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The Criminalized Victim: Can Knowledge of Trauma and Coercion Influence Free Will Doubt and Perception of Culpability for Sex Trafficked Individuals?

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**The Criminalized Victim: Can Knowledge of Trauma and Coercion Influence Free Will
Doubt and Perception of Culpability for Sex Trafficked Individuals?**

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Abstract

Individuals who have been sex trafficked are continuously being targeted for prostitution and other related offenses instead of being recognized for their victimization. This may occur due to a fundamental lack of understanding of the sex-trafficked experience, allowing for misperceptions to form unhindered. Individuals with these misperceptions then go on to form laws and services intended to aid victims, but instead leave them vulnerable and criminalized. This study assessed whether an educational intervention on the experience of a sex-trafficked individual could influence public perceptions of free will doubt and criminal culpability. This study used a nonequivalent groups posttest-only design to administer an article on the sex trafficking experience, including the trauma and coercion a victim faces, or a neutral article on optical illusions, to then assess sex trafficking knowledge, free will doubt, and culpability beliefs. Participants (N= 445) were recruited from the general public through Amazon Mechanical Turk and were reimbursed for their involvement. Results showed no difference between the scores of the individuals exposed to the experimental or neutral intervention on both sex trafficking knowledge and culpability beliefs. However, significant results were found in the sex trafficking intervention group with members showing scores of more free will doubt. A mediation analysis also showed significant indirect effects of the experimental intervention on culpability beliefs through free will doubt.

Keywords: sex trafficking, prostitution, trauma, coercion, free will, culpability

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The Criminalized Victim: Can Knowledge of Trauma and Coercion Influence Free Will Doubt and Perception of Culpability for Sex Trafficked Individuals?

The U.S. is the only “modern democratic country where the majority of trafficking victims are its own citizens” (Mir, 2013). This problem is becoming increasingly worse even though many Americans believe trafficking does not exist in our country anymore due to legislation like the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), creating a false sense of security. Unfortunately, this is not the case as each year an estimated 300,000 minors aged 12 to 14 are at risk of being sex trafficked within the United States (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Mir, 2013). These numerous victims are not receiving adequate help, and instead are being held criminally culpable for prostitution and other related crimes (Barnard, 2014; Gerassi, 2015; Mir, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). There is an abundance of research on the failures of the laws and policies that could help victims, but not why they are created with so many flaws. This study aims to address this by assessing the public perceptions of sex trafficked victims to see if legislation is formed naively with a misunderstanding of victims’ traumatic and coercive experiences, or if it is due to other factors such as inherent stigma against prostitution.

Background

Although sex trafficking is commonly referred to as “modern slavery,” it has been in existence for centuries (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014; Gerassi, 2015; Pflieger, 2016). In the 1800s people believed sexual slaves were prostitutes who lured good men away from their “chastity” (Wagner & Wagley McCann, 2017). Slavery was abolished in 1865, yet sexual slavery was not deterred and continued with minimal involvement from law enforcement. This is why in 1910, the Mann Act was put into effect, attempting to punish those kidnapping and forcing women to do sexual acts (Cianciarulo, 2008). This act even has segments addressing interstate

transportation and elements of coercion and enticement, which is similar to the modern legislation in place. This act eventually led to the prosecution of promiscuous and unfaithful women (Cianciarulo, 2008). While well-intentioned, this legislation was wrongly enforced and added to perceptions that promiscuous women are criminal and ignoring the possibility of victimization.

Misperceptions of sex trafficking have been maintained over time, especially when attempting to distinguish between trafficking and prostitution. In an ideal situation, the two would easily be distinguished by the construct of “free will” or voluntary behavior, which is not always the case in real-life. Prostitution is recognized as the voluntary performance of commercial sex acts, whereas sex trafficking involves the pressure of force, fraud, or coercion in any manner (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000). Traffickers subject their victims to a multitude of tactics to gain their trust, establish compliance, and intimidate them into doing whatever they ask. This is why trafficked victims are not voluntarily engaging in sex work, they would not otherwise commit these acts without the pressure of force and coercion (Wolf & Pruitt, 2018).

An issue that arises within the legislation is that there is a search for a precise difference between guilty sex workers and innocent victims (Chapkis, 2003). Victims' experiences are not as black or white as this. There are many situations where an individual may be trafficked at a young age yet turn to sex work as an adult (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). This is because instead of a typical education they learned the trade of sex work, and out of necessity it is the most economically viable choice for supporting themselves. Victims can often seem like willing participants due to being uncooperative with law enforcement or being protective of their traffickers (Zimmerman & Pocock, 2013). However, fear and psychological trauma can keep a

victim from self-disclosing about their experience in these situations. There are situations where individuals are recruited by their own family into sex work and are sent abroad as a way to financially support those back home. Victims are pressured by risks of deportation and devotion to their families, which makes the difference between voluntary and forced actions even more confusing (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). These are just a few examples of different reasons why one might choose sex work, why one may feel unable to leave their abuser or choose between duty and autonomy. It is not always as clear as having someone who has voluntarily chosen their fate and someone who is an “absolute victim” where agency is completely removed (Bergquist, 2015).

