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Isolation and Support Dynamics Among Concurrent Victims of Sex Trafficking

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Abstract

The present study analyzed wiretap data to determine the characteristics of social support among concurrent victims of sex trafficking. Using a grounded theory approach to determine prevalent elements and themes that characterize interactions, conversations between women and conversations between pimps and women that involve concurrent victims as a topic of conversation were examined. A coding scheme was created based on the derived elements, and network patterns were analyzed. Finally, temporal patterns of conflict were examined to determine whether periods of heightened threat were used to punctuate periods of seeming calm, similar to that seen in research on coercive control and intimate partner violence (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). Findings suggested that the pimp used coercive control to maintain victim compliance, and as a result, victims were isolated from the outside world. While at the surface the women appeared to have each other as their primary social network, analysis revealed that the women monitored and regulated each other in order to enforce the pimp's rules and gain status with him, which contributed to feelings of competition, distrust, and jealousy. This is consistent with other studies that have noted such discord among victims (Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014; Reid & Piquero, 2014), which increases trust towards the pimp (Reid, 2016). The current research has implications for understanding the complex and subtle nature of coercive control and the power pimps exercise over their victims.

Keywords: sex trafficking, coercive control, support, isolation

Isolation and Support Dynamics Among Concurrent Victims of Sex Trafficking

Introduction

Victims of sex trafficking are often isolated from their friends, their family, and from the outside world in general (Raghavan & Doychak, 2015; C. Stark & Hodgson, 2004). Victims' primary social circle is comprised of the pimp and other women[1] in the trafficking ring (Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008; Ravi, Pfeiffer, Rosner, & Shea, 2017). Although women may desire to leave this lifestyle and frequently come into contact with individuals outside the trafficking ring (e.g., johns, police, health care providers; see Curtis et al., 2008; Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Moore, Kaplan, & Barron, 2017; Reid & Piquero, 2014), they do not often self-disclose or reach out for help (Mahan, 2017). This ostensibly leaves the other members of the ring as the sole source of social support, and indeed, some women involved in sex trafficking or prostitution describe the others in the ring as their "families" (Ravi et al., 2017). However, competition, distrust, jealousy, and suspicion are common among the women, due to such issues as competition for the pimp's attention, conflict over soliciting territory, and issues related to earnings (Bryan, 1965; Curtis et al., 2008; Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014; Reid, 2016). This may help explain the apparent lack of intragroup coordination regarding help-seeking behaviors but what exactly characterizes the support network of concurrent victims in a sex trafficking ring?

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[1] The majority of sex trafficking victims are female and pimps male (Dank et al., 2014), so in this paper, pimps will be referred to as "he/him" and victims as "she/her." Additionally, the term "pimp" will be used rather than "trafficker" because this research does not specifically address issues confined to trafficking as defined by local, federal, or international laws but rather areas that affect those involved in commercial sex regardless of the precise nature of the prostitution ring.

The extant research on victims of sex trafficking is limited and largely focuses on the individual experience of the dynamics between a pimp and a single victim. Therefore, the present research aimed to examine the extent of social support and isolation among concurrent victims in a sex trafficking context in order to better understand more fully the dynamics and nature of their relationships with each other. In the following sections, social hierarchies are first discussed in a sex trafficking context and the conflict and ambiguity that ensues. Next, I elaborate upon the nature of the social network and support systems in a trafficking ring and how that intensifies the isolation of each individual. Finally, I discuss the current research aims of examining the interpersonal dynamics among concurrent victims, drawing on observations from other research that involves joint victimization.

Social Hierarchies in Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking rings are comprised of a social hierarchy with the pimp at the top, controlling the network. In order to maintain power over his group of victims, he utilizes coercive control tactics: surveillance, microregulation, manipulation/exploitation, isolation, intimidation, deprivation, and degradation (Expert Panel Discussions 1-4, 2016[2]). Each pimp operates his enterprise according to a specific set of rules, which varies from pimp to pimp (Curtis et al., 2008; Dank et al., 2014; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Women in a trafficking ring are expected to comply with the pimp's rules as well as monitor each other's activity and report back to the pimp (Moore et al., 2017). Although victims in a trafficking ring are isolated and frequently only have each other as their primary social resource, competition, distrust, jealousy, and suspicion arise as they maneuver for favor and report on each other (Bryan, 1965;

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[2] Expert panel discussions were held over one year and included experts in psychology, social work, and law, as well as professionals with expertise in coercive control, trafficking, and domestic violence.

Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014; Reid, 2016). Commonly, because of triangulation and splitting among the members, with the pimp taking the authoritarian role of mediator and disciplinarian, the pimp is the only one the victims feel they can trust (Reid, 2016). Pimps may even promote this type of distrust and in-fighting among the women (Curtis et al., 2008), as it is beneficial in maintaining control over the group.

By helping enforce the pimp's rules, a woman stands to gain several advantages within the group, such as being in the pimp's good graces, an increase in status, or increased responsibilities (Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). In turn, the victims seek to comply with the pimp's demands and are rewarded when they do so. Through a woman's obedience, devotion, and the earnings she brings in, he rewards her with individual attention (Dank et al., 2014). The highest-ranking woman in a sex trafficking ring is, ironically, commonly referred to as the "Bottom." This position is also called the bottom bitch, bottom girl, bottom woman, head bitch, head ho, main woman, best girl, or number one lady (Curtis et al., 2008; Dank et al., 2014; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). She is considered to be the pimp's favorite; she is often the highest earner and has been with the pimp the longest, he has delegated the most responsibilities to her, and she has the highest status among the women. In many ways, she is like the second in command to the pimp, and she may act on his behalf (Dank et al., 2014).

Responsibilities delegated to the Bottom may include collecting the other women's earnings when the pimp is not available to collect them, taking on a trainee, or being in charge of other women's schedules (Bryan, 1965; Dank et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2017; Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014; Roe-Sepowitz, Gallagher, Risinger, & Hickle, 2015; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). This level of responsibility represents privilege, power, and a certain amount of autonomy that the other victims do not have, making it a desirable status within the trafficking

ring. Additionally, a woman who is training may get to keep a percentage of her trainee's income (Bryan, 1965; Heyl, 1977), which is a further incentive for maneuvering to a more advantageous status position within the trafficking ring hierarchy. However, the comparative benefits the Bottom enjoys are not secure; other women may gain favor, and the established Bottom may lose her position (Dank et al., 2014). These fluid and shifting power dynamics among the women contribute to an atmosphere of insecurity and perpetuate a cycle of isolation and mistrust.

In research that examines the role of the Bottom, some authors have categorized her position as a type of female pimp, due to her recruitment and exploitation of other women (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2015). Others have posited that the position of Bottom demonstrates gaining ground within the trafficking ring hierarchy and becoming indispensable to the pimp in a way that diminishes the power differential between them (Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014). However, categorizing the Bottom must be approached with caution; although she has relative favor with the pimp and is valuable to him, she is still under his control and must defer to him (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2015). This is an important power imbalance that is overlooked by research that considers the Bottom to be in a position of power with the pimp, such as the resource-sharing model posited by Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso (2014).

The increased status afforded by a Bottom may give the appearance of autonomy, but if her status depends entirely on the pimp, such agency is false. Raghavan and Doychak (2015) have posited that victimhood in sex trafficking is non-binary; the bifurcation between being a true victim or not being a victim at all is a false dichotomy. Rather, the power differential between the pimp and victim is perpetuated through coercive control and fluctuates in a way that creates multiple avenues of limiting agency and enacting it that must be considered within their contexts. Despite the Bottom having moments of power and control, a chronic imbalance of

power generally exists in which the pimp ultimately has the final say. This formulation of power and control is not new and is similar to the context of battered women under coercive control who may appear outwardly to have nothing amiss (E. Stark, 2009). Likewise, it may be that prostitutes who are in positions of privilege with the pimp may seem to have more equality in their relationship with him than is actually there.

A key point stemming from non-binary victimhood and the contextual agency therein is the importance of not confusing the legal interpretation of a Bottom's actions (e.g., that she is a pimp or trafficker herself) with the actual power she possesses. That is, although her activities as a Bottom may be deemed pimping and pandering in the legal arena, it should not be conflated with her having real power or full agency regarding her actions. It is essential to recognize that her role of enforcing the pimp's agenda is enacted within an overarching coercive framework that diminishes her ability to act freely. Interestingly, other types of female pimps that seem to exist outside of this ambiguous role, such as a "madam" who runs a house-based brothel, have also been noted as being required to defer to a male pimp (Heyl, 1977; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2015), implying that the roles of males and females as pimps may be less clear in general than previously thought.

In reality, by turning a victim (e.g., the Bottom) into someone who recruits and enforces rules with other victims, the pimp has an additional advantage in that he has made her complicit in illegal acts (Reid, 2016). Furthermore, as she takes over trafficking activities and becomes complicit in the eyes of the law, the pimp is able to evade legal ramifications himself (Dank et al., 2014), further increasing his power and decreasing hers. It is important to recognize that increased status and responsibilities blur the distinction between women who are coerced and those who are proactively involved in sex trafficking.

