes were also discussed in reference to each woman’s time in the sex industry. Four women spent time in prison for offenses of stealing, drug use, and prostitution. Three women discussed having negative views of men and sex. By the time Mary Margaret was 16,

I was a pro. I was a straight up pro. You know, we had to watch sex movies, we had to have some toys. Rubber penises and handcuffs, and you know, shit like that. Grew up thinking, shit, that’s what I’m supposed to do. That’s what it is, sex and being with men, and shit, where’s the compassion, where’s the love? Men will say anything and women will just fall for it. You’re so pretty, or you swingin on a pole half ass naked, or just come on, come home with me, I’ll take care of you. Only for a couple weeks. Only until you stop druggin or until your menstrual cycle then they don’t want you anymore. I remember a lot of men just put me out because I was having a menstrual cycle. Your purpose is not needed anymore.

When I asked if she knew that some people actually had compassion and love along with sex, she said, “I didn’t know it existed. For real, did not. Sometimes even at this age now, still don’t. I know it’s out there, but I just avoid any. Ten years celibate, I’m okay. I just don’t want to deal with it.” In reference to how she feels about men, Taylor said, “I don’t trust em. Ninety percent of them had wedding bands on. Ninety percent. Yeah! And no shame! No shame.”

A third negative aspect was brought up by CC, whose years of drug use began to take a heavy toll on her body. Her body could not process the synthetic narcotics her pimp introduced her to, and CC was diagnosed with kidney failure. She was crushed,

feeling like it was the end of the world. The doctor tried to encourage her by reminding her that Sheila E. lived for many years while on dialysis, and she replied, “Well, she has money.” CC received a liver transplant, but her body rejected the new organ. She’s been on dialysis for the past 20 years. CC discussed her health in six different areas. She gets around by use of a scooter because her body is left frail from synthetic drug abuse.

Entering the Sex Industry Summary

Within this topic, participants discussed what was happening, what actions they took, and what happened next. Eight women spoke of needing to provide for themselves or their children without the benefit of family, child support, or a good education. They talked about facing drug and money addictions. The topic of brainwashing was discussed in that someone else had control over their minds. The women were in unhealthy relationships, enduring physical abuse and unfaithful partners. Spring could not understand why her husband was not jealous of other men watching her dance. In fact, he often brought his friends to watch her work. Some partners used or sold illegal drugs. Rebecca’s mother continued to mentally abuse her as an adult.

Faced with these difficulties, the women attempted to make money through both conventional work and sex work. Seven women worked at conventional jobs, but they all found that the pay was not enough. Sunny had a glimpse of a “boring” day job and a “fun” night job. At 16, she chose the fun job. Each woman eventually entered the commercial sex industry. The reasoning included providing for their children, making money, and buying drugs.

They disclosed both positive and negative aspects to sex work. It did provide good money, and they were able to provide for their children. Monica loved being able to spend time with her children with an hourly job that paid more than three minimum wage jobs. Farrah finally had shampoo and conditioner, a luxury for her. They felt a sense of control. Often, they picked what days and hours they worked. They said who could touch them and who could not. The participants spoke of feeling desired and enjoyed the attention they received. Some felt chosen and sexy.

Despite some positive aspects of sex work, the participants reported definite negative repercussions. Four women were incarcerated. Some spoke of having negative views of sex and men. Mary Margaret wondered where love and compassion fit in with sex. Taylor stated that 90% of her clients wore wedding bands, which caused her to distrust men. In addition to emotional distress, participation in the sex industry contributed to failing health. CC's drug use has left her permanently on dialysis. Three women reported receiving severe beatings. In the end, commercial sex work provided what they needed at that point in time, but it was not something that they would recommend. When Spring had been out of the industry for several years, her teenage daughter needed to make some money. Her daughter brought up the idea of waitressing temporarily at a strip club. Spring said, "Megan, don't do it. It will eat your soul forever. I promise you, if you go in there and you make like \$100, that \$100 is gonna cost you for the rest of your life. I promise you."

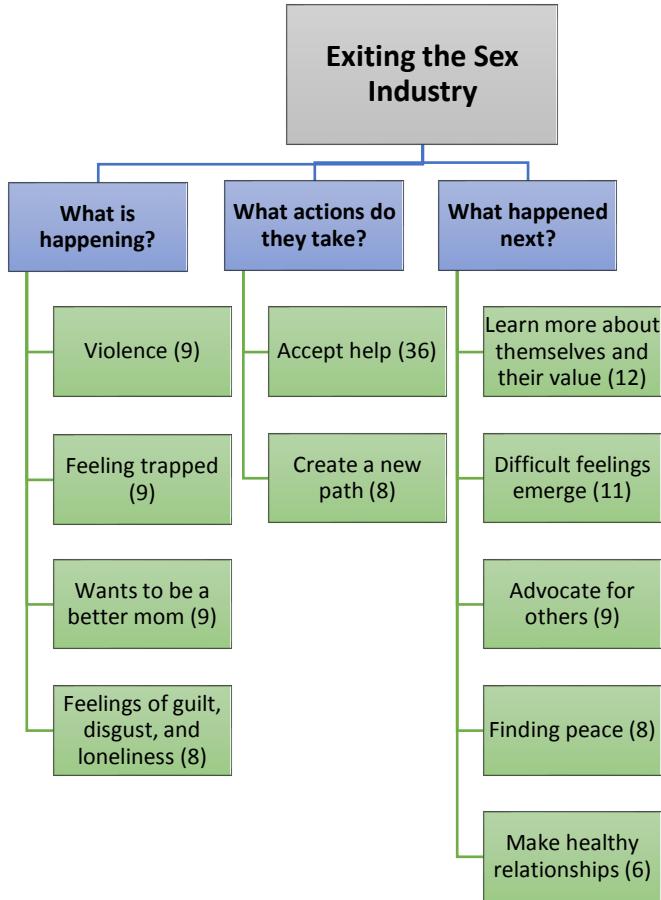


Figure 8. Exiting the sex industry node structure

Exiting the Sex Industry

Although an exit from the sex industry is not part of the original research question, it is an important part of the story, and therefore important to share. This category deals with the final exit from the sex industry. Some participants tried to leave several times but eventually made their ways back. Those attempts are not discussed here; rather, they are included while the participant is still in the industry. As with the previous time frames, exiting the sex industry was broken into three pieces: what was happening, how the participants responded, and what happened next. When looking at

what was happening, the women tired of living with violence. They felt trapped and lonely. They experienced feelings of guilt and disgust. The majority of the women felt that they had to leave the industry in order to be a better mother.

What is Happening?

The women spoke of several factors that pushed them to the breaking point. Three discussed violent attacks against them. Four women mentioned feeling trapped. Monica said, “It’s a trap for all of us that have to go through this.” Monica “wanted more for me,” and Rebecca “wanted some happiness. I knew that all the different things I had tried weren’t gonna work.” Participants spoke of feelings of disgust, guilt, and loneliness. Taylor relayed her revulsion at walking into the strip club with its smells of cigarette smoke and semen.

I just remember feeling disgusted. Disgusted. Like if I had to fake it one more time, fake that I liked someone, fake that I think they’re handsome, or faked that I think they hung the moon. Cuz it was all fake. It was an act. Talk about academy awards. Phew. And then there just comes a time when you can’t act anymore. You’re just, like, done. Put a fork in me. You’re ugly, you’re fat, hell no. You’re too old, get the hell away from me. So, not ‘no,’ but ‘hell no.’ Brush your teeth.

Rebecca’s regular clients brought her gifts and complained about their wives not wanting to have sex anymore. She told them, “Well, when was the last time you bought her this? You went out of town, and you bought me a t-shirt and perfume. Did you bring her anything?” While in the beginning, Rebecca felt as though she was chosen, she began to experience guilt at being with married men. She became lonely.