Even though prostitution and sex trafficking overlap, the criminal justice system continues to arrest and criminally prosecute both groups the same, instead of recognizing the possibility of victimization. Current research states that the typical victim is female, heterosexual, Black/African American, and initially trafficked as a minor; however, these numbers could look different due to underreporting as most research have little to no accounts of male or LGBT victims (Swaner et al., 2016). There has also been reporting of some factors that can increase one’s risk of being trafficked since they put individuals in vulnerable positions. Those who are homeless, have run away from home, have been abused in the past, and are overall lacking in support systems are more likely to be trafficked (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Gerassi, 2015).

Victims are typically first trafficked at the age of 13 and are seen to have a mortality risk that is 200 times greater than the general population. For this reason, it is estimated that victims rarely survive more than seven years after they are trafficked (Wagner & Wagley McCann, 2017; Shelley, 2010). Despite having 300,000 possible victims, only 4,136 cases were reported in

2015, making this a highly underreported and unrecognized crime (Pfleger, 2016). It appears to happen more often than not that victims are being mischaracterized as prostitutes. It is common that victims are reluctant to advocate for themselves; they are too young to realize they have been trafficked, or feel stuck due to past criminalization, leading them only to report their victimization long after it occurred (Gerassi, 2015; Greenbaum, 2017).

Public perceptions of sex trafficking prostitution can have a strong influence how sex trafficking victims are disregarded and go unnoticed so often. Prostitution is not, and never has been, a positively viewed profession within American culture. Women who are involved in this type of work are stereotypically seen as promiscuous, addicted to drugs, and sinful (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). These views stem from religious and political ideology and media portrayals. Many movies and films glamorize the notion of prostitution, showing how women choose this way of life and that it can be exciting and positive. This is a view that many feminists choose to believe in, and they are reluctant to discuss sex trafficking within the realm of prostitution for this reason (Elrod, 2015). They view the two as separate and unconnected industries and view prostitution as an empowering career for women, even though this is not always true (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). There is a heavy overlap between sex trafficking and prostitution, and just because one may choose prostitution does not mean that they would not choose a different profession if they had the means to do so, because they still can be subjected to conditions that they never consented to (Cianciarulo, 2008). On the other end of the spectrum, highly religious and conservative individuals believe that every woman in prostitution is a victim because no woman could ever choose that kind of life on their own (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017).

The feminist and conservative communities have clashed over whether to decriminalize prostitution or to put more effort toward prosecuting sex traffickers. This is what helped to pass the TVPA, conservatives saw this law as a way to criminalize prostitution on a federal level; this was in response to the feminist community wanting to legitimize prostitution and porn (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). The resulting legislation focusing on sex trafficking was a compromise of these views, and these public-guided perceptions that informed this law are still in play today. There are still stereotypes of what a typical victim is supposed to look like; they are presumed to be involved in these acts against their own free will. When victims show up not fitting that narrative, individuals within the criminal justice system are more likely to condemn them as an offender that does not deserve help.

Free Will and Coercion

Free Will

Free will is seen as one's ability to consciously and rationally make uninhibited choices about what actions to execute (Koppel et al., 2018). People are expected to have their own agency that guides their life and the decisions they make. This concept is what allows society to believe that others should always be held accountable for their actions because it was of their own choice. Within the criminal justice system, these views provide the justification for retributive justice, where the accountability for how much blame or punishment one deserves for a crime depends on how culpable they were (Koppel et al., 2018). Those who are seen as most culpable are those who have acted consciously, rationally, and uninhibited. According to State v. Sikora 1965, "for protection of society, the law accepts the thesis that all men are invested with free will and capable of choosing between right and wrong (Gordon & Fondacaro, 2017).

However, one can be able to rationally recognize the difference between right and wrong and still be hindered to make the morally or criminally right decisions. To assume that agency or free will, and rationality are the only aspects involved in being compliant with the law ignores any biopsychosocial factors that weigh heavily on most people's lives (Gordon & Fondacaro, 2017). The sex-trafficked experience is complicated, wrought with traumatic and coercive factors that can be argued to influence one's free will, and ultimately render them less culpable.