Social Network and Support in Sex Trafficking

The social hierarchy of a sex trafficking ring occurs within the social network of the ring. In and of itself, social network is a neutral term that is used simply to discuss the connections that a person has with others (Berkman, 1984; Leavy, 1983). Social support is one aspect of a social network that refer to a person giving informational, emotional, material, or companionship support to another person, and both parties recognizing it as support (see Berkman, 1984, and Leavy, 1983, for reviews). It is a helping relationship that involves give-and-take between individuals and an important aspect of having a strong and positive social network. Social support has been linked to lower stress levels (see Thoits, 1995) and better physical health (Uchino, 2006). Furthermore, perceived support (i.e., the belief that support is available) is beneficial to mental health (Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987; Wethington & Kessler, 1986).

In sex trafficking, the social network is usually controlled by the pimp. He uses coercive control tactics to isolate victims physically, psychologically, socially, and in areas related to privacy, such as requiring the victim to check in frequently (Hom & Woods, 2013; Mahan, 2017). The pimp microregulates the women's activities, such as requiring a certain dress code, controlling money, and assigning work or living partners (Dank et al., 2014). He also manipulates and exploits the women, including misrepresenting information, intentionally deceiving, and taking advantage of existing vulnerabilities, such as financial need or a lack of familiarity with the city or language (Dank et al., 2014; Deshpande & Nour, 2013). These all affect the women's social support by impacting their trust and the quality of their interactions with each other.

Furthermore, as victims seek to be compliant with the pimp's rules, they may monitor and regulate each other. This can be considered as acting in the interest of the pimp more than out of self-interest, and thus it represents a coercive control tactic used by him; the women must still answer to him, and by monitoring each other they are promoting his goal of maintaining control and power over the group without direct interaction by him. This type of monitoring through another person, or third-party monitoring, as a coercive tactic is not unique to the sex trafficking context. This and other coercive control tactics used by the pimp are similar to those seen in intimate partner violence (IPV), and not all of these tactics are readily discernible. Research in this area has been done primarily in the context of IPV, so it will be discussed as such in the following paragraphs to help provide an understanding of the dynamics between the pimp and the victims.

Just as coercive control and other tactics used by pimps are similar to those seen in IPV, third-party monitoring and regulating have also been noted in cases of IPV (e.g., children asked to report on their mother's activities to her abusive partner; see Dutton & Goodman, 2005). In other cases, siblings or related children who are abused by a common perpetrator, such as a grandfather, have been known to gang up on a new victim despite not wanting to be a part of the abusive activities (WLRN Documentaries, 2012). These examples show that compliance may be done out of fear of the perpetrator or the consequences of disobeying, or due to a lack of being able to discern other options. The perpetrator's vicarious use of coercion and monitoring embeds the victims in an enclosed network that limits their freedom and autonomy.

In the legal setting, IPV is often measured based on discrete acts that incur physical or psychological harm. The idea of a "calculus of harms" (E. Stark, 2009, p. 1510) is generally applied to assess severity, meaning that more outward evidence of injury or trauma indicates

more severe abuse. However, in actuality, measuring the harm done to a victim in an abusive

relationship, including sex trafficking, is not that straightforward, considering that control and

abuse tactics need not be overt or extreme in order to be effective and cause harm (Dutton &

Goodman, 2005; E. Stark, 2009). This is manifest in coercive control; due to the ongoing or

chronic, pervasive nature of the abuse dynamic, the victim is familiar with the consequences of

not complying with the perpetrator's demands, thereby allowing the perpetrator to use more and

more subtle tactics to ensure compliance (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; E. Stark, 2009). Dutton and

Goodman (2005) explained that the important aspect of a threat, whether explicit or implicit,

within a context of coercive control is its credibility, and it may be understood by the victim

based on past experience with the perpetrator. For example, because a victim already knows the

perpetrator's expectations and the consequences of displeasing him, something as seemingly

benign as asking where she is or who she is with implies a credible threat of harm because she

has already learned the consequences that the perpetrator will exact if she is somewhere or with

someone that displeases him. However, when the threat of harm is not obvious to an outside

party, such as the perpetrator giving the victim a certain look that she understands to represent a

credible threat, it may be difficult for outside parties to understand the victim's continued

compliance or for the victim to convincingly explain it (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; E. Stark,

2009).

Likewise, such subtlety makes it difficult to establish an individual's victimhood in a

legal context, as opposed to assuming she acted as an agent of her own will. This may be the

case in sex trafficking, as prostitution is considered by some to be a choice rather than an act of

victimization (Cianciarulo, 2008; Meshkovska, Siegel, Stutterheim, & Bos, 2015). In concert

with credible threats, coercive control furthers the power differential between the exploiter and

the victim and strengthens the dependency of the victim on the perpetrator (Raghavan &

Doychak, 2015). Furthermore, increasingly subtle threat cues need only be punctuated

periodically by more overt threats or actions in order for the abuser to maintain control over the

victim (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). Therefore, in practice, threats or conflict at a more intense

and apparent level may only serve as brackets that punctuate and sustain longer periods of

seeming calm.

Unlike most studies of relational dynamics that examine dyads, there are multiple,

concurrent victims in a sex trafficking ring. As concurrent victims vie for status and privilege

with the pimp, who encourages conflict and mistrust, the women find themselves in a network

that is both unsafe and unreliable. Unsafe networks refer to social networks comprised of others

who may be aligned with the pimp or participate in the coercion, thereby putting the victim in

danger or causing harm (Mahan, 2017). Because women in a trafficking ring are expected to

monitor each other and report back to the pimp, there is clear cause to suspect that the network

may be unsafe.

Similarly, unreliable networks are not as directly dangerous, but they still hold a risk for

harm. Unreliable networks refer to social networks comprised of others who may at times be

helpful but may unintentionally disregard the victim in times of need (Mahan, 2017). For

example, as the women vie for status with the pimp, each woman may put her needs and goals

first without considering (i.e., intentionally disregarding) the harmful consequences her actions

might have on another woman in the ring who she considers to be a friend or ally. Due to such

actions, the women would not be able to feel confident in having reliable support from their

peers in the trafficking ring.

There is much research on perpetrator and victim dynamics in areas related to intimate

partner violence and some in sex trafficking, but there is little research on the dynamics among

groups of concurrent victims in situations in which autonomy and free will are limited. The

present research aimed to examine the nature of isolation and social support among concurrent

victims of sex trafficking in order to better understand the context within which the victims live.

By addressing these questions, this study furthers our understanding of the complexities of

coercive control, isolation, and support in trafficking networks. This knowledge helps clarify

why victims may not leave "the life," even if they want to and come into contact with individuals

outside the trafficking ring who could potentially provide help. It also furthers an understanding

of the context within which victims, especially Bottoms, may appear to willingly engage in

trafficking themselves.

Study Overview

The present study analyzed both conversations between victims and conversations

between victims and the pimp in which other women were a topic of discussion. This study used

a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify the dynamics and characteristics

present in these verbal exchanges. This exploratory approach shed light on the following

questions:

1) Is any form of coercive control evident in interactions between concurrent victims of

sex trafficking?;

2) What interpersonal dynamics characterize the victims' social support network?; and

3) Do the interactions among the women reflect periods of calm punctuated by

heightened threats or conflict, as seen in cases of intimate partner violence?

Method

Design

This qualitative study analyzed wiretap data from a police investigation involving two pimps and four victims. The nature of wiretapped conversations provides a unique opportunity to analyze naturalistic verbal interactions. The available data was comprised of conversations that occurred during a four month period from December 14, 2011, through April 5, 2012. Calls from 60 out of the 113 total days were available for analysis. The available conversations were those that were naturally carried out in the course of the participants' everyday lives over the phone; information on person-to-person conversations was not available. The wiretapped conversations included all calls carried out on each participant's phone number during each of the 60 days for which records were available. The only information on external events that occurred during that time period was that which was contained within the calls.

Participants

The participants in this study included two adult male pimps and four adult female victims. To protect their identity, no demographic information was revealed. Because the data is comprised of wiretapped conversations obtained for a police investigation unrelated to this research, little is known about the participants' demographics other than that the women lived with at least one other woman and worked in pairs or groups. The participants were located in an urban setting in the northeastern United States.

Data Analysis

Preliminary data analysis: Aim 1. Because women in the trafficking ring monitor and regulate each other in an effort to enforce the pimp's rules, I expected to see them exercise coercive control by proxy (i.e., enact coercive control amongst each other in an effort to enforce

and comply with the pimp's rules). Therefore, preliminary analyses (Unger, Doychak,

Pomerantz, & Raghavan, 2018) on a subset of the current study's data examined whether

conversations between women demonstrated elements of coercive control (see Method for a

detailed description). The interactions between the women were distinctly lacking in the type of

give and take that is usually observable in support networks; their conversations seemed sterile

and emotionally flat. Simultaneously, there seemed to be an undercurrent of conflict and tension,

which, combined with the overall sterile quality of the conversations, led us to believe that there

would be a unique set of dynamics that would characterize their interactions in a manner distinct

from the pervasive use of coercive control enacted by the pimp.