Even though I was chosen and somebody was willing to spend that much money on me, they always left and went back to someone else. That's what it felt like to me. I'm good enough for this, but I'm not good enough to be loved for a long period of time.

Seven women spoke of wanting to be a better mother. In her childhood memories, Shanee talked about her mother being in prison for five years. Shanee missed her during that time, and her mother regretted the choices that took her away from her children. Repeating the cycle, Shanee spent five years in prison while her two children were young. She said, "That alone made me, just being away from my daughters, I felt lost. So I made up my mind, you know, I have to go home and do things better and different. And that's what I did." Likewise, Spring talked about wanting to be a better role-model for her children. She told herself, "I gotta do something different with my kids. I would be devastated if my kids were to be in that kinda living that I did. I don't want to ruin my daughters' lives. I want them to do things I didn't do."

Sunny became upset when her daughter was old enough to answer the door to let a client in the house, telling her mom that a friend was visiting.

I was like, oh my god, you need to go in your room immediately. And then another time, I was crossing the hallway from the room to the bathroom, and I was naked and she saw me. She said, Mommy, can I come out of my room now? So I was in the moment of the money and the man is here and I said GET YOUR ASS BACK IN YOUR ROOM! And then I felt like, oh my god, I just screamed at her for me being a fuckin hooker. So I had to go in there and patch that up. She was like, why are you in there for so long? I was like, woo, I don't wanna have to explain all this shit. So I'm just gonna stop doin this.

Taylor summed up this category by saying, "I thought a great living equaled stability for my children. And it did not!"

The fourth interview question directly related to this time in their lives. Each participant was asked, "Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?" This led to a follow-up question of, "Why did you finally leave?" The answers to these prompts became an important part of the study, because this is when a lifelong cycle was broken. As will be discussed in the conclusions, the participants continually sought solutions that temporarily fulfilled their needs. However, those solutions later became their own problems. When the participants finally left the sex industry, they found resources that were strong enough to provide a solid solution. Due to the importance of this issue, all participants' responses are given.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

CC: Yes, many times. I cried, especially when the guy beat me. If I didn't bring him enough money or didn't perform oral sex with him and whoever they brought. I just couldn't see myself at that time, because you know, I was still new at it, and I had some horrors about some things I didn't want to do. And I would get beat up, and I would go cry and want to leave, and try to leave. I did try to leave one time. They said to me, girl, they conned me back.

Why did you finally leave?

I got pushed out of a car one time, and scarred all up. And I got a gun pulled to my head, and I think that's what made me stop. That was the last straw. Because I prayed my way out of that. Of the gun. The whole time I was just saying the Lord's Prayer. I was saying, God if you would just let me make it, I won't ever go back. He let me survive.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Farrah: Yes. Towards the end, I didn't know how to do it. I didn't know how to get out. I didn't know what to do. I was so used to that lifestyle, and all my friends were in it. So, anytime I tried to do the right thing? You can't do the right thing and do drugs around people. They just don't do the right thing.

Why did you finally leave?

I quit shooting up drugs, had slowed down, and got rid of that guy. And I got pregnant, and I thought, okay, here it is. I gotta do somethin. I can't be a stripper mom. I can't do both. I can't do both. It's like, you can't do drugs and your life. Just can't manage both. Can't do both.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Mary Margaret: And I don't remember actually what happened, I just remember [my boyfriend] changing the locks, locking up all the, like the patio door and the windows, and had my ID on the front door. He told me to go stay in a shelter, cuz he didn't want me there anymore. And here I am with my, it was cold! Okay, it was snowing! What the hell am I gonna do?

Why did you finally leave?

My first daughter, I smoked, I did a bunch of drugs with her, and they took her. And my son, I was still doing drugs, and he [was adopted out]. So, when I [got pregnant with twins], I thought that would be my second chance with children. And then he told me I was having a boy and a girl, and I thought, oh my god. I gotta get my shit together. It was hard, you know. Single and two kids, you know. There was a lot time when I just wanted to leave my children in the house and thought somebody would find them. I don't know. But I'm looking at these little bitty people and I know they need somebody. They need somebody that's gonna love them and take care of them. And who can treat them better than me?

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Monica: Yeah, I wanted out early, I just, you know, the town I was living in, there wasn't bigger strip clubs, bigger money. It was one tiny little hole in the wall place. A mom and pop kinda environment and there just wasn't no money there and I was like, I can't do this anymore, making \$100 a night, it wasn't good enough, you know? So I moved to [a big city], cuz there's one on every street corner. They're everywhere.

Why did you finally leave?

My oldest kid at the time, he was in second grade, and there was some people he made friends with at school. And their parents kept saying to me, well, you know, there's this program at my church that meets on Wed nights for women who do, you know, quote on quote. And I was like, how would you even know? Was it written across my forehead? But they kept pushin, and kept pushin, and kept pushin, and I said, you know what? I think I'm gonna go ahead and go with you. I think I'm gonna go, because I'm really tired of this. I'm really seeing that everything you're explaining to me about what you know about the program seems like, if I check it out and it's legitimate, I might be down with that.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Rebecca: I don't know. Financially, I could always fall back on substitute teaching. It's not a lot, but I could have made it. But, at the same time, mentally, I couldn't handle working that much at the time. My depression and anxiety was really bad at that time. I don't think that there was ever a time that I couldn't

have left. But at the time, I would've come up with an excuse that I couldn't have left.

How or why did you finally leave?

I was going to counseling and my counselor had told me she had accepted a position to go private, and that was gonna be our last session. And so I told her about being an escort. I had never told her. And she's like, don't you think you should have told me? And I was like, well, you've got a cross on your wall, and I didn't want to offend you. She told me about Hope is Here, and she said that she didn't know anything about them, she just heard about them, and I should check em out.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Shanee: No, because whenever I was tired, I was tired, and I didn't do it. Because there was no one tellin me I had to do anything because I put my money in the savings, my bills were always paid. So, no.

Why did you finally leave?

It wasn't until I went to prison. Me being there those five years, you know, it was a eye opening experience for me. It really was. Because it totally, my mind frame, because I started feeling remorse for what I'd done to people and things like that. And before I did, before it was all about me and my family. I could care less about anything else. And so, yeah, I can say that prison system broke me. I don't know about anyone else, but it did me.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Spring: Oh yeah, lots of times. I told myself I would get out by the time I was 30. I got married when I was 25, had my daughter when I was 24. And I really thought after I had the baby I would get on schedule.

How or why did you finally leave?

My aunt and my cousin came [to Hope it Here] first. And I was like, I'm gonna try it. I'm ready for that change. And I just haven't had it yet. So they accepted me, and I was here for maybe 6 months or a year, and they sent me to this class to better my outlook on myself, to see what I needed to do to get a job.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Sunny: The money. Most girls are like addicted to crack or beat up by their pimps so they have to stay. I was addicted to money.

How or why did you finally leave?

When I first started coming [to Hope is Here] and they were like, oh, we'll pay your rent. I'm like, okay. I thought, well I'll need money for clothes and stuff. I needed money.

Was there a time you wanted to get out but didn't know how?

Taylor: Yeah! Yeah. If I could've found a job that paid decent right away, I never would have in the first place.

Why did you finally leave?

I met a guy. Okay, you're going to pay for me to not work? Okay! I'll quit.
(After he and Taylor broke up, she sought assistance from Hope is Here.)

Throughout their lives, the participants were faced with overwhelming issues that required solutions. Due to limited resources, the participants chose solutions that were unstable and temporary. When the issue became wanting to exit the sex industry, the participants were offered or sought help outside of the realm of resources they had previously used.

What Actions do They Take?

To make their final exit, the participants relied on two main things: creating a new path for themselves and receiving help. Farrah knew that she could not leave while she was still tied to friends who used drugs. She needed “abstinence from drugs and alcohol and new friends.” She found both by attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Taylor signed up for college. Rebecca, whose clients came to the home, stopped cleaning her residence.