The Trafficked Experience

A victim of sex trafficking is subject to years of chronic psychological and physical coercion, manipulation, and abuse. Traffickers can use different techniques, but overall they follow similar patterns of systematic isolation and disorientation to maintain a victim's dependence and vulnerability (Shelley, 2010). Research of child sexual abuse calls these patterns "grooming", where the ultimate goals are desensitization, normalizing boundary violations, and ensuring secrecy from the victim (Wolf & Pruitt, 2018). A study examined Albert Biderman's work from 1957 interviewing American prisoners from the Korean War, which analyzed how to manipulate others and keep them compliant in their situations without the use of physical force and found similarities to traffickers grooming tactics (Baldwin et al., 2014).

One of the most common ways to be trafficked is through the *Romeo*, or *lover boy* method (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Toney-Butler & Mittel, 2019). In this method, traffickers will first become romantically involved with their victims. After the victims are encapsulated by promises of love, traffickers begin to implement tactics of manipulation and coercion. To keep their victims compliant, traffickers follow the typical cycle of violence. They will implement the minor abuses and create tension, letting it grow until the victim may show signs of unease. They will begin to isolate their victim and find ways to keep them away from

their friends, family, and other support systems (Wolf & Pruitt, 2018). Over time, they can enact so much control that the victim's exposure to the outside world is limited and they are only allowed to go places when they are with their trafficker. Victims will most likely live with their traffickers so they can have even more control over their daily lives. Slowly, traffickers will force their victims into routines of chores or trivial demands, always insisting on perfection. They will overwork their victims, depriving them of food and sleep, and also degrading them for imperfect work (Gerassi, 2015; Baldwin, Fehrenbacher, & Eisenman, 2014). After some time, the trafficker will likely begin more intense abuses. They may start physically beating their victim, initiate forced sexual acts, or begin psychological abuse of threats of harm to the victim or others. Traffickers may use drugs to induce disorientation and increase beatings that result in broken bones or head trauma, and even allow for gang rape style domination (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). They'll deny them medical care, or claim connections to law enforcement to prevent them from attempting to seek help (Baldwin et al., 2014). After the harm period, traffickers will often reward their victim with acts of kindness such as compliments, shows of love, or gifts to make them think that their trafficker truly cares about them. The cycle then begins again, becoming worse and worse over time, often escalating far enough that the result is death for the victim.

Psychological Consequences

For survivors, this grooming and cycle of abuse can have serious psychological consequences. Victims have trouble recognizing the escalation of behaviors and seeing it as unhealthy, which leads them to doubt their perceptions, become passively permissive, and blame themselves for what has occurred (Wolf & Pruitt, 2018). Biderman explains that the "structures of coercion and fear become psychological boundaries" that shape their actions and relationship

with their trafficker (Baldwin et al., 2014). A sex trafficked victim is subject to multiple types of abuses, each can create separate traumatic consequences, compounding the negative effects even more. According to Wolf and Pruitt (2018), threatening and violent tactics were the highest predictors for harmful effects found in child sexual abuse survivors. These tactics cause a sense of powerlessness and self-blame that lead to maladaptive coping strategies. Verbal coercion was also found to be a significant predictor for future sexual problems since it is more ambiguous than other methods it leads to confusion on what is and isn't okay (Wolf & Pruitt, 2018).

Most often, victims are trafficked by the age of 14, so they are experiencing this chronic trauma during their most important developmental years. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) records the type of abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual), and frequency of abuses to measure the health and well-being of victims later in life. Research has shown that adverse childhood experiences can interrupt neurodevelopment, which causes impairments socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Toney-Butler & Mittel, 2019). These impairments can lead to high-risk behaviors that can impact their health, but also make them increasingly susceptible to exploitation by traffickers. So by enduring chronic abuse by traffickers, victims can consequentially have cognitive deficits that lead them to partake in impulsive and risky behaviors and become even more vulnerable to their abuser.

By making an individual so dependent, trusting, and fearful of them, traffickers can influence someone to do almost anything for them, including illegal sex acts (Gerassi, 2015). In most cases, victims will at the very least exhibit intense fear of their abuser, but in extreme cases symptoms similar to Stockholm syndrome can be present in the form of trauma bonding. This means that a victim will identify with their trafficker in a way that makes them protective of them (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Victims will believe that their trafficker cares about their

interests above all else. This leads to reluctance in assisting prosecution with information on their trafficker, ultimately making the victim seem voluntarily participatory (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Justice, & Owens, 2017; Gerassi, 2015) Another side effect of trauma is memory deficits because when the brain is under increased amounts of stress, attention is inhibited so memories are not completely formed (Zimmerman & Pocock, 2013). This, unfortunately, affects a victim's ability to recount experiences in court and can make it seem like they are being uncooperative. In reality, trauma affects individuals in many different ways, and this can confuse others into thinking that force or coercion was not present, or that a victim was complicit in the eyes of the law (Zimmerman & Pocock, 2013).