       Subsequent data analysis: **Aims 2 and 3.** Because the a priori theory of coercive control

by proxy proposed in the first research aim was not supported in the preliminary analyses, a

grounded theory method was determined to be a useful approach to answer Aim 2. Grounded

theory method is an inductive process that allows data and theory to emerge through systematic

analysis until it is deemed to be saturated, meaning no new data emerges (Glaser & Strauss,

1967; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Ong, 2012; Saunders et al., 2018). After determining the

dynamics that characterized the interactions between the victims, conversations were then coded

for the derived themes and dynamics. In addition, because social network analysis examines

links and interaction patterns between actors in a social system, a network analysis was

conducted to give a better understanding of individual and overarching relationship dynamics

(Bandyopadhyay, Rao, & Sinha, 2011; Newman, 2010), potentially allowing for more in-depth

analysis.

       To examine Aim 3, that is whether coercive control in this context is characterized by

periods of seeming calm punctuated by incidents of heightened threats or conflict (Dutton &

Goodman, 2005), I examined whether such temporal patterns emerged in the interactions among women in this trafficking ring.

Data selected for analysis: Verbal exchanges. Two types of conversations were coded. First, direct conversations between women in the trafficking ring were selected for analysis. Second, conversations between a pimp and a victim in which another woman in the trafficking ring was a topic of conversation were included in analyses, as those conversations had the potential to reveal information related to the victims' dynamics with each other. Conversations were excluded for the following reasons: no audio file available, duplicate entry, insufficient content to determine the dynamics, or one woman was not a member of the trafficking ring.

Identification of themes/codes. Elements of coercive control were not readily apparent in conversations between or about women, so a grounded theoretical approach was used to determine what elements or themes characterized the women's interactions with each other. Two researchers listened to a subset of 14 calls between women, and independently noted the predominant themes perceived to emerge in each call before discussing their observations together. After listening to the entire subset in this manner, they independently organized the themes they had found into predominant categories, compared and discussed their observations, and distilled them into a final set of elements that characterized the interactions. This process was repeated with calls between women and a pimp in order to determine whether the same codes were present or if a new set of unique codes would emerge, given the possibility of different characteristics being present due to the indirect nature of speaking to a third party (i.e., the pimp). In analyzing calls between women and pimps, it can be difficult to extract characteristics representative of the women's dynamics with each other from the dynamics that are present between the pimp and the victim with whom he is speaking. The researchers were

careful to distinguish between these two different sets of dynamics in order to only including the former in the derived coding scheme and not conflate the two. In other words, rather than focus on the surface layer of the conversation in which the dynamics of the pimp and the woman were present, the researchers focused past that in order to determine the woman's dynamics with the woman who was being discussed. Ultimately, the dynamics expressed in both types of conversations were sufficiently similar to create a single coding scheme. The coding scheme was developed until it appeared to be saturated to a point where the data did not offer anything new to the categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saunders et al., 2018).

Network analysis of communication patterns. Social network analysis examines links and interaction patterns between actors in a social system (Bandyopadhyay, Rao, & Sinha, 2011; Newman, 2010). Network representations show where connections exist and can display the strength or frequency of connections between actors in the network (e.g., centrality and degree; Hawe, Webster, & Shiell, 2004). For example, Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso (2014) conducted a network analysis of a sex trafficking ring in Montreal, Canada, in order to understand the overall structure and flow of resources. Their data included pimps, prostitutes, their families, and their friends. Their analyses found that out of 142 actors, two pimps and one prostitute were most central to the network and also acted most frequently in a broker-like or middle-man position.

The present research involves a much smaller network comprised of six actors in total. Although this was a very small network, the analyses aimed to provide an overview of who key players were and what communication patterns looked like among the women. Gephi 0.9.2 software (https://gephi.org/; Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009) was used to analyze and visualize the social network in the present study. Network density (i.e., proportion of existing connections out of total possible connections) and actors' weighted degree (i.e., total

interactions) were determined in order to better understand the overall interconnectedness of the actors as well as their roles.

Analysis of temporal patterns of conflict. Overt violence is used by perpetrators of IPV as a way to facilitate control and power during periods in which overt threats or violence are not present (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Pimps have also been noted to use violence as a method of control (Dank et al., 2014; Ravi et al., 2017), and some female pimps use violence as well (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2015). Because of the ambiguous role of the Bottom as both victim and pimp and due to the victims' monitoring of each other as they seek to enforce the pimp's rules, it was expected that the women in this ring would also demonstrate outbursts of overt conflict that seem to sustain longer periods of seeming calm in which overt conflict is low.

In order to analyze the temporal pattern of conflict between women in the trafficking ring, conflict was plotted onto a timeline. Conflict was plotted as high, medium, or low in order to determine whether the interactions between women in the trafficking ring were characterized by episodes of increased violence that served to bracket periods of seeming calm. For the purposes of this research, high conflict was defined as incidents that had overt behavior like yelling, a direct conflict between women, or reporting of direct conflict to the pimp. Low conflict was defined as interactions in which no direct or overt clash occurred. Confrontation between women was coded as medium if the women did not have a sustained argument or seek action from the pimp.

An excerpt follows from a high-level conflict that occurred in calls between a trafficked woman, H, and the pimp, G, in which she confronted him about having sex ("playing tag") with another woman behind her back (all capitals indicate yelling):

H: (crying) I'm done. You can play tag with X all you want.

G: Wait a minute.

H: You try to appease me by helping—by having…

G: Wait a minute, wait a minute . CAN I ASK YOU A QUESTION?

H: 'CAUSE I'M DONE!

G: (loudly) Wait a minute! Wait a minute!

H: (yelling- unclear)

G: (loudly) Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Wait a minute! You're pissing

me off while I'm sick.

An example of a low-level conflict occurs in this call about food between D and H, two

trafficked women:

D: Yes, dear?

H: They don't have rice and peas. Do you want white rice?

D: That's fine.

H: Okay.

D: Alright.

H: Bye-bye.

D: Bye.

An example of a mid-level conflict occurred in a call in which two trafficked women, K

and D, discussed a clash over a parking place for picking up johns (call edited for clarity):

K: ...I just have a feeling there's gonna be some type of situation because we were like

sitting here 'cause that wasn't a parking spot. And now you guys are sitting there. So

somehow, someway we're gonna clash. 'Cause when them guys came out the club, we

went to pull off but we didn't because we didn't wanna like cock-block or anything. But

that's why we're sitting here. So I don't know what we're supposed to do.

D: (pause) Honestly K, I'm not trying to have an attitude, but I really don't give a shit

about this shit anymore. Like, y'all can talk to who you want to talk to, talk to whoever

comes, I don't really give a shit anymore.

Results

Overview

Conversations between women in the trafficking ring and conversations between women

and a pimp in which other women in the ring were a topic of conversation were included for

analysis. All transcribed conversations in these categories were compiled ($n = 206$), and those

that met the following criteria were excluded ($n = 30$): the conversation was a duplicate, ($n = 2$);

the call was a personal call (e.g., with a friend or family member, $n = 5$) rather than with another

woman in the trafficking ring; the call contained insufficient content to make determinations

about the interaction (e.g., only one side of the conversation was audible or the call was

extremely brief, [$n = 15$]), or the audio file was missing ($n = 2$). An additional six conversations

were excluded due to coding errors (i.e., the conversation did not go through tie-breaking). The

final sample included 176 conversations (134 between women and 42 between a victim and

pimp).

First, the conversations were analyzed for the dynamics that characterized the women's

interactions. Next, a network analysis revealed predominant patterns of communication in the

trafficking ring. Finally, an analysis of temporal patterns showed the use of overt conflict serving

as brackets that punctuated periods of seeming calm in which the status quo of isolation

prevailed. These results are discussed in detail below.

Network Characteristics and Dynamics

Contrary to our expectation, I found that the women did not use a tactic of coercive

control by proxy, in a manner similar to the pimp, as frequently or directly as I had expected.