As long as my apartment looked like that, there's no way I'm gonna let someone come in. I think that that was my insulation to keep me from going back, for a long time. Because you know, every now and then, I would get lonely, and I'm like, it would be nice if I could just call up one of those old guys. I had to take away the temptations, so I changed phone companies, changed my phone number.

She asked her doctor to change her depression and anxiety medications to ones that would be more effective.

Assistance was sometimes mandated through a court ordered stay in rehab, and other times, it was offered through a friend, family member, or stranger telling them about Hope is Here. A college professor confronted Sunny.

So everybody thinks I'm a college girl. Baby, I'm college girl by day, prostitute all night. So, one of my teachers said, I need to talk to you in my office. I was thinking, I turned in all my paperwork, I don't know what this bitch's problem is. So I go in there and sit down. She says, you're a single mom. I said, yeah, I don't see what that has to do with this class. She closed the door. She's hard core, so she's just like me. She's like, sit down, and we're gonna talk! How are you makin ends meet? And I said, do you really want to know? And she said, well I asked you didn't I? And I said, I'm a prostitute. And she said, no you're not. You are way too smart and way too beautiful. And I said, you know what? I said, how much do you make an hour? She didn't want to answer. Well I can make twice as much as that in five minutes and be right back in there with my kid. She was like, that ain't a good way to raise your daughter. So she said, there's this place called Hope is Here. I want you to go there. So, TWO YEARS later, I called Hope is Here. [I thought everyone knew about the organization] except for me! Why don't I know about it? So I'm like, everybody knows about this but me. That's because I'm supposed to be a prostitute forever. If someone would've cared about me, they would've told me.

All the participants received help from Hope is Here. Farrah related calling Dr. Carter from the pay phone at the "titty bar. And I said, I'll finish the weekend and be done. And she said, you can finish now. You can walk out right now. You can get your stuff and leave now. So I just turned around and told everybody bye."

What Happened Next?

The participants spoke of many different things that have happened since receiving help and exiting the sex industry. The women continually deal with difficult emotions that emerge from prior hurts or decisions they have made in the past. CC is disappointed that drugs forever ruined her kidney and left her with a frail body. Mary

Margaret regrets having to give up her son. She has “anger that I gave him up, and hurt that I didn’t give him that life.” Rebecca is now a representative speaker for Hope is Here. “When I first started speaking to groups and everybody was kinda rich well-dressed women, all I could think of was, what are the chances that I’ve been with one or two of their husbands?” Rebecca needed to work out her anger toward God and people who did not protect her. She felt like God “didn’t love me. That I was created be abused and to be a maid. And the little bit that I felt like, the people at church should have seen the bruises and that kinda stuff.”

They say that they have found peace and are learning more about themselves. Many participants spoke of the benefits of counseling sessions through Hope is Here. They received financial help to bridge their exit. They are seeing life clearly and learning how to be in healthy relationships. Sunny is learning how to date.

When he pulls up to the house, he’s probably thinkin I’m gonna give him a kiss. I’m like, alright! Have a good night! Peace out! And I get outta the car and leave. And you know, at first, I kinda felt guilty. I kinda felt like, damn, I’m using this guy. And then I felt like, you know what? That’s what I was supposed to be doin in the beginning! So, now I’m dating. Before, I was hoing. Now, I’m dating, and it feels so weird.

The women are now advocates. All nine are in the leadership group at Hope is Here. They speak on behalf of the organization, and they mentor women who have just entered the program. Rebecca, who contemplated suicide for much of her life, wants to work with adolescents.

Because I see things that other people wouldn’t notice. You know, I have a suicide attempt in my past, and I think that I notice things about abuse. I notice things about people that don’t fit in. And see, sometimes I wonder, am I over

identifying? But I don't think so. I think God has used my experiences to help the people that I was searching to help me.

And until I started Hope is Here, I didn't really know who I was. I've gotten to know who I am, and I kinda like me. I've got a lot of healing. I think that my mental illness and the healing and the leaps and bounds I've made over that and the abuse issues makes me someone who is more empathetic and has something different to bring to the table. And I think that I'm getting better at protecting myself and being empathetic and not getting lost in somebody else's sorrow. For once, I'm not afraid to be alone with my own thoughts.

Sunny is seeking to start a non-profit group that helps women out of prostitution by providing other means of employment.

I want to make a change in this city, America if I can, the world really. That prostitution, I mean, it's a terrible thing, but I feel like it gets a really bad rap and a lot of times, people don't know all the circumstances and all the ins and outs. And the reasons why, the necessity that's there. And it's like, you're getting yourself from one meal to the next.

The past is not important anymore, and I can value the journey that I've taken. And I've learned from those mistakes and I feel like I can reach out to other people and I can speak their lingo. And they'll trust me and they'll feel comfortable with me because they'll be like, [she] has been there before. She knows what she's talking about.

Each woman spoke of positive life events since exiting the sex industry. In all, 46 positive references were coded. CC said that coming to the program "is like a peace of mind for me. It relaxes me. It helps me not to think about my past." Farrah stated, "I learned about God and my value and got counseling that I still go to. Can't imagine living without counseling. Just got educated and learned how to be a friend and a sister and mother and all that stuff." Mary Margaret now has flashbacks, but "my counselor she said that when you have these flashbacks, that you're in a good place to handle it. That's what she said. So, I feel like I am in a good place." Monica, who had learned to

rely on herself, said, “I came to [Hope is Here] to see if it was the real deal. If something out there really truly existed that I could literally not go back and never have to go back was the ideal. I just, I don’t know what would have happened if I hadn’t of done this.”

Shanee does not regret her past choices because they have made her into a strong woman. She stated, “I had to learn. I had to bump my head, I had to endure those things to be who I am today. And now, I’m trying to learn how to build healthy relationships because I never had a healthy relationship with a man.” Spring’s daughter noticed changes in her mother.

[My daughter] said when I started coming here, after a few years, she started seeing me change because I started having a real life. You know, it wasn’t like I was just trying to get sleep in the middle of the day so I can stay up all night. I started doing things with her instead of shoving her off to the daycare and babysitter.

Taylor appreciates the financial assistance she received and credits Hope is Here and Alcoholics Anonymous for her ten years of sobriety. Sunny no longer depends upon the approval of others.

So just now, at 34 years old, I’m starting to feel comfortable in my own skin and with myself. I go out in my yard and garden. I don’t have to call anyone and tell em I’m gardening. I don’t even have to take a picture of what I’m proud of and send it to anyone. The self-satisfaction from within is good enough for me now. Which hasn’t been the case for the past 30 years. For 30 years, I’ve looked for someone else’s approval. And now, I’m satisfied with my own opinion of myself.

Exiting the Sex Industry Summary

The participants discussed their final exit from the commercial sex industry. The women had endured physical violence and had become disgusted by some of the clients. They spoke about feelings of guilt and loneliness. Rebecca stated that she was good

enough for an hour but not good enough to be loved for a long period of time. They wanted to be better mothers. They expressed their desires to stay out of prison and to keep their own daughters from taking this same path.

To exit the commercial sex industry, the participants needed to make life modifications and receive outside assistance. Farrah's plan included finding new friends and embracing sobriety. She found both through attending AA meetings. Rebecca deleted her clients' numbers and changed her own number. She asked her doctor for new medication to help with her depression and anxiety. The women found help through the courts, friends, and family members. They all received counseling and financial assistance from Hope is Here.

Now that they have left the industry, they are processing through difficult memories in their past. They work through feelings of anger and regret. They are learning to like themselves and have healthy relationships with others. Furthermore, they advocate for others in the industry.

Summarizing Findings and Connection to the Research Question

How do adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation talk about factors that led to their victimization?