When courts do not recognize that coercion or force occurred, judges and juries will then see individuals as complicit in their victimization, and chastise them for their sexual exploitation (Pfleger, 2016). They believe that victims failed to leave on their own accord, instead of looking deeper into why someone would be reluctant to leave. Court decisions have gone so far to say that adult trafficking is not a violent crime because the victims are simply placed in harmful situations, and violence is not done to them directly (Pfleger, 2016). When the legal system fails to appreciate the nuances of trauma and coercion, it is ignoring the needs of victims and obstructing more beneficial, non-retributive alternatives.

Current Legislation

Trafficking Victims Protection Act

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act was created in 2000 as an effort to combat human trafficking on a global scale (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000). This act and its four subsequent reauthorizations focused on human rights by enacting effective federal

laws, improving treatments, and spreading awareness both domestically and internationally (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). The law defines forms of severe trafficking as:

"the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery" (Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000).

This act was created as a protection for both sex trafficking as well as labor trafficking. The different types of trafficking are defined similarly, yet sex trafficking has the additional requirement of coercion for commercial sex acts. However, if the victim is under the age of 18 then force and coercion do not need to be present (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000).

The TVPA is a multi-faceted law dealing with an extremely complicated sector of crime and victimization. As mentioned earlier, when this law was proposed in 1998, there was a clash between advocates of feminism trying to push these protections and the religious right who saw their proposals as a way to legitimize porn and prostitution (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). The political right then saw the TVPA as a vehicle to criminalize prostitution federally under the guise of giving protections to trafficking victims. Many elements of the TVPA are vague consequentially, and in practice, this makes it difficult to extract a distinct difference between sex work and sex trafficking (Bergquist, 2015). Factual research was not given priority in making these decisions; instead, policymakers' personal moral ideals and motivation to push their own agendas was the driving force (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017).

A main flaw of the TVPA lies within its definitions of *severe* trafficking. What this means is that if certain forms of trafficking do not meet their specifications, then it is not

technically considered a federal crime under the TVPA (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000). For example, the harboring and recruitment of someone over the age of 18, who either is not, or cannot prove, fraud, force, or coercion, would not be a victim of a crime (Elrod, 2015). The TVPA only defines severe forms of trafficking to be in those cases where the victims are under the age of 18, when coercion does not need to be proven. However, this is where the differentiation between prostitution and sex trafficking becomes tricky. Prostitution is a state law, not a federal law, and most states do not have specific age requirements in their definitions of prostitution, allowing many minors who are trafficking victims to be identified as prostitutes instead, even for minors as young as 12 years old (Mir, 2013). These flaws continually allow victims to be arrested and charged as prostitutes when legally, they should not be.

A study in Florida showed that within six years, it was recorded that over 400 minors were arrested and adjudicated on prostitution charges (Reid & Jones, 2011). Most states have statutes establishing the age of consent around 16 years of age, yet many trafficking victims are even younger than that. Even if a state has consent at the age of 16, the federal law for sex trafficking does not require any coercion under the age of 18. For that reason, there should be no way to convict an individual under the age of 18, or 16, for prostitution because consent and trafficking laws should automatically apply. However, it often happens that girls who are minors are perceived as self-prostituting first, rather than forced accomplices (Mir, 2013). In a study of law enforcement treatment of prostituted minors, it was found that 40% of the youth were regarded as offenders instead of victims (Reid & Jones, 2011). In the case of adults, state and federal law further contradict each other since the U.S. State Department claims that it is not possible for prostitution to be a “freely chosen profession”, but the federal government relies on

evidence of coercion to accept someone as a victim of trafficking (Cianciarulo, 2008). Due to the lack of strength of the TVPA, this issue tends to go unnoticed within the criminal justice system, and the victims are often treated more harshly than their traffickers.

Safe Harbor Laws

The weakness of the TVPA has been demonstrated by the cycle of juveniles being victimized and then incarcerated for prostitution offenses (Mir, 2013). Safe Harbor laws were enacted in 2008 to provide extra protection for these commercially sexually exploited youth by decriminalizing juvenile prostitution and/or diverting the youth into child welfare or other services (Barnett, et al., 2015). These protections are not without fault, however. Once again, states are allowed their discretion on how to implement them. States like New York attempt to protect minors under the age of 16 by using diversion programs instead of incarceration. However, the court still has the discretion to overrule that if the individual has repeat prostitution offenses, or is uncooperative in their diversion program (Barnett, et al., 2015). Other states require trafficker identification or proof of coercion. Trafficker identification could be extremely traumatic, let alone dangerous, for a victim and proof of coercion is difficult to attain, and federally, that burden of proof is supposed to be relinquished for minors (Zornosa, 2016; Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000). Service providers and law enforcement are still seeing a lack of training and understanding, little to no punishment for pimps and johns, and the needs of trafficked victims not being met. Victims are still facing re-traumatization, being told that they don't fit criteria for the protections, or are still winding up in prison due to other related offenses (Barnett, et al., 2015).