Using a grounded theory approach, I then analyzed a subsample of 14 conversations for

recurring elements and themes. Those that emerged were noted and initially distilled into five

key elements: fishing for information, being guarded or withholding, passive suspiciousness or

soft accusations, cautiousness, and alliances (Figure 1). However, as more conversations were

analyzed, it became clear that the codes were not saturated (see Saunders et al., 2018).
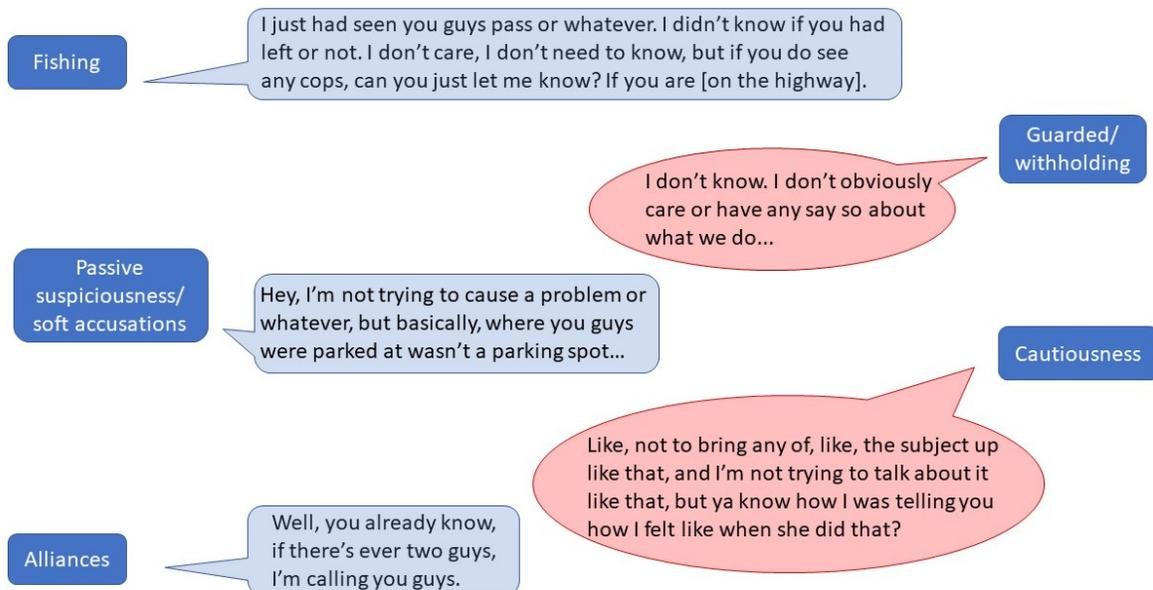
Figure 1. Preliminary codes. Examples of statements that characterized the preliminary derived

codes.

A second wave of analysis examined an additional selection of 56 calls between women (W-W) and 14 calls between a pimp and a woman (P-W). Randomizer.org was used to choose a random selection of calls from each set. Further recurring themes or dynamics that emerged included expressions of jealousy and competition, reporting on other women to the pimp or to each other, and occasional expressions of alliance. Also, on occasion, coercive control by proxy as initially hypothesized was observed. Additionally, it became clear that the conversations between women were conducted within certain topics, which characterized the context of the conversation. Specifically, the following codes were added: Competition (Passive, Direct, and 3rd Party), Reporting (Solicited and Unsolicited), Coercive Control by Proxy, No Code (meaning neutral or no notable dynamic), and Coordination (General, Food, Drugs, Traffic and Weather, Work, and None). Four of the initial five elements (fishing, guardedness, suspiciousness, and cautiousness) were collapsed into one overarching code for push-pull dynamics since these interactions were subtle and determining which aspects were at play proved to be fairly subjective. The reason this category was collapsed was because the dynamics of the conversations that contained fishing, guardedness, suspiciousness, and cautiousness were often ambiguous, and although the coders often agreed that some kind of push-pull was occurring between the women, the precise nature of it (e.g., cautiousness, fishing, etc.) was subjective. Alliances as a category was retained.

A third wave of coding did not incur substantial changes to the coding scheme, but reporting was collapsed to include both solicited and unsolicited reporting within a single category. This was done because the motivation behind the reporting was not always clear, considering that the women operated under a set of rules defined by the pimp that were not explicit to the researchers. For example, it was likely that the pimp required and expected the

women to tell him when police were present in areas where the women were working, and so if a

woman called and reported police activity, this may or may not be considered "solicited" despite

lack of a formal inquiry on the part of the pimp. Therefore, due to the ambiguity of such

interactions, reporting was collapsed into a single overarching category. Additionally, a

coordination category of "Group Activities" was added. The women's lives were highly

enmeshed and intertwined, and there were a number of calls that reflected coordination of things

they did as a group that were not related to their work as prostitutes.

The final coding scheme resulted in 15 distinct codes, as well as codes for duplicate

conversations, conversations that did not include a participant, and conversations that contained

insufficient content to code, for a total of 18 codes (see Appendix A). Notably, positive

interactions among the women were so rare that only one code was broadly positive in nature:

alliances. However, an alliance need not be characterized by warmth, caring, or support to be

established, so the nature of this category is not specifically positive per se. Aside from this, the

No Code category captured neutral support, and positive support was so rare, if at all, that there

was no need to create a code for it.

Inter-rater reliability. There were challenges to attaining adequate inter-rater reliability.

For the first and second waves, coding was conducted by two the researcher and another coder,

and tie-breaking was resolved through discussion between them. Additionally, codes were still

undergoing saturation during the first and second waves of coding. The third wave of coding

included the researcher and two independent coders. The remaining conversations were each

coded by two people, and disagreements were resolved by tie-breaking with the third person. At

the end of the second wave, the coders obtained adequate reliability for W-W (78.26) but not P-

W (63.41). Overall reliability for the third wave was 70.67 for W-W, ranging from 63.37 to

76.79 per coding pair, and 68.09 for P-W, ranging from 66.67 to 69.77 per coding pair. Coding

reliability increased as the coding scheme became saturated. The P-W conversations created a

unique challenge because of the added layer of having to distinguish the dynamics being

expressed about the two women, rather than the surface dynamics occurring between the pimp

and the woman speaking with him.

Calls between women. Nearly all calls between women (W-W) had a context of

coordination, with the most coordinating work (44.78%), meaning conversations related to

commercial sex were the most frequent. Furthermore, calls about police (20.90%) and

traffic/weather (28.36%) are related to specific aspects of commercial sex activities, so the

majority of calls between women were conducted within discussions related to their line of work.

Drugs also represented the context for a large number of calls (26.12%) and were the primary

form of social interaction, or what might be considered intimacy, among the women. Calls about

food (5.22%) were very sterile; the women ate together and had to coordinate meals, but these

calls had a very flat, business-like feel. Few calls were conducted in a context of general

coordination not captured in the preceding categories (5.22%), and only two calls (1.49%)

between women were coded as not having a coordination context. Note that because calls may

contain more than one dynamic or coordination context, the results are not meant to add up to

100%. Figure 2A provides a visual comparison of the coordination contexts used between

women in calls.

Push-pull was by far the most common social dynamic in the calls, with women being

guarded, suspicious, cautious, or fishing in nearly half of the conversations (47.76%). A nearly

equal number of calls (47.01%) had a neutral tone and were coded as "no code". The other

dynamics occurred in few calls: Alliances (7.46%), Passive Competition (6.72%), Coercive

Control by Proxy (3.73%), 3rd Party Competition (2.24%), Direct Competition (1.49%), and

Reporting (0.75%). Figure 2B provides a visual comparison of the dynamics that occurred

between women in calls.

        Calls between a pimp and woman. Unlike calls between women, calls between a pimp

and woman (P-W) in which another woman was a topic of conversation were evenly split

between the absent woman being discussed in a context of coordinating work and no

coordination context (each at 35.71%). Other coordination contexts were brought up

infrequently: Group Activities (9.52%), Food (7.14%), Police (7.14%), and General

Coordination (4.76%). Drugs and Traffic or Weather were never contexts of the conversations

women had about each other with the pimp (see Figure 2A).

        The social support dynamics that women expressed when talking with the pimp were also

strikingly different than the women's interactions with each other. When talking to the pimp

about another woman, the women predominantly expressed passive competition (45.24%) and

reported on each other (42.86%). A little over a quarter (26.19%) of the conversations contained

push-pull dynamics. Direct competition and 3rd party competition were each expressed in

19.05% of the conversations, and coercive control by proxy was in 14.29% of the conversations,

usually with the pimp instructing the woman to enact some form of coercive control on his

behalf or under his instruction. A small number of conversations (9.52%) had a neutral "no