In regards to the research question, the participants spoke of two main time periods in which contributing events occurred: childhood and entering the sex industry. The third time frame, exiting the sex industry, does not relate to the research question, but it has been recorded to preserve each participant's story.

Childhood was defined as beginning at birth and lasting until the participant entered the sex industry or turned 18, whichever came first. The only exception was Mary Margaret, who was eight when she was trafficked from her uncle's home. Her remarks were left in the childhood category until she left her uncle's house as a teenager.

Both positive and negative events occurred in childhood. There were 39 total positive references in three categories: buffering adults (21); enjoying school, sports, and peers (11); and having their physical needs met (7). Eight participants contributed thoughts to this area.

There were far more negative references, totaling 172. All nine participants contributed information to this area. (See Figure 9.) Endangered with lack of protection and guidance had the most references (73), and transient household was second (41). Problems with school, peers, and behavior (38), and parent mental health disorders (20) were also presented. The women discussed situations that overwhelmed them and the lack of resources to fully deal with their circumstances.

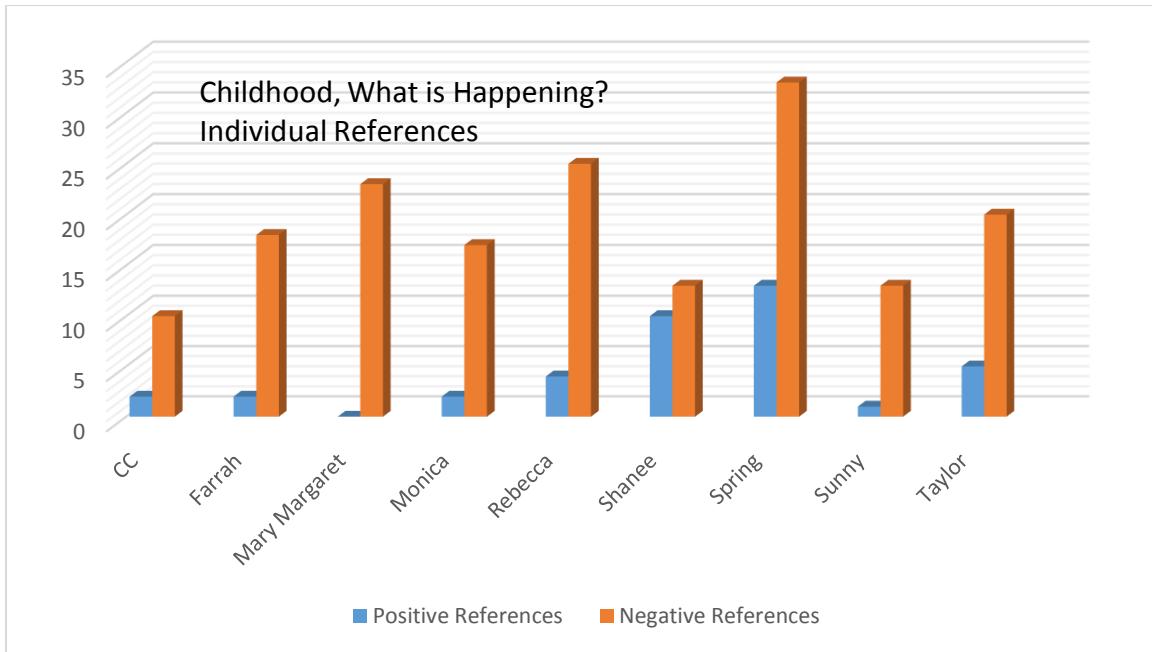


Figure 9. Childhood, what is happening? Individual references

The participants behaved rebelliously while pursuing autonomy (24) by hanging out with new peers, using drugs, and lying to their parents. There were several mentions to “doing things that I wanted to do.” They sought attention, acceptance, and escape (24) through running away, sexual relationships, and drug use. Their peer groups, although bad influences, provided an acceptance for the participants. What happened emerged as several different modes of exploitation (14), including rape and an introduction to addictive narcotics.

Their entry into the sex industry was born out of a desire to combat an overwhelming situation. They had to provide for their children (22) with little to no support from their families or their children’s fathers. They were in unhealthy relationships (34) that left them physically and mentally harmed and spoke of being

brainwashed by another person (9). They faced addictions to drugs and money (24). Conventional jobs (13) failed to provide the resources they needed to correct their situations, so they turned to sex work.

The data show both positive and negative references to their experiences in the commercial sex industry. They were able to make enough money to provide for themselves and their families (23) and had extra time to spend with their children by earning a higher hourly wage (4). They enjoyed the sense of control it afforded (18). They felt desirable and enjoyed the attention (22). However, working in the sex industry led to incarceration (9), and references were made to having negative views of men and sex (6). Drug addiction (14) decimated their bodies and disrupted their frames of mind.

Eventually, the participants found that the sex industry no longer fulfilled their needs and desires. They spoke of violence (9) at the hands of men and continued health problems (4). Some women wanted to be a better mother and a good example for their daughters (9). They felt trapped in the industry (9) and wanted more for themselves (4). They struggled with feelings of disgust, guilt, and loneliness (8).

To secure a final exit, they created a new path (8) and accepted financial and emotional help (36). While they continue to work through difficult feelings (11), they have been finding peace (8) and learning about themselves (12). They have discovered what healthy relationships are (6), see life more clearly (2), and are learning to trust

others (2). Currently, the participants advocate for those who have faced their same struggles (9). Sunny shared, “Some of us are very highly motivated. We just need direction.”

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study evaluated how survivors of commercial sexual exploitation discuss factors that led to their victimization. Nine women who were previously in the sex industry were interviewed. The interviews were transcribed, and constant comparative analysis was utilized to categorize the information. This study used grounded theory to add to existing literature on sexually exploited women.

Victimization

The guiding research question of this study explored how survivors of the commercial sex industry spoke of factors that led to their victimization. However, the word victimization was a sticking point with several participants. Mary Margaret, whose uncle trafficked her at age eight, and CC, who was also controlled by a pimp, did not object to me using the word victimization. Farrah asked me to clarify the question, so I rephrased it, asking when she had been trafficked. She stated, “I was not trafficked, but I was a stripper for like 10 years. And you cross boundaries. I trafficked myself.” Likewise, Shanee did not consider herself a victim. “I don’t call myself being trafficked or pimped, I was just a victim of circumstances.” She repeated several times during the interview that she had made her own choices. At the end of the interview, I told her that anyone who works in the sex industry before the age of 18, as she did, is automatically considered by law as a trafficking victim. She stated that this law was not in effect when

she was a teenager; therefore, it did not apply to her. I asked if she wished her mother would have protected her from her bad decisions; she said that her mother could not have stopped her.

As stated earlier, The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (U.S. DOS, 2014) states that any minor working in the sex industry is trafficked. Minors cannot legally consent to sex. Although not all the participants agree with the term “victim,” the women who were minors when entering the industry — CC, Mary Margaret, Shanee, Spring, and Sunny — are legally considered victims.

The participants who were adults when they first entered the sex industry are not legally defined as having been victimized, and they did not claim to be victims. However, women in the sex industry are treated as commodities rather than human beings.

A prostituted woman explained, “What rape is to others, is normal to us.” Prostitution is a cornerstone of rape culture. Rape cultures normalize the objectification and commodification of women as sex and blame victims for their own victimization. The global finding that women aged 15-44 are more likely to be injured or killed by male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined – only makes sense when understood as a result of cultural acceptance of sexual violence. Prostitution is a commodified form of violence against women, a last-ditch survival option rather than a job choice. The lies that prostitution is a victimless crime, that she chose it, or even that prostitution isn’t really happening at all –enable people to avoid the discomfort of knowing about the brutal realities of prostitution (Farley et al., 2005).

The APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls states that sexualization occurs when “a person is sexually objectified — that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making”

(2008, para. 3). Farley (2013) states, “In prostitution, johns and pimps transform certain women and girls into objects for sexual use” (p. 2). It is the opinion of the researcher that when a woman is defined as a “thing for others’ sexual use,” she has become a victim. Therefore, for the purposes of this research study, all survivors were classified as victims.

The Question of Most Significant Factor

Each participant was asked a form of the question, “What do you think was the most significant factor to your being victimized?” Besides the fact that several participants corrected the word victimized, some women’s answers were different than what I viewed to be the most significant factor. For instance, CC stated that her addiction to drugs was the most significant factor. In order to afford her addiction, she prostituted herself. But in my mind, a chain of events was apparent. The participant did go into the commercial sex industry to buy drugs, but the pimps introduced her to the narcotics. She met the pimps when she ran away from home due to underlying issues between her parents and her baby. She became pregnant because she wanted more attention after finding out that she had a different father than her siblings. I see the most significant factors to be found in her childhood home. CC sought more attention, tried several avenues to receive it, and eventually moved in with a pimp after he told her, “you need more of my time and attention.”

Mary Margaret’s answer to that question surprised me. She replied, “The money. The drugs.” As previously stated, she was eight when her mother kicked her out of the house and sent her to live with her uncle, who began pimping her out. I asked her to think

back to when it first started. “Oh, I don’t really know about the young part, but I know when I was about 15, I knew it was the drugs and the money. Drugs and the money. You know, being raped was part of it. Being abused was, you know, it is what it is. But money and drugs.” In an effort to clarify, I asked if she would say that her mother or uncle were some of the factors of her victimization. She replied, “Well, it wasn’t, I really didn’t have anybody that just loved me. Besides the men who molested me. So I don’t think it was, I don’t know at that age.” In my mind, that was the most significant factor. Mary Margaret had no one who simply loved her. She related the horrors of her childhood, but she blamed her victimization on her pursuit of money and drugs.

Happy Childhood

Another time in which I felt differently than the participants was when I prompted them to tell me about their childhoods. Two participants stated that they had a good childhood. CC “had a good childhood life.” She then went on to relate the story of her having a different father and seeking out ways to receive more attention, becoming pregnant at age 14. Farrah stated two times, “I had a great childhood.” However, in her story, she explained that her mother worked all the time and hardly paid attention to her. Farrah went back and forth between her divorced parents’ houses both by choice and as a means of punishment. She wished that she and her siblings were taught to value one another and form a strong bond. She snuck out to be with the boy who would eventually become her abusive husband and said that her parents could not have done anything to

stop her. However, with the statements about the general lack of parental presence, it can be argued that her parents were not investing the time necessary to steer her actions.

Grounded Theory

The findings were categorized into childhood, entering the sex industry, and exiting the sex industry. The first two provided information for the guiding research question:

How do adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation talk about factors that led to their victimization?

The third category, exiting the sex industry, developed naturally out of the stories shared by the participants, was recorded to preserve their complete accounts, and was used in the theory development. Each category was divided into three parts: what is happening, how the participants respond, and what happens next.

The action-interaction portion of shaping data tends to be descriptive in nature (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this study, the action-interaction was found by asking what was happening and what actions the participants had taken in response to those events. The next step in theory building is investigating what happens after the responses.

Corbin and Strauss explain:

Action-interaction also has to be connected to consequences. If these connections are not made, the findings are more descriptive than theoretical. They may be informative and give insight, but they lack the ability to explain how persons act and interact to shape and gain control over events and happenings in their lives (p. 172).

To fully understand the full picture of conditions, responses, and consequences, the grounded theory researcher uses process.

Process describes a “sequence of related acts [and] the continual adjustments in those acts as persons attempt to adapt to changes in conditions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 176). In this study, the phenomenon presented was the participants’ need for survival, and the process details how they achieved that survival. The data were analyzed and organized into a grounded theory of overwhelming issues, limited resources, hollow solutions.

Conceptual Summary

The core category of this study has been identified as “Overwhelming Issues, Limited Resources, Hollow Solutions.” (See Figure 10.) This concept represents the action-interaction shared by commercial sex workers in discussing factors that led to their victimization. This study identified three distinct phases repeating in a cyclical pattern. The participants (1) are presented with a situation that overwhelms them and (2) seek to solve that issue with limited resources, (3) achieving a hollow solution. This cycle repeats itself, as the solution is not solid enough to retain permanence. Many times, the solution becomes an overwhelming issue that must later be solved.

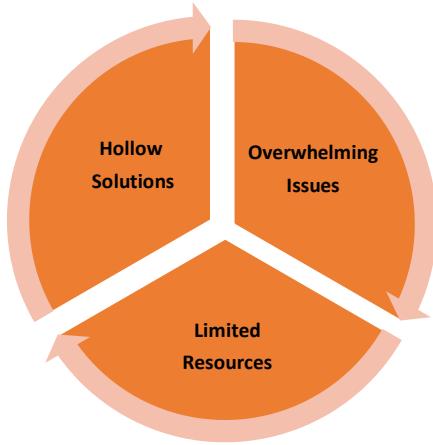


Figure 10. Conceptual summary

Overwhelming Issues

Each participant spoke of several overwhelming issues throughout the course of their stories, as seen in each ‘what is happening’ area. The issues began in childhood, with neglect, abuse, transience, and difficulties with peers. As the women strove to solve these problems, they often became entangled in another issue that needed to be addressed. For instance, CC wanted more attention, so she ran away from home. That became an issue, and she had nowhere to stay. Once the pimp took her in and gave her drugs, the addiction became overwhelming, so she began sex work. The sex industry later became an overwhelming issue. Literature often speaks of pimps forcing girls and women into sex work (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Hotaling et al., 2006; Lloyd, 2011). While only three of my participants had pimps, the rest of the women had different issues that were just as powerful as the control of a pimp. These issues ultimately overwhelmed them, calling for an immediate response.

Abuse. The women spoke of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse during childhood. Shanee witnessed her father murder a family member. The participants watched their parents struggle with substance abuse. Most of the participants experienced more than one type of victimization. High amounts of trauma and dysfunction were present in the home. Research indicates that these types of issues are common among women who have worked in the sex industry (Estes & Weiner, 2005; Reid, 2014; Ross et al, 2003; Shannon & Csete, 2010).

Addictions. Considering the issues they faced in childhood, they searched avenues of escape. These paths were temporal in nature, but they were the only options the participants were able to see. Drug use developed through means of acceptance, rebellion, and escape. The women found acceptance through peers who introduced them to drugs. Once they became addicted, they searched for a way to maintain the supply. They craved drugs, which felt overwhelming, and they looked for short-term solutions to that problem. This held an added component in that drugs often impair the decision making process (Davis et al., 2009). A drug addiction can overpower one's mind and take control over whatever reservations one may have about sex work (Murphy, 2007). This is a common theme among women in the commercial sex industry. The drug addiction forces them in sex work and traps them there (Murphy, 2010).

Not only did the participants discuss their own drug use, but they also talked about watching their parents struggle with substance abuse. Parental use of drugs created another overwhelming issue for the children. They experienced abuse and neglect when

parents were on drugs. Shanee lost her mother for five years when she was arrested for selling narcotics. Bountress and Chassin (2015) add that parents suffering from substance abuse provide a less stable home environment, increasing the chance of behavior problems in the children.

Their children. All but one of the participants spoke of the need to provide for her children. Their extended families were unwilling or unable to help, and they received little, if any, support from the fathers of their children. This is also a shared theme among sex workers (Murphy, 2010). The women were young when they began having children, and their youth, lack of education, and absence of job skills left them with a sense of desperation. As Monica said, “All by [age] 22, three kids, two men, divorced, on the stripper pole trying to make a living. It was hard, couldn’t even get rent paid, couldn’t pay daycare. I had to make choices.”