Criminal Defenses

Even though the TVPA fails in application, other defenses could be applied to a trafficked individual's situation. A criminal act requires two components: *mens rea*, the guilty mind, and *actus reus*, the voluntary physical act. The criminal justice system presumes that most illegal activity is committed with an "ill will," through an individual's own free will (Gordon & Fondacaro, 2017). However, this is not the case for a sex trafficked victim. They are almost always consciously aware of crimes they may be committing, yet due to trauma, physical threats, and psychological coercion, they are not acting of their own accord. They may still have an awareness of what they are doing, but do not have the free will to control their actions.

According to previous literature, the only kind of legal defense that is used in trafficking cases is an affirmative defense, more specifically, an excuse defense. This defense requires a "*disability causing an excusing condition*," or for a trafficked victim, their coercion and trauma keeping them from controlling their actions (Zornosa, 2016). This acknowledges that an individual was aware of their wrongdoings, but is claiming a lack of personal culpability due to extenuating circumstance (Reid & Jones, 2011). This kind of defense allows a victim to be excused for their crimes since they were committed due to coercion and force from a trafficker.

Another defense that would seem plausible is duress, however, the strict requirements are rarely applicable in a trafficking situation. Duress is used to excuse responsibility for someone who had no choice but to commit the illegal act, because of force from a third party (Barnard, 2014). The defense requires that there is a believable serious threat of bodily harm or deadly force, the threat was imminent at the time of the offense, the crime had to be committed to escape the threat, and the defendant did not instigate the threat. The trafficked victim would look at this list and say that they are all applicable to their situation, yet the courts find a way to argue that they are not (Barnard, 2014). The biggest issue usually seen legally is that of the "imminent

threat” requirement because victims are sent to carry out their duties away from their traffickers at times. The threat will still be imminent to a victim because they know they face harm if they do not do what is asked of them, but the courts see it as a chance they should have taken to step away from the crime (Rocke & MacKenzie, 2017).

Vacatur and Expungement

The defenses above are rarely used because to do so victims first need to be recognized or seek help on their own, both of which are rare. This leads to statutes that have been enacted for vacatur and expungement. These statutes are administered after a victim has been charged on criminal offenses, and is seeking a clean record for a second chance. For example, New York put into place section 440.10(1)(i) of the New York Criminal Procedure Law, which allows for a vacate of judgment if the “participation in the offense was the result of having been a victim of sex trafficking” (Zornosa, 2016; Barnard, 2014). However, there are many critiques for vacatur statutes. Most state statutes have limitations that do not include situations where victims are forced to complete non-prostitution offenses such as buying illicit drugs, so ultimately they are not eligible for vacatur (Zornosa, 2016; Meiers, 2015). It is also common that courts will require that the victim cooperates with law enforcement by giving information about their trafficker, which most victims would be entirely unwilling to do due to their trauma or fear of harm, not to mention the effects of revictimization it would have on the victim. If victims want to try getting their records expunged, they will face a multitude of other barriers such as how some states do not include prostitution-related offenses, or they need proof of police and medical reports which they will rarely have or proof of rehabilitation which they can be denied due to their criminal record (Meiers, 2015).

Most of the current sex trafficking legislation does not understand the complexity of a trafficked experience, thus leaving victims with very few options. Putting more importance on affirmative defenses would allow for less manipulation of evidence (at the hands of the trafficker), not brand victims as criminals, and increase their willing cooperation with law enforcement (Zornosa, 2016). Interestingly enough, courts presently are putting increasing importance on vacatur statutes, which while helpful, are ignoring the core issue and forcing victims to go through a very strenuous and unnecessary experience.

Summary of Present Study

The purpose of the following study is to measure the perceptions the average layperson has of a sex trafficked victim's experience. The current definitions, laws, and policies currently set in place to help victims often fall short, leaving them with few options and often criminalizing them as prostitutes. The average person may fail to recognize the true complexity of a victim's experience with trafficking, not understanding the continuous trauma and coercion victims face that affects the extent of their free will and culpability. The results from this study look to inform future policies so that they accurately and effectively address sex trafficking victims' needs.

Hypotheses

First, the level of general knowledge on sex trafficking and prostitution will be assessed. The first hypothesis (H1) predicts that there will be an overall lack of understanding of the topic within the control group, displayed with responses aligning with common misperceptions of sex trafficking and prostitution. Second, it is predicted (H2) that participants exposed to education on the trauma and coercion that sex-trafficked individuals face would have higher scores on a measure of free will doubt than participants in the control group. Finally, the third hypothesis

(H3) predicts that participants exposed to education on the trauma and coercion that sex-trafficked individuals face would be less likely to hold sex-trafficked individuals criminally responsible for prostitution than those in the control group.