code" dynamic, and very few (4.76%) contained expressions of alliance (see Figure 2B).
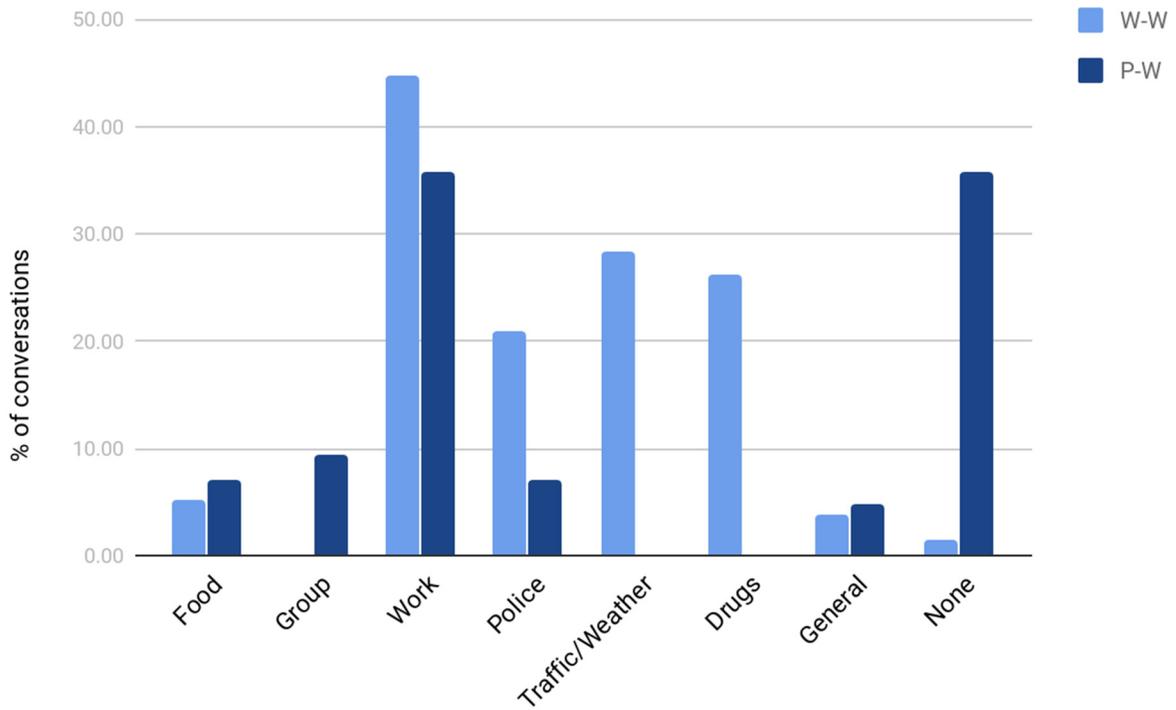
Figure 2A. Frequency of codes: women's coordination contexts in conversations between

women (W-W) and between a pimp and a woman (P-W). Totals may add up to >100% as

conversations may contain multiple codes.
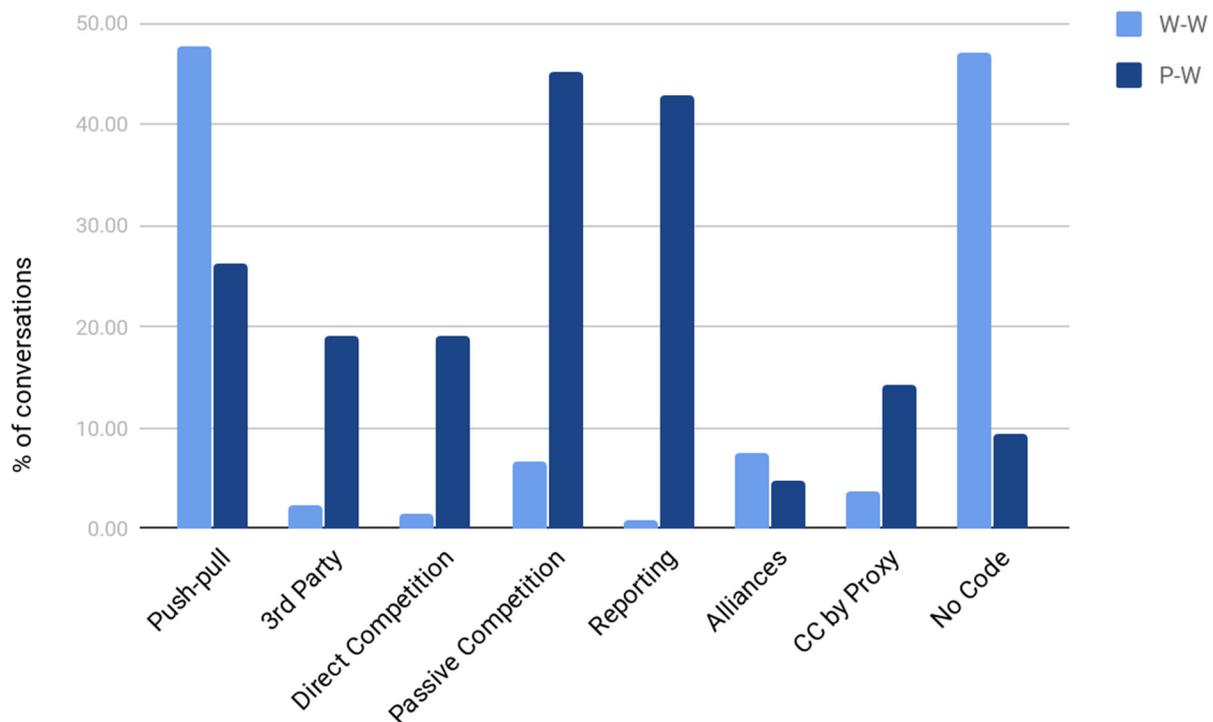
Figure 2B. Frequency of codes: women's interpersonal dynamics in conversations between

women (W-W) and between a pimp and a woman (P-W). Totals may add up to >100% as

conversations may contain multiple codes.

Isolation due to unsafe and unreliable networks. Overall, there was a dearth of the

various positive elements that generally emerge in ongoing relationships, and the existing

elements all seemed to point to an overarching environment of isolation, specifically due to

unreliable and unsafe networks. The sterile nature of the women's interactions, along with the

dynamics above that characterized their conversations, pointed to a lack of social support in their

network, resulting in isolation. The flat, passive, indirect, and cautious nature of the women's

interactions suggested an atmosphere of fear in which the victims were not able to fully trust

each other, further pointing to an unsafe and unreliable network. Unsafe networks refer to social

networks comprised of others who may be aligned with the pimp or participate in the coercion, thereby putting the victim in danger or causing harm (Mahan, 2017). The following quote from the present study (edited for clarity) is an example that illustrates an unsafe network:

[Two women are discussing a third woman who saved money that was supposed to have been spent on food to buy a gift for the pimp.]

S: And I just wanted to let you know one thing, I ended up telling um G [the pimp] about how I thought she took that money and bought his gifts or whatever. Like, not to bring any of the subject up like that, and I'm not trying to talk about it like that, but you know how I was telling you how I felt like she did that?

D: Uh-huh.

S: Well, she sat there and, I guess, tried to say she thought bitches was taking out they traps-- H and everybody else-- bitches was taking out they traps basically. I said it's funny that she goes and says that ... I said, now I know there was at least two-, three hundred hundred or more left over ..., in his pocket that was missing, ya know what I'm saying? So for her to try to point the finger at somebody else, and she did the same shit or more-- not the same shit, but she don't even know what you guys are doing basically.

D: I was gonna say, how does she even know, even for you for that matter? If somebody's gonna do something like that, you're not gonna sit there and do it to where the other person knows anyway... I mean come on now, common fucking sense.

S: That's what I'm saying. She's basically trying to make it sound like y'all was doing it, and she wasn't doing shit though..she didn't know that I assumed that she took that money. Like, G [the pimp] didn't even know. I said something to you 'cause I wanted to say something. But I wasn't trying to cause a problem when it wasn't the case.

The women here told each other and the pimp about the behavior of another woman that they felt was unfair and violated the pimp's rules. The woman in question felt that her behavior was similar to that of other women in the ring, and later the two women conversing described the third woman as someone who cannot be trusted: "There was another incident that she went through that she thought that it was okay because she assumed that everybody else did it, and when she gets caught for it, she wants to throw everybody else under the bus."

 As described above, unreliable networks refer to social networks comprised of others who may at times be helpful but provide unintentional disregard for the victim in times of need (Mahan, 2017). Such a network would further contribute to a cycle of isolation and distrust that continually exacerbates the unsafe and unreliable nature of the women's social support network. The following quote from the present study is an example that illustrates an unreliable network (edited for clarity):

[A woman, H, is speaking with the pimp, G, about another woman, D.]

H: I'm really frustrated, 'cuz I don't understand how this bitch expects to go do a date and feels like she's getting credit for a date that I met. Like, that pisses me off. That really pisses me the fuck off. Like, I'm really irritated.

G: I bet so dude.

H: I'm sorry.

G: Let that girl do her own motherfucking thing, man. 'Cuz this is the only way she'll be able to pick up her pace. She's been taking up her pace 'cuz of you. I'm not stupid. That's why I like D to work by herself. The reason why I like D to work by herself is because she has to do the work. She has to show that she's putting in the work to bring in the money...

H: No, I give this girl money, that's why I'm so pissed off right now.

G: Wait…what do you mean you give this girl money?

H: I give this bitch money! When she don't break, and I break, and I have an okay break or something of the sort, I give this bitch money so she can at least go home with 100 or 200 dollars! For this shit to happen to me at the end of the day--that's why I'm so pissed off!

G: I didn't know that.

H: Yes!

G: How long has that been going on?

H: Since I've been working with her! If she 'aint having a good night, and she's afraid of getting her ass whooped, and I broke for a decent amount of money or I made my money, I generously give her money!