Later in their stories, the participants again discussed their children and expressed their desires to be better mothers. Spring wanted to “do something different with my kids. Cuz I don’t want them to be in that kinda living that I did.” Monica knew “with three kids I needed to be a better mom.” Research shows prostituted women talking frequently about their children (Dalla, 2006). The issue of children shows a clear cycle of an overwhelming need, limited resources, and choosing sex work as a hollow solution. The sex industry later became an overwhelming issue because they wanted to be a better mother. Their children were the reason for entry and exit.

Limited Resources

Limited resources showed up in many different forms, beginning with the lack of protection and guidance in childhood. Additionally, their physical environment offered finite opportunities. When discussing this research with peers, I am often asked, “Why would those women choose to do that?” Sunny provided the answer:

A lot of times, it’s rich white people that have come from a lot of money who are like, oh, well why can’t you just ask someone for help? Well, I don’t even have anybody to ask. And if I did, I wouldn’t want to ask for help, because my pride is so fuckin thick, that I’m better than that. I don’t have to ask for help.

Lack of protection and guidance. The lack of protection and guidance in their childhoods instantly limited their resources, as the women were not shown how to make decisions that would serve their long term interests. While this study did not ask the educational levels of the participants’ parents, it was suggested that education was not a priority in the household based on the dropout rate of the participants. This instantly limited their employment opportunities to jobs that do not require a degree.

The participants spoke of frustrations over not being protected from situations that overwhelmed them in childhood. Shanee wished that she could have received counseling as a child. Rebecca expressed anger towards God and the people at church because they “should have seen the bruises.” Mary Margaret’s mother told her outright that she was unwanted and unloved. Other participants were frustrated that not only did their mothers allow the abuse to continue, but they also blamed the child for the exploitation. Rebecca stated, “I think that what happens to us when we’re young leads us to [sex work]. I think prostitution isn’t the problem. I think it’s just a symptom of the problem.”

Lack of protection and guidance also constrained their resources in that they were not always taught about their individual worth. Monica stated, “I didn’t know what was wrong or right, so I just let it happen because I didn’t know better.” Their stories spoke of a belief that they are only valuable to men for sex. Mary Margaret was not taught that she has other qualities that make her special beyond her sexuality. When Sunny and I talked after her interview, she discussed dating. Even to this day, she feels bad when she does not have sex after her date buys dinner. I told her that the presence of her personality is enough. She replied:

You know what, Amy? You could say that to me every morning when I wake up. . . And you could write it on a t shirt and stamp it on my forehead, and I would still say to you, isn’t he mad at me, because I’m not having sex with him? I feel like I owe it to him.

Shanee’s parents were incarcerated for lengthy times during her childhood. Although she was cared for by other family members, she missed her mother. When her mother returned home, she found conventional work and tried to provide the guidance they needed. However, Shanee had grown accustomed to the fast money lifestyle. In addition, her mother played less of a parental role and more of a peer role by “trying to be our friend.”

The issue of limited guidance allowed the participants to spend time with peers who were participating in illegal activities. Adolescents with less consistent parenting are more likely to form deviant friendships, and drugs help solidify those relationships (Dishion & Owen, 2002). The attitudes and actions of the adolescents are then shaped by that group of peers.

Another way in which their upbringing led to a lack of resources is they learned they could not trust people. They had been let down and left unprotected time and again. Monica stated this as one reason why she was hesitant to go to Hope is Here.

I just was a little apprehensive, cuz I didn't know for sure if I made a commitment to it, they were gonna stick to it, cuz so many promises had been broken in my life. I'd been told things were gonna happen, they never did.

Other participants used phrases such as "I don't need anybody, because I was taught to rely on myself," and "it was me against the world. And that's how it's always been." From a young age, they were conditioned to believe they could only rely on themselves. Even if there was someone they could have asked for help, they had been habituated to believe that no one could be trusted.

Employment. The participants, most of whom did not graduate high school, had few employment opportunities. The work they found did not pay enough to provide for their children. Benoit and Millar (2001) also found that women in the sex industry acknowledged their limited employment options and the earning potential of commercial sex work. The participants in this study knew of sex work through many means: having a family member or friend in the industry, being around men who offered money for sexual services, or simply living in a neighborhood where there were sex industry establishments. Before I was an adult, I had no knowledge that sex work was an employment opportunity. I did not live in a neighborhood with commercial sexual activity and had never heard friends or family discuss the industry. I asked Monica how she knew strip clubs even existed. She replied, "I mean, you just go down your major

roads in your town and you see a billboard for something. Or you'll see a blinking light with an arrow going to a building. You know, or a sign that says topless." Again, in my childhood, I never noticed any signs like this. I asked Monica how she knew there was good money in stripping, and she stated, "I think it's just common sense." When talking with Sunny, I told her that I had never heard of a strip club as a child. She replied, "That's because you were protected, Amy."

When attempting to leave the sex industry, additional barriers arise when it comes to conventional work. Sunny is hard working and has an upbeat personality. During our final conversation, she was excited about applying for a customer service job. She believes that she would be great in that role because she knows how to work with people of different cultures. However, she has found time and time again that although she passes the interview portion with ease, she is rejected once her criminal background is revealed. Additionally, most of the participants do not have the education that is required for higher paying jobs. It is common for prostituted women to remain in the sex industry due to their lack of schooling, job training, and the presence of a criminal background (Edlund & Korn, 2002). In short, they see no other employment opportunities.

Environmental constraints. The community environment in which they lived not only provided access to sex industry work, but it also afforded a shortage of alternatives to drug use and prostitution (Murphy, 2010). They became immersed in a culture that promotes sex work and addictions and began raising their children in that culture so that a generational cycle continues. This environment promotes prostitution

and makes it difficult to leave the sex industry. The community lacks viable options such as job training (Murphy, 2010) and resources to aid an exit (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007).

Money in childhood. One finding that initially surprised me was that five out of nine participants spoke about having enough money in their childhood homes. I was not expecting this finding because literature often speaks of poverty as a contributing factor to entering the sex industry. However, coming from a middle class or affluent home fits within the conceptual summary. The cycle begins with an overwhelming need. With these five participants, lack of money in the childhood home was not the overwhelming issue that needed to be solved. Other issues of abuse and neglect overwhelmed the participants. Shanee's case was interesting, because it was the affluence of the childhood home that presented the problem. She became accustomed to the "fast and easy money." When her mother stopped selling drugs, the money was no longer there. Shanee stated that she had an addiction to money and went into sex work to provide an affluent lifestyle for her daughter.

Hollow Solutions

The overwhelming issues created a need for an immediate response. The participants failed to generate a path to reach long-term goals because desperate times call for desperate measures. They sought immediate solutions to feed the children, numb the pain, find acceptance, or get control. Taylor thought, "I know where I can make some money. I'll go waitress at one of those bars until I figure something out." Shanee stated, "You never know what someone will do when their back's against the wall. I can say

that.” I saw their solutions as hollow. Each fix appeared to solve a problem, but the solution was more of a bandage covering a wound, than an actual healing of that wound. The solutions were immediate but did not have a strong foundation that could completely fix the problem. Time and again, the solutions became an overwhelming needs from which the participants needed escape.

Drugs. Drugs became a solution when they were used to escape the overwhelming issues. Mary Margaret reiterated this many times. She began sniffing liquid paper at the age of eight to provide an escape from the rapes. When she discovered cocaine at age 12, she was elated because they “keep me high. Keep me numb. Cuz I know what’s about to happen in that room.” Drugs are often used by sex workers to detach themselves from what is happening (Murphy, 2007). Drugs were also used as a solution to gain peer acceptance in the adolescent years.

Control and desirability. Autonomy and rebellion took them out of the house, away from parental influence. When beginning sex work, they discussed finally having control over situations. They used phrases such as “I could choose” and “it was fun. Look at me! [It] felt so good and so powerful.” They were in control by financing their overpowering needs, which caused them to feel in control of their lives. These are referred to as pull factors (Cimino, 2012). Being accepted, desired, and earning enough money to provide for their families are factors that pulled them toward the industry.