Method

Design

This study used a posttest only nonequivalent groups design. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group.

Participants

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and were compensated \$1.00 for their participation. Inclusion criteria required participants to be between 18 to 65 years of age, English speaking, and live within the United States. Initially, 528 participants were recorded but 83 had to be excluded due to incomplete surveys and failed attention checks. The total sample (N= 445) included adults between the ages of 18 to 65 (M= 35.12), with 285 men (64%), 152 women (34.2%), and 8 participants who identified as non-binary or chose not to provide their gender. The sample was predominately made up of those who identify as White/European American (n=282, 63.4%), with the rest identifying as Asian/Asian-American (n=63, 14.2%), Black/African-American (n=36, 8.1%), Mixed Race/Ethnicity (n=25, 5.6%), Hispanic or Latino (n=23, 5.2%), Native American or Alaskan Native (n=14, 3.1%), or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (n=1, .2%).

Participants' political views were reported as liberal (44.6%), conservative (28.7%), or moderate (25.2%). Participants were most likely to live in an urban or suburban area (87.2%), with an income of less than \$59,999 (59%), with the highest level of education as a four-year degree (55.1%). Seventy-three participants (16.4%) reported being convicted for either a

misdemeanor (n=39) or felony (n=29) and also having been incarcerated (n=58). One hundred and 52 participants reported being victimized in the past (34.2%), with 50 individuals specifically reporting having been trafficked themselves (11.2%). Of those who reported being trafficked, 32 of them have also had a criminal record (62.7%).

Materials

Demographic Questionnaire

Participants answered questions on age, race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location, political views, education, and past experiences with the legal system. The full questionnaire can be seen in Appendix C.

Sex Trafficking Intervention

Participants in the experimental group were given a short article explaining the effects of trauma and coercion on the free will of a sex trafficked victim (Appendix D). Physical, psychological, social, and emotional effects were addressed, as well as definitions of trafficking, prostitution, and free will. Information was adapted from a peer-reviewed article (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017).

Neutral Control Intervention

Participants in the control group were given an article on an unrelated topic of optical illusions (Appendix E) that was the same length as the experimental group, adapted from Bach and Poloschek (2006).

Sex Trafficking Awareness Questionnaire

This questionnaire collects responses on previous awareness of sex trafficking, and from where, if at all, someone has ever heard or learned about it and was adapted from a previous study (Tumiel, 2016). The entire survey can be seen in Appendix F.

Sex Trafficking Knowledge Scale

Participants answered questions to determine if they hold misperceptions about what sex trafficking and prostitution are comprised of. Questions have been obtained and adapted from other studies (Shrestha et al., 2015; Tumiel, 2016; Nichols & Heil, 2015). Possible items include “People choose to be trafficked to make a living,” “Prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing,” “Sex trafficking is a problem in this country”. This scale had not been formally tested but presented good reliability with this sample ($\alpha = .744$). The answers are on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The full questionnaire can be seen in Appendix G.

Free Will Subscale (FAD-Plus)

Participants answered questions to measure the general extent of their beliefs in free will with the FAD-Plus Scale that contains seven items again on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (Koppel et al., 2018). Question examples are “People have complete free will,” and “Strength of mind can always overcome the body's desires.” Higher scores demonstrate a strong belief in free will while lower scores demonstrate free will doubt ($\alpha = .857$). The full questionnaire can be seen in Appendix H.

Sex Trafficking Vignette

Participants were asked to read a short passage about an average experience of a sex trafficked juvenile in order to answer the following culpability questions. This was developed by adapting the materials found in a previous study (Tumiel, 2016). The information included is how they were trafficked, some actions carried out while trafficked, and apprehensions for seeking help (Appendix I).

Culpability Scale (Culpability Judgements Questionnaire)

Culpability was measured through the Culpability Judgements Questionnaire developed by Graham & Lowery (2004). This is composed of four questions on a scale of 1 (Very Unlikely) to 7 (Very likely). An example of a question is “How much do you think the defendant is responsible (blameworthy) for the alleged crime?” Higher scores demonstrate a stronger belief in culpability while lower scores demonstrate weaker beliefs in culpability ($\alpha = .627$). The full questionnaire can be seen in Appendix J.