In the course of expressing her frustration about a situation involving a john, H revealed that she had been giving D money that she had made so that D would not have to return with nothing and risk getting beaten by the pimp. As the conversation continued, the pimp solicited more information about D's activities and habits and became upset at the report that D did not get as much money out of johns as she was expected to. The pimp said, "She's talking about not getting my motherfuckin' money, we got an issue." D's relationship with H had been protective for D previously (e.g., H gave her money and thereby covered for her), but in the course of venting her frustrations about a different situation, H revealed information to the pimp that now put D at risk.

Network Analysis

A network analysis revealed the characteristics of the interactions between the women in the trafficking ring. Because of the mistrust that is fostered among the women, it was expected

that the pimp would have the most density in the network (i.e., have the most direct

communication links occuring overall with the women). Additionally, because of the importance

of the role of the Bottom, it was expected that the woman who appears to be in that role would

also have a higher number of communications between herself and the other women than any of

the other women would have.

The results, however, indicated unexpected communication patterns. Regarding

interpersonal interactions among the women, the pimps (P1 and P2) were not central parts of the

network. P1 had minimal contact with the women and only spoke with one woman when talking

about other women. P2 had communication with all of the women, but had the most interactions

with two women (V1 and V3) when speaking about other women, and he initiated conversation

about other women the most with V1 (Figure 3A). Overall, though, most of the arrows are

pointing in toward the pimp, showing that it was usually the women who brought up other

women in their conversations with him. This supports the idea that the women live in an unsafe

and unreliable network.

Importantly, not all of the women were connected with each other or had

communications that were initiated from both sides, indicating various levels of isolation. For

example, V4 had a two-way connection with only one other woman, which places her in a

position of high isolation. Additionally, V1 was considered the Bottom, but she did not seem to

be the most central actor among the women or between the pimps and women. V3, on the other

hand, was the only woman who had a two-way connection with all of the other women in the

network, which would seem to place her in potentially the most advantageous position within the

network. Overall, the women had more interactions with each other than speaking about each

other to the pimp (see Figure 3C).

A.

B.

C.
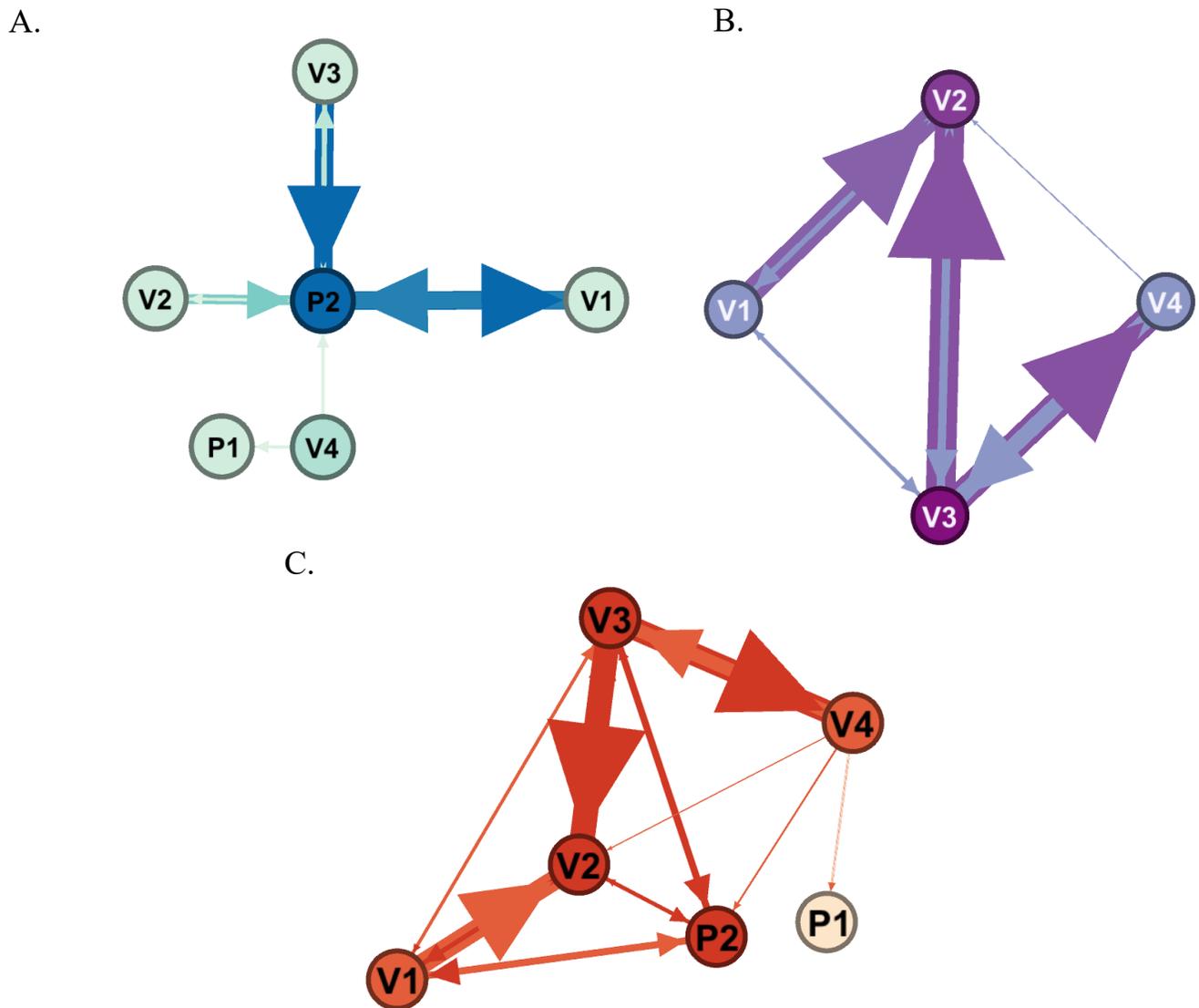
Figure 3. Network pattern of interactions in the trafficking ring *A:* Interactions between a pimp and a woman (P-W) in which another woman was discussed. Arcs (i.e., arrows) point from the actor who brought up the other woman to the other actor involved in the conversation; thicker arcs represent more interactions. *B:* Interactions between women (W-W) in the trafficking ring. Arcs point from the actor who initiated the conversation toward the other actor involved. *C:* Overall interactions between actors in the trafficking ring. Arc direction is as described in *A* and *B*.

The network density was 0.6, meaning that the network actors are not all connected with each other, as a density of 1 would mean that each actor is connected with every other actor. Less dense networks have less coordination among the actors and potentially more isolation (Hawe, Webster, and Shiell, 2009). Table 1 shows the number of interactions between unique actors (i.e., degree) as well as the total number of interactions between actors (i.e., weighted degree). In-degree indicates calls or statements directed toward an actor, whereas out-degree indicates calls going outward (for W-W calls) or statements made by an actor about another woman (for P-W calls). V3 had the most interactions in total, with V2 at a distant second. Both of these women were usually partnered with women who did not interact directly with each other, and V3 and V2 rarely interacted directly with each other's partners. However, V3 and V2 did work and smoke together at times. Notably, the women did not have many interactions with the pimps that involved discussion of other women in the ring. P1 had almost no involvement of this nature, and P2 had limited involvement compared with the amount of direct interactions the women had with each other.

Table 1

Centrality of Network Actors in Terms of Degree

Actor ID	In-degree	Out-degree	Degree	Weighted In-degree	Weighted Out-degree	Weighted Degree
P1	1	1	2	2	1	3
P2	4	3	7	24	14	38
V1	3 (1)	3 (1)	6 (2)	17 (9)	39 (8)	56 (17)
V2	4 (1)	3 (1)	7 (2)	64 (2)	20 (5)	84 (7)
V3	4 (1)	4 (1)	8 (2)	34 (3)	76 (9)	110 (12)
V4	2 (1)	4 (2)	6 (3)	32 (1)	23 (4)	55 (5)

Note. Total calls are provided with number of calls with the pimp in parentheses.