Sex work. An overwhelming need combined with limited resources brought them into sex work. While working in the sex industry may not be a favorable long-term

situation, it was the hollow solution that was available to the participants. Sex work provided for their children or their addiction and even afforded them with luxuries they had not yet experienced. Taylor expressed much excitement over being able to afford shampoo, conditioner, and bubble bath. Not only were her most pressing needs, drugs and providing for her children, accounted for, but there was enough money for additional life indulgences. Prostituted women often find that they are now able to meet their financial needs (Murphy, 2010).

The sex industry is ultimately a short-term solution to their problems, as violence, drug use, incarceration, and feelings of disgust enter into the equation (Williamson & Folaron, 2003). The negative factors begin to outweigh the positive factors, and they wish to leave the industry. This exit now becomes another overwhelming issue. Shanee said, “And it’s just that, for so many of us, we all come from the same past; in one way or the other, we each sold our soul to the devil for such petty things.”

Conceptual Summarization

The grounded theory for this research study was overwhelming issues, limited resources, hollow solutions. The participants had pressing needs, which required immediate attention. The issues included escaping abuse, feeding addictions, and providing for children. With limited resources, due to both lack of guidance in childhood and environmental constraints, the women chose options that provided immediate, although temporary, reprieve. Those solutions, including drug use, seeking attention from unhealthy peer groups, and sex work, provided temporary rescue and later became

more overwhelming situations from which they needed escape. The cycle began anew. The chain broke when two things happened. First, the participants were provided with resources from friends, counselors, and Hope is Here. Second, they walked through a lengthy program, which provided a supported solution. Short-term decisions were seen in conjunction with long term goals.

Conceptual Summary Related to Existing Theories Connected with Commercial Sexual Exploitation

In the field of social work, strengths-based perspective is used in conjunction with studies on prostituted women (Busch-Arendariz et al., 2014). This perspective discusses the aide that social workers give in protection of vulnerable women and children and the assistance social workers provide in successful exit from the sex industry. Strengths-based perspective is built on trust, both in the relationships they build with their clients and with organizations that can assist those clients. In the present research, the trust and assistance from social workers becomes a way to break the cycle by providing resources towards a stronger solution. Within the interviews of this study, participants spoke numerous times about having no one they could trust. They also spoke highly of their current counselors. The strengths-based perspective fits within Overwhelming Issues, Limited Resources, Hollow Solutions as one way to break the cycle.

In the criminal justice field, victim-centered approach is used in literature surrounding survivors of violent crimes, including commercial sex workers (Busch-Arendariz et al., 2014). This approach states that each victim must be treated with

individual needs in mind. “The mission and program services are developed through a survivor’s lens rather than what might be best for professionals or the structures in which they work” (p. 16). This can be seen in the current study, as each participant had unique individual needs. Each woman’s overwhelming issues needed to be addressed with specific resources. The victim-centered approach provides resources for more stable solutions.

The life course perspective has been tied to prostituted women. The life course perspective focuses on each individual’s change and how that affects the family unit (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993). It also takes into account outside factors contributing to the self and the family changing. “The family comprises interacting personalities, dynamic and developing over time, whose behaviors, needs, and various career trajectories are contingent upon-and sometimes in conflict with-others in their family” (p.479). With the participants in the current study, one can see how the actions of the individuals in the family had a direct connection to the participants, including contributing to their needs and limiting resources.

One study by Browning and Laumann (1997) provides an interesting thread connecting life course perspective to the current study. Browning and Laumann studied women who had been touched in a sexual manner before turning 13. The authors found that a woman who experienced childhood sexual abuse at the hands of an adult was more promiscuous in adolescence and her adult life. She began having sex at an earlier age and was more likely to get pregnant in her teenage years. Since the abuse is the child’s

first introduction to sex, the sexual script is incorrect, and sexual maturity may be assumed, causing her to be projected as sexually ready at too early an age. The child's sexual trajectory has been placed in motion before it is developmentally appropriate. Applying Browning and Laumann's findings to this current study, the participants' sexual abuse was an overwhelming issue. With limited protection, they sought resolution. Since their sexual script was already in play, one solution was to engage in sex on their own terms.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory is present in some research on the commercial sex industry. The bioecological theory sees both nature and nurture at work in developing the individual (Bronfenbrenner, Kessel, & Kessen, 1986). According to Bronfenbrenner (1989), the cornerstone of the theory lies in the following definition:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, *throughout the life course*, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (p. 188).

The bioecological theory fits within the conceptual framework of the current study, as participants must continually react to immediate needs in their microsystem by using the resources that are available. The welfare of an individual is dependent upon the welfare of the environment, highlighting a relationship between the environment and the self (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Each part of the environment works to influence other parts. The environment is not solely responsible for a person's actions; however, the environment can limit opportunities or provide significant resources.

Breaking the Cycle

For the women in this study, the cycle was broken when they found help (a resource) and committed to working through a difficult process (offering a more stable solution). The participants spoke of help they had received from their counselors. Additionally, the women were provided a financial bridge until they were self-sufficient and could provide for their families without assistance from Hope is Here. The participants also took steps to change their paths. They found support through Alcoholics Anonymous, forged new friendships, and cut ties with previous peers and clients.

Limitations and Further Research

As with any research, the current study includes limitations. All participants were heterosexual women who had successfully exited the sex industry in the U.S. The study does not account for males, homosexual, or transgender workers, those still in commercial sex work, or victims in other countries. These women have all undergone several years of working with advocates and counselors at Hope is Here. They mentioned counseling sessions many times throughout the interviews. There is a chance that some of their stories or conclusions were thoughts from counseling sessions rather than being drawn from individual deductions. The sample was non-random and pulled from one recovery agency, and the interviews contained self-reports of childhood memories with no opportunity to triangulate data. The women in this study did not discuss the rise of technology and commercial sex work because they were prostituted

before the explosion of sex purchased over the internet. Further research should compare these findings to victims of the internet sex industry.

Quantitative research should be conducted using the conceptual summary of Overwhelming Issues, Limited Resources, Hollow Solutions. Thinking of overwhelming issues, rather than focusing on one specific reason women are drawn into the industry, whether it be pimps, drug addiction, sexual abuse, etc., research can focus on a more encompassing category. The issues found in this study included a variety of abuse and addictions and having to provide for their children. There are likely more overwhelming matters that can be added to the topic, providing a more comprehensive list of needs. Likewise, the examples in Limited Resources and Hollow Solutions should not be thought of as an exhaustive list. Valid and reliable instruments would be highly beneficial to research on the commercial sex industry (Cimino, 2012).

Further research can also study how the cycle of Overwhelming Issues, Limited Resources, Hollow Solutions is broken. This study was limited in that each participant had the cycle broken with assistance from Hope is Here. It is important to find other ways in which the woman can successfully break out of the sex industry.

More research is needed to fully understand what happens before a woman enters the sex industry, as it is important to break the cycle before entry. Additionally, the women spoke repeatedly of their children, and I was able to see some interact with their families outside the interviews. I am interested to find out more on how they parent and the outcomes for their own children. Spring, in discussing raising her two daughters,

stated, “Somebody, somewhere, has to break that chain. And I’m gonna start with a little chain.” Further research is needed to understand how women with ineffective parents learn how to guide their own children.

Implications

When Mary Margaret said, “I really didn’t have anybody that just loved me,” I thought back to my own childhood. I cannot even count the number of people who loved me. If my parents had not cared for me properly, my grandparents or uncles and aunts would have taken me in. In the absence of all my relatives, several families in my church would have stepped in. I received advice and protection from multiple adults while growing up. The guidance I received in childhood made me into the confident woman I am today and is enabling me to raise two self-assured daughters.