Procedure

Participants were asked to take part in a study measuring public perceptions of sex trafficking. Every participant started by completing a demographics questionnaire. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group through the randomization feature on Qualtrics. The experimental group was exposed to an article explaining the sex-trafficked experience and the trauma and coercion that a victim endures. The control group was given a neutral article of the same length on an unrelated topic of optical illusions. The participants then completed a sex trafficking awareness questionnaire, the sex trafficking knowledge scale, and the Free Will Subscale (“FAD-Plus”). The Culpability Judgements Scale was administered after a short vignette about a sex trafficked juvenile to which participants in both groups answered questions about that juvenile’s criminal culpability.

Results

H1: Sex Trafficking Knowledge

A one-way between subject’s ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the intervention on perceptions of sex trafficking and prostitution. There was not a significant effect of the sex trafficking intervention on sex trafficking knowledge at the $p < .05$ level [$F(1, 443) = 1.25, p = .265$]. These results show that the control group ($M = 2.64, SD = 0.387$) would have

higher responses of misperceptions than the experimental group ($M= 2.60, SD= 0.406$). Both groups showed similar levels of responses, aligning more closely with factual knowledge of trafficking and prostitution.

H2: Free Will Doubt

A one-way between subject's ANOVA was also conducted to compare the effect of the intervention on opinions of free will. There was a significant effect of the intervention on free will beliefs at the $p<.05$ level for the experimental condition [$F(1, 441)= 5.24, p= .023$]. This provides support that those exposed to education on the trauma and coercion that sex-trafficked individuals face in the experimental group ($M= 3.56, SD= 0.838$) would have lower scores of free will beliefs (indicating more free will doubt) than participants in the control group ($M=3.73, SD= 0.704$).

H3: Culpability Beliefs

A one-way between subject's ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of the intervention on beliefs of culpability. There was not a significant effect of the intervention on beliefs of culpability at the $p<.05$ level for the two conditions [$F(1, 443)= 0.531, p= .467$]. These results show that exposure to education on the trauma and coercion that sex-trafficked individuals face ($M= 4.73, SD= 1.35$) would not lead to lower judgments of culpability for prostitution offenses than the culpability judgments of those in the control group ($M= 4.64, SD= 1.26$).

Free Will Doubt as A Mediator

A mediation analysis was conducted to test for indirect effects of the sex trafficking intervention on culpability beliefs through belief in free will, which can be seen in Figure 1. This analysis was done through PROCESS, at a 95% confidence interval and 10,000 bootstrapped

samples (Hayes, 2017). The regression of the sex trafficking intervention on the mediator, free will beliefs, was significant, $b = -0.168$, $t(443) = -2.29$, $p = .023$. The next step of the mediation process showed that the relation between the mediator (free will beliefs) and judgments of culpability, controlling for the sex trafficking intervention, was also significant, $b = 0.599$, $t(442) = 7.98$, $p < .001$. Lastly, analyses revealed that controlling for the mediator (free will beliefs), sex trafficking intervention was not a significant predictor of culpability beliefs, $b = 0.191$, $t(442) = 1.64$, $p = .102$. Overall, there was a significant indirect effect of the sex trafficking intervention on culpability beliefs through beliefs in free will, $ab = -0.1004$, BCa CI $[-0.1996, -0.012]$.

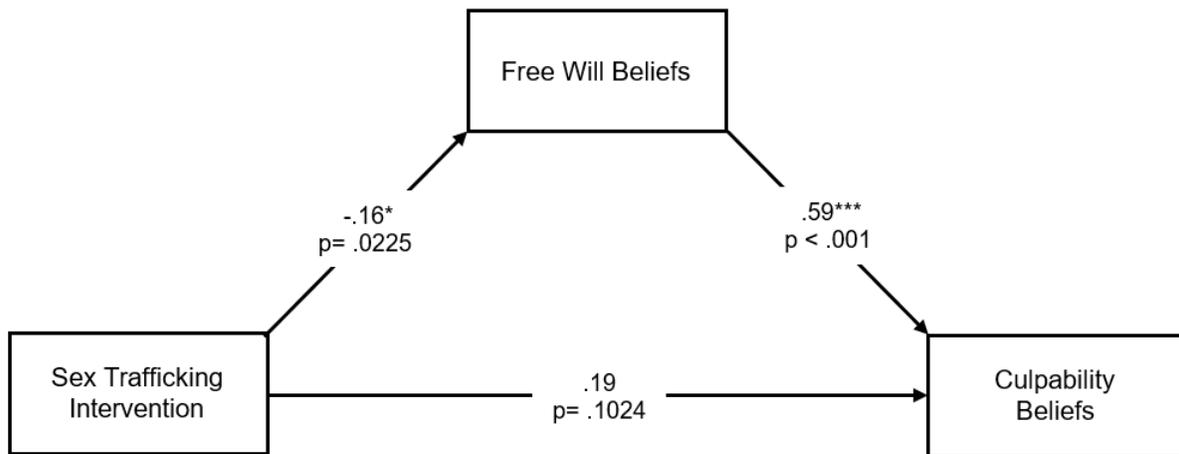


Figure 1. Exposure to an educational sex trafficking intervention led to lower beliefs in free will, which in turn led to lower culpability beliefs.

Length of Time

A timing check was placed within the survey to see how long participants spent reading the educational interventions. A two-way ANOVA was conducted that examined the effect of time spent on the intervention and intervention type on the level of sex trafficking knowledge, free will doubt, and culpability beliefs. Participants were scored whether they spent more or less than two minutes on the intervention page, the time needed to thoroughly read through the information given. There was a significant difference between timing and knowledge of

trafficking, but not with timing *and* type of intervention on knowledge of trafficking, [$F(1, 441) = 2.73, p = .099$].

There was a significant effect of the timing and intervention type on free will beliefs [$F(1, 441) = 5.94, p = .015$]. Participants had the lowest average scores for beliefs in free will when they spent over two minutes in the sex trafficking intervention ($M = 3.43, SD = 0.894$), indicating more free will doubt the longer they spent with the intervention. There was also a significant effect of the timing and intervention type on culpability beliefs [$F(1, 441) = 3.99, p = .046$]. Participants had the lowest average scores for culpability beliefs when they spent over two minutes in the sex trafficking intervention ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.43$), indicating fewer feelings of criminal culpability the longer they spent with the intervention.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between knowledge of trafficking, beliefs in free will, and culpability beliefs for victims of sex trafficking. It's important to note that the majority of previous research in this field has been focused on outlining what sex trafficking looks like and reviewing the policies and legislation in place (Bergquist, 2015; Cianciarulo, 2008; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Gerassi, 2015; Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Zornosa, 2016). Unfortunately, this means there is a dearth of empirical research on this topic, especially when trying to address why the systems in place are failing victims. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions the general public has of a sex trafficked victim's experience, as they may fail to recognize the complex interaction of trauma, coercion and free will that ultimately affects victims' culpability for crimes of prostitution.

Analyses showed that participants in the experimental group had no significant difference in the level of misperceptions about sex trafficking and beliefs in culpability. However, the sex trafficking intervention did have a significant effect on lowering participants' beliefs in free will. A mediation analysis showed that culpability beliefs were found to be indirectly affected by the sex trafficking intervention through beliefs in free will. Lastly, analyses showed that the longer a participant spent with the intervention materials, the more of an effect it had on lowering culpability and free-will beliefs.

No support was found for the first hypothesis, predicting that there would be an overall lack of understanding of the topic within the control group, displayed with responses aligning with common misperceptions of sex trafficking and prostitution. Instead, the analysis showed that both groups had similar answers, more often aligned with the correct information about sex trafficking than the misperceptions. This may be because this study was formed on the assumption that the general public has little to no knowledge about sex trafficking, thus leading to misperceptions when prompted about the topic. This assumption may have been flawed since only 10 participants reported never hearing about sex trafficking before this survey; this means that 435 participants have heard of or learned about sex trafficking in at least one kind of setting, most reporting multiple. While the hypothesis is unsupported, the implications of the negative findings are positive in that the general public displays some awareness about sex trafficking, even if they are unaware of how victims are still vulnerable to criminalization.

It's important to note that an additional analysis showed that specific questions on this scale had significant results relating to the first hypothesis. Participants in the experimental group displayed fewer misperceptions of the sex trafficking experience than those in the control group when answering these six questions (1, 9, 18, 19, 23, 25; full questions can be seen in Appendix

G). These questions dealt with topics of juveniles being criminalized, issues of individuals realizing their victimization, and criminal responsibility resting on traffickers, all of which are integral misconceptions leading to the major flaws in existing legislation (Elrod, 2015; Gerassi, 2015; Greenbaum, 2017). Since the scale was generated for this study, the significant results for these questions will help with refining the measure in the future.

The most significant findings of this study were in support of the second hypothesis. Results showed that participants exposed to the sex trafficking intervention scored lower on beliefs in free will than the participants who were shown the neutral intervention in the control group. This means that individuals who are more educated on the trauma and coercion that sex trafficked victims face will be more likely to doubt free will.

Free will is at the core of most legislation, rooted in the assumption that people are at fault for committing crimes because they rationally and consciously made an uninhibited choice to do so (Gordon & Fondacaro, 2017). It is argued that sex trafficked victims may be consciously aware of their actions, but cannot rationally make uninhibited choices when they have coercive threats hanging over them constantly. The support for the second hypothesis shows that individuals can understand that free will can be compromised in extraordinary circumstances; that coercive and traumatic experiences can lead someone to act in ways that they typically would not. If individuals understand this, then ultimately it should be seen that sex trafficked victims are less culpable for any crimes they