Temporal Patterns

In order to analyze the temporal patterns of the women's interactions as indicated in their conversations with each other and with the pimps, conflicts were plotted on a timeline as low, medium, or high conflict. As seen in IPV, high conflict incidents were few and occurred in isolation, thereby punctuating longer periods of low and medium conflict (Figure 4). During the low conflict periods, it was not uncommon for the push-pull dynamic to be present, which makes sense as the women abide in the status quo of upholding the pimp's rules and enforcing those rules among each other. This pattern allows the pimp to maintain order, power, and control over the women without having to put in as much direct effort as constant supervision and enforcement would require. Indeed, this was also seen in the network patterns results above; despite the required check-ins every two hours, the women were in contact with each other much more frequently than with the pimps.
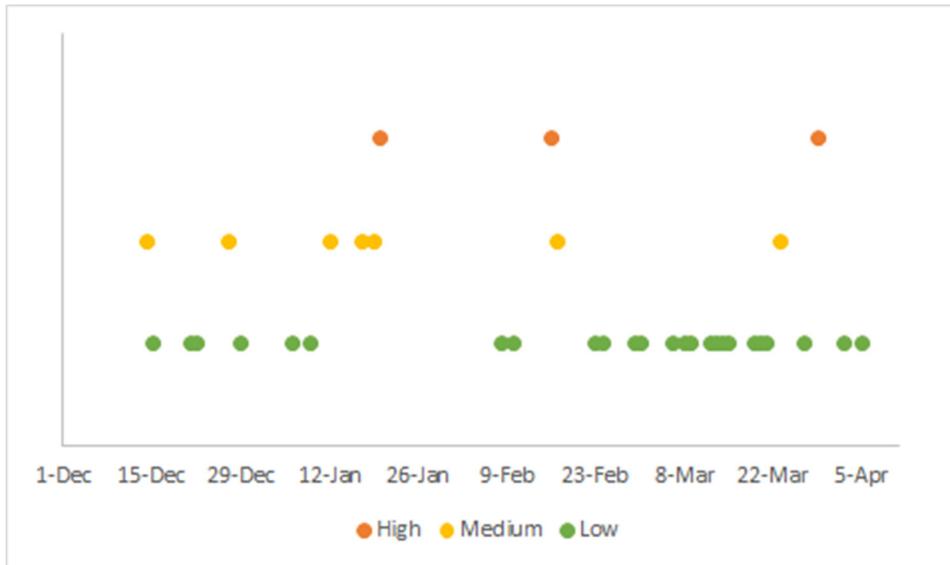
Figure 4. Temporal pattern of conflict. This is a visual representation of the temporal pattern in which more emotionally intense or direct incidents of conflict seem to serve to bracket periods of lower conflict, i.e. calm or seeming calm.

Discussion

Although there is much research on the relationship between perpetrators and victims, this study is among the few that examine the dynamics among concurrent victims of sex trafficking using real-life data occurring in real time longitudinally. This study aimed to examine the possible use of coercive control by proxy among the victims, understand interpersonal dynamics that characterize the victim's social support network, and determine whether the women's interactions contained high conflict incidents that bracketed and sustained longer periods of lower conflict.

The women's conversations in our study reflect the social hierarchies typical of trafficking rings. The pimp was clearly at the top and in control of this trafficking ring, and the women sought to comply with his rules and please him. For example, at one point the pimp

forbade two of the women from working together or even talking with each other. They complied, and any exceptions were explicitly granted permission by the pimp. Another example was shown in a conversation in which two women discussed a gift that a third woman had gotten for the pimp and talked about their concerns about being able to get him a sufficiently special present that could compare or outshine hers. A final example was in conversations surrounding the pimp's arrest when he was caught riding in a speeding vehicle. The women frantically called each other and were unable to make their own decisions on what to do in light of his arrest for fear of displeasing him.

The women did not explicitly refer to the Bottom as such, but there was one woman who seemed to have a unique relationship with the pimp, as shown in her more open conversation style with him compared with the way the other women talked with him. In addition, she had a child with the pimp and seemed to be a high earner. The other women did not speak with her often, and most of her communication was either with the pimp or with the woman she was usually partnered with, who incidentally was her cousin as well. Any illusion of equality in stature or power with the pimp was removed during a massive argument she had with him over allegations that he had sex with another woman in the ring. The argument made it clear that he was in control and her main sense of currency in the ring was in the ability to have a child with him. This supports the argument that despite having responsibilities delegated to her, the Bottom is in an insecure position of false agency, and it is actually a facade grown out of her belief of being complicit in illegal behavior (Barnard, 2014).

Because of the women's competition for the pimp's attention and efforts to comply with his demands, I expected to see the women use coercive control among each other, for the pimp's benefit. I found that there was not as much explicit use of coercive control being enacted by

proxy among the women, as initially anticipated. However, it is important to note that it occurs among them at all, as it defies the normal give-and-take of social support systems; rather than provide support to each other in a helping relationship, the coercive control by proxy engendered transactional alliances, betrayals, splitting, and triangulation in their conversations, which all erode trust and diminish perceived support. Thus, any semblance of social support was undermined in the interactions between the women in the trafficking ring

Not only was social support virtually absent in the women's interactions with and about each other, but rather, their dynamics served to perpetuate their isolation and contribute to creating and maintaining an unsafe and unreliable network by perpetuating a cycle that reinforced mistrust of one another. For example, the guardedness and cautiousness with which the women spoke to each other was notably less frequent in calls with the pimp, which indicates being careful with the information they tell each other but not being careful to protect each other from him. This manner of betrayal or disregard was also apparent in the network analysis, which showed that it was usually the women who brought up discussions of other women with the pimp. The pimp seemed to encourage women's reporting on activities of other women when it impacted his enterprise (e.g., the conversation described previously in which one of the women revealed helping another woman meet her nightly quota) but discouraged bringing interpersonal problems to him (e.g., "...every time you at work and you have your little misunderstandings or whatever the fuck is said, I'm always brung into this hoe shit, and I'm getting tired.").

Such dynamics that foster isolation and mistrust ultimately benefit the pimp and increase his power and control over the group. This lack of social support and connections with each other or outside parties means that there was no real help available, not even from one another. These findings are important because they shed light on a common misconception: that women

who are sex trafficked have the ability to access others, in or out of the ring, for help (see Cianciarulo, 2008). Rather than having access to others, the women are functionally isolated. Understanding this makes it easier to see why women who are sex trafficked might hesitate or avoid seeking help even if they seem to have opportunities to do so.

In all, their conversations showed that they are likely to align themselves with the pimp over supporting each other, which has also been indicated in prior research (Barnard, 2014). This is important because it means that if a woman discloses the wrong information, she could be hurt or punished. In the commercial sex setting, "wrong" information includes things like going out of the approved territory, drinking with someone, or wearing clothes that are not approved by the pimp: in other words, activities or disclosures that might make a typical person vulnerable at most but not in serious danger. All of these factors contribute to the unsafe and unreliable network they are enclosed in.

The women's interactions with each other did contain occasional expressions of alliance dynamics. However, the alliances formed were all transactional in nature and related to conducting commercial sex. For example, one woman said, "If there are ever two guys, I'm calling you," and sometimes conversation was initiated by offering to share drugs and then continued with a request to ride with the other woman. There were no truly positive, strings-free interactions; at best they were neutral, as captured in the "no code" group.

These results are important because this transactional nature was not limited to a few calls but occurred in nearly every call that was conducted. The calls were recorded on full days that were adjacent or within a few days, so there was a fairly complete picture of the interactions during this time period. When adults in the general population talk to each other about topics they consider to be important, these topics include a wide range of things such as news, health,

household matters, politics, community, ideology, and relationships. Furthermore, the topics that

people report as being important are not discussed in order to obtain some kind of result or end

goal (Bearman & Parigi, 2004). This contrasts greatly with the women's conversations in this

study; there were no calls that offered support or developed a relationship, but rather nearly

every conversation was transactional in nature, and there was a distinct void of the expected

mutual helping relationship.

On the rare occasion that a woman sought emotional support, it was usually met with

nothing or flatness from the other woman. For example, on one occasion, one woman sounded

distressed and said, "Like, I don't know why it is- because I'm tired but I, like, just literally feel

like crying (made a laugh sort of sound and inhaled sharply). Like, I'm so stressed out from this

traffic." After a short pause, the other woman responded in a flat and distracted tone, "I'm in

(street) now, I'm on -- What am I on? (street) and (avenue). I'm about to turn." The first woman

clearly expressed distress and an emotional need, but the other woman completely ignored it, and

instead talked about directions and location.

This lack of support is especially notable because even in situations of IPV, the victim

has resources and some social support. There may be less from her abusive partner, but overall,

abused women have comparable levels of support outside of the relationship as non-abused

women (Carlson, McNutt, Choi, Rose, 2002). Here, however, there was not only a flatness that is

unusual in relationships but also an utter lack of support. These dynamics contribute to an

atmosphere of mistrust inside an embedded, enclosed network, which may also explain victims'

reluctance to seek help from outside parties with whom they come into contact.

In addition to those social support implications, there are also legal implications that may

occur as a consequence of these dynamics. Because the pimp delegates responsibilities to some

women, such as the Bottom, and they enforce the pimp's rules with each other, a victim can be

charged with trafficking or pimping herself (Butler, 2014; Reid, 2016). Sometimes trafficking

charges are brought instead of lower prostitution charges in an effort to pressure the women to

testify against the pimp as the trafficker (Barnard, 2014). However, this ignores the women's

history of functional isolation living within an unsafe, unreliable social network in the trafficking

ring. The women have a history of repeatedly betraying each other, and this contributes to their

feeling that the pimp is the only one they can trust. Therefore, in court, their allegiance will be

with the pimp; they will testify against each other but rarely against him, instead taking the

punishment in his place (Serita, 2012).

The temporal pattern of conflict among the women in this trafficking ring appears to

follow a similar pattern to that found in IPV, wherein incidents of high conflict serve to

punctuate and sustain longer periods of seeming calm. This is important to understand when

considering arguments that the women choose this lifestyle and stay in it of their own volition.

Understanding the temporal pattern of conflict provides increased insight into the pimp's use of

coercive control and the way that the women's interactions reflect the network structure and

interpersonal framework created by him. Together, all of these results provide a richer

understanding of the dynamics between concurrent victims and shed light on the role of the pimp

in the women's interpersonal dynamics.

On a practical level, there needs to be a shift from viewing trafficked women as criminals

to recognizing their victimhood (Barnard, 2014; Butler, 2014; Crocker, 2017; Serita, 2012).

There are various suggestions on legal approaches to supporting these women. One suggestion is

a "safety valve" approach that would allow for the physical and psychological trauma

experienced by a Bottom to serve as a mitigating factor as her charges are considered (Crocker,

2017). Others suggest redefining and expanding laws or statutes that would allow victims of sex trafficking to vacate convictions and avoid amassing new ones (Barnard, 2014). Similarly, some suggest creating safe harbor laws that eliminate victims' culpability and implementing these in conjunction with educating legal players and providing social services to victims (Butler, 2014). Additionally, it has been suggested that it would be helpful to provide sex-trafficked women undergoing the arraignment process with support through a social worker who could guide them through a process that is often confusing, scary, and feels adversarial (Rogers, 2019).

Limitations

Wiretap data offers an excellent opportunity to analyze naturalistic interactions, but at the same time, it provides an incomplete picture of the relationships among the victims since in-person interactions are unknown. This was evident when the recorded conversations made reference to conflict and incidents that were not included in the recorded data. Additionally, the difficulty in obtaining adequate interrater reliability is a limitation of this study. Perhaps the biggest factor at play in this was the difficulty in fitting the dynamics observed in the calls into a discrete framework that captured their full essence. In that light, it may be useful to further examine the coding scheme to ensure saturation and clarity of definitions.

Furthermore, there may be differences between the characteristics of the trafficking ring that was analyzed for the present study and other trafficking rings throughout the country or the world. For instance, because of different pimping styles, such as a softer "finesse" style as opposed to the violent "gorilla" style (Dank et al., 2014; Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Kennedy, Klein, Bristowe, Cooper, & Yuille, 2007), it is possible that victims controlled by each of these types of pimps have different styles of interacting among themselves as well. The pimp's ability to control his anger and violent outbursts may also play a role in the victims' expressions of

conflict with each other, which might thereby show a different pattern when undergoing

temporal analysis. Analyzing the dynamics of concurrent victims in other trafficking rings is

necessary to confirm whether the results of the present research are generalizable. Another

limitation is the finite time period available for analysis in the present research; the temporal

pattern of interactions would likely become clearer if data from a longer time span were

available.

Future Research

Moving forward, interactions between victims in other trafficking rings should be

examined in order to confirm whether the same or similar themes and dynamics are present there

as well. Pimps vary in the set of rules they maintain with their ring, and the size of trafficking

rings vary as well; it is important to determine whether the codes and characteristics that I found

to be present in our data are also present in other trafficking rings and among groups of victims

that are larger or smaller than the group in our data. Additionally, analyzing a greater number of

conversations over a longer time span is necessary to offer increased insight into the nature of the

women's dynamics and to confirm the present findings. It may also be useful to extend research

to conversations the women have with personal parties outside of the trafficking ring, such as

friends or family members. These conversations were few in the data available to the present

study, but such conversations could shed light on the extent of the women's isolation and the

dynamics apparent in their outside connections.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

The present study revealed dynamics, in particular a lack of social support and

interactions that were transactional in nature, that increase our understanding of the ways in

which concurrent victims of sex trafficking live within an unsafe and unreliable network, despite

their close contact with one another. This is important for understanding their ability to seek

help, in or out of the ring, and their ability to rely on others. It also has important legal

implications. Women in the trafficking ring interact in ways that foster mistrust and betrayal,

which increases their loyalty to the pimp as the only person they feel they can truly trust. In a

legal setting, this would mean that they would be more likely to testify against each other or take

the consequences themselves rather than betray the pimp, which is another avenue for further

research. This understanding can lead to improved policies within the legal system that better

support and provide options for sex-trafficked women who find themselves accountable to the

law but are also victims themselves who are unable to act with full agency. Ultimately, the

accountability should be with the pimps, who are responsible for perpetuating the cycle of

perpetration and victimization.

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Appendix A

Isolation & Support Dynamics Codebook

Highlight the call heading (first 4 lines: number, date, length, callers) and add codes there. Defer to tone of audio call (over reading transcription) when making choices. For calls that are ambiguous in nature, err on the side of being conservative in judgment.

- ***Always code type of coordination for each call. Only code predominant type or if >1 is focus of conversation, code as needed.***
- ***Also code at least one other dynamics code (non-coordination code) for each call.***
- ***For Other/Insufficient Content, Not a Participant, or Duplicate: only give single code.***
- ***For P-W calls, only code for the interpersonal dynamics/context of the conversation about the 2nd woman (rather than the context of the conversation with the pimp or the dynamics between the woman speaking and the pimp).***
- ***If callers switch mid-call, code for each conversation – for subsequent conversations, highlight text line that introduces new caller for 2nd (and and subsequent) set(s) of codes.***

- *If you note many typos or incorrect speaker labels in any conversation, highlight the first 4 lines and add a memo stating the problem and corrections (for speakers).*

Inclusion criteria:
- Conversations between women in the trafficking ring (W-W)
- Conversations between a pimp and a woman in the trafficking ring in which another woman in the ring (known participant) is a topic of conversation (P-W)
- Participants are known women (D, H, S, K) and pimps (G, Se).
- Both sides of the conversation are recorded/audible/intelligible

Exclusion criteria:
- Only one side of conversation recorded/audible/intelligible
- A member of conversation or woman who is the topic of conversation (for P-W) is not a known participant or likely not a known participant
- (*Include if it is a known participant or likely a known participant but unclear which one. Likely = preponderance of evidence, more likely than not)
- For P-W, the woman who is mentioned is not a topic of the conversation. For example, the woman speaking says "We're in the car," but does not make further mention of the woman.

P-W Coding: *Code only for women's interpersonal dynamics. If callers switch mid-call, code for each woman's conversation with pimp (treat each as individual call-see instructions above for marking text)*

CODES:
Push-Pull dynamics (Guarded, Suspicious, Cautious, Fishing):
- Seems to be seeking information (about another woman, for P-W; or feedback or emotional support, for W-W) but skirts around or broaches topic without directly asking about it.
- Often characterized by indirect language and repetition of phrases or comments.

- Withholding information, defensiveness, putting up a wall.
- Lack of responsiveness to the other person or to pimp's statements about another woman.
- Using cautious or passive language, walking on eggshells, indirect or soft accusations.
- Tiptoeing around a topic, preceding introduction of the topic with many disclaimers and/or apologies.

Alliances: Direct expressions of support/alliance with other woman. *Can't code in conjunction with passive competition (for the same segment).*

Competition:
- **Passive:** Underlying understanding of group dynamics at play (eg, need to make certain amount of money and keep up with others). Almost like a subtle alliance but not explicitly an alliance.
- **Direct:**
  - Elevating self over the other speaker or woman being discussed.
  - Expressions of competition or jealousy.
- **3rd Party:** Bad-mouthing or trash-talking about a 3rd party participant.

Reporting *(*make memo note for solicited/unsolicited*)***:**
- (Solicited): Pimp/another woman asks for information about another woman. Can be coded in conjunction with any code above or alone, if no other code fits.
- (Unsolicited): Speaker spontaneously provides information about another woman (eg, location, activities, statements, appearance, etc.)

CC by proxy (*make note of type of coercive control*):
- Pimp orders woman to act on his behalf in regard to another participant that would be coded as coercive control if he enacted it himself.
- Woman reports (solicited or unsolicited) on cc by proxy orders that pimp had given her. Differs from reporting code in that it is specific to orders to act on behalf of the pimp rather than behaviors that may be coercive control and benefit the pimp or align with his rules but not solicited by him.
- Woman uses coercive control toward another participant on behalf of the pimp or for the pimp's benefit.

Coordination, general, or specify:
- **Food:** Conversations coordinating food, what to eat/drink, etc.
- **Drugs:** Discussions of obtaining drugs, meeting to smoke, etc.
- **Police:** Reporting/warning about police location or activity.
- **Traffic and Weather**: Reporting traffic (including directions and parking) or weather problems.
- **Work:** Basic coordination of routine activities not in categories above, including location that's not associated with driving/traffic.
- **Group activities:** Discussions surrounding interactions with each other that are not related to the other coordination activities but reflect the enmeshed/intertwined nature of their lives (eg, working out Christmas plans)
- **None:** Context of conversation does not involve any form of coordination.

Other, specify:
- **Duplicate**
- **Not a participant**: Participant is speaking to or woman of topic is a friend, family member, woman from a different trafficking ring, or woman who is otherwise not a known participant, or if preponderance of evidence suggests that it is not a participant if

ambiguous.
- **Insufficient content**: *Only use if necessary* Not enough dialogue to code the call.
- **No code:** No distinctive content, doesn't fit in other codes.