Childhood is a crucial time in a person’s life. Before I began the study, I wondered where I would see the life trajectory change from non-victimization to victimization. What I found was, their paths were always in a victimization trajectory; they needed something to get them off that route, beginning in childhood. As adults, the participants found help through Hope is Here, which provided a new path. It also changed their children’s futures.

Children who live in poverty are particularly at risk for commercial sexual exploitation. In communities with a high incident rate of commercial sex work, educational resources can be presented in schools. A survivor might speak to the notions of the glamourous sex industry and its realities. The students can be shown the benefits

of remaining in school and receiving an education. Reid (2014) found that education is one of the most important resiliency components to warding off sexual exploitation.

More organizations are needed to assist in leaving the sex industry (Dalla, 2006). Women in the sex industry need convenient support if they are to make a successful exit. An escape plan can include physically moving away from an area with a high concentration of drug use and sex work, job training, and access to a new social network (Murphy, 2010). The survivors need both an increase in life skills and a decrease of environmental constraints (Cimino, 2012). In addition to more organizations, more well-trained advocates are needed, as survivors of the commercial sex industry have “complex immediate, ongoing, and long-term needs [which] require a particular expertise” (Rand, 2010, p. 153). Each part of the cycle must be considered on an individual basis. Each woman’s overwhelming issues can be assessed, so she can receive help with what drove her into the sex industry. Each woman’s resources should be supplemented where they are lacking, either with income, education, job training, etc.

This issue requires a policy change in which prostituted women are not labored with felony offenses after exiting the industry. Staying out of the sex industry is difficult when women cannot gain conventional employment once a background check is completed, as Sunny discussed. Prostitution is an illegal act in which one party, the sex worker, assumes most of the legal blame. Prostituted women are prosecuted at higher rates than johns or pimps (Godsoe, 2015). Hotaling et al. (2006) state, “We must not presume that anyone labeled a ‘prostitute’ is responsible for a system in which we allow

people to buy human bodies” (p. 5). The women should be spoken of as victims rather than perpetrators (Rand, 2010). Rather than direct money towards prosecuting and detaining women in the sex industry, an average of \$11 million per city each year (Murphy, 2007), the money can be used to educate others about the precursors to sex work, provide help to high risk children, and offer services to assist in escape.

A policy change which mimics Sweden’s law, in which the pimps and johns are held accountable while those in the sex industry are offered help, would redirect money away from the repeated prosecution of incarceration of sex workers, and towards prevention and rehabilitation programs. Within five years of Sweden’s policy change, prostitution dropped by two-thirds (Offenbacher, 2010).

Additionally, police officers must be trained in Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) laws which state minors cannot legally consent to sex and are therefore victims of prostitution (Schauer & Wheaton, 2006). Prostituted minors need people they can trust, and when policemen treat them like criminals, the girl resists law enforcement and turns towards those who accept them (Lloyd, 2011). Lloyd, a survivor and advocate, says that prostituted girls believe police are not to be trusted and do not want to help. “In the minds of most cops, there are girls, probably foreign, who may be victims of trafficking, and then there are girls who are prostitutes, teen prostitutes perhaps, but prostitutes nonetheless” (p. 146). Police trainings can include not only specifics on the law regarding minors, but the sex worker’s perception that there is no one to help them

out of this overwhelming situation. “When compassion and belief in your potential comes from a cop. . . or some other unexpected source, it can feel so significant” (p. 146).

Many prostituted women have lost custody of one or more children. The conceptual summary presented here could be a guide for social workers determining the viability of the mother to regain custody. By discussing what resources have been added and what stable solutions are being sought after, an action plan can be created (Cinimo, 2012).

Children in high risk families or neighborhoods would benefit from the guidance of an adult or older peer. These children would profit from learning about their self-value and how to set and achieve long term goals. Additionally, boys can be taught that it is not acceptable to purchase girls and women (Hotaling et al., 2006). The adage “boys will be boys” gives license to buy women. “These stereotypes about men not only normalize and trivialize prostitution but are also good business strategy, relieving johns of any doubts regarding the social acceptability of their sexual predation” (Farley, 2004, p. 1088).

Abused or neglected girls can be taught what a healthy relationship entails (Reid, 2011). Such girls need “tailored and innovative interventions to support young women’s safety will help empower youth to break the trauma cycle and afford alternative opportunities to reduce reliance on risky drugs and sexual relationships for survival” (Miller et al., 2010, p. 39). Parenting education could be helpful in preventing a girl’s entry into the commercial sex industry. Reid (2011) found that parental interventions,

such as drug treatment programs, supporting victims of domestic violence, and parenting classes, can aid in lowering the risk factors for children.

Conclusion

This study interviewed nine survivors of the commercial sex industry to discover how they talk about factors that led to their victimization. Constant comparative analysis was used to code participants' statements into three timeframes, childhood, entering the sex industry, and exiting the sex industry, with three overarching themes for each time frame: what is happening, how they are responding to it, and what happens next.

Grounded theory was used to create a theoretical framework for the data. The conceptual summary discusses a cycle of overwhelming issues, limited resources, and hollow solutions. Limitations and implications are given in light of this new framework.

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APPENDIX A
Participant Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: How do Adult Female Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation Talk about Factors that Led to Their Victimization?

Investigator: Amy Johnson.....ajohnson43@twu.edu 817-581-XXXX
Advisor: Katie Rose, PhDkrose1@twu.edu 940-898-3154

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Mrs. Johnson's dissertation research at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to determine how adult female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation talk about factors that led to their victimization. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have identified yourself as having been in the commercial sex industry.

Description of Procedures

As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend one hour of your time in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. Follow up interviews or phone conversations may be requested within two months after the first interview. A follow up interview may be requested if the researcher has additional questions not covered in the first interview. You can choose to decline the second interview if you wish. The researcher will ask you questions about your childhood, your relationships, and the point when you realized you were in a situation that you did not want to be in but you did not know how to get out of it. The interviews will take place at the weekly dinner and spiritual support time. You and the researcher will decide on a code name for you to use during the interview. The interview will be audio recorded and then written down so that the researcher can be accurate when studying what you have said. In order to be a participant in this study, you must be a female, at least 18 years of age or older, and have been previously sex trafficked.

Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you questions about your childhood relationships, your parents, and your victimization. A possible risk in this study is discomfort with these questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset you may take breaks as needed. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview with no penalty. There will be counselors immediately available at XXXXXX if you wish to speak with one. In addition, you are being given a referral list to help you find a suitable mental health professional if you feel you need one.

Initial with an X
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Another risk in this study is loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. A code name, not your real name, will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name. As a way of further protecting your identity, you will not be asked to sign your actual name to this consent form. You will be asked to sign with an "X" to acknowledge your having read the document. The recordings and the written interview will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office on the campus of Texas Woman's University. Only the researcher and her advisor will hear the recordings or read the written interview. The recordings and the written interview will be shredded within 5 years after the study is finished. The results of the study will be reported in scientific magazines or journals but your name or any other identifying information will not be included.

Another potential risk is a loss of anonymity. Others at the XXXXXXX may be aware that I am visiting to conduct data collection for a study. If they see you speaking with me, they may know that you are a study participant. Your anonymity as a participant cannot be guaranteed, but your responses to all questions will be kept confidential.

Another potential risk is coercion. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are in no way obligated to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Your participation or non-participation in this study will in no way affect your relationship with or services provided to you by New Friends New Life.

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. After each interview, you will receive a \$20 gift card for your participation. If you would like to know the results of this study we will leave copies with the Leader Circle Coordinator for anyone interested.

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Signature of Participant – Please sign with an X

Date

Other Mental Health Professionals

Please visit <http://locator.apa.org/> for mental health professionals in your area. You may also choose to call 775-784-8090 to access a crisis call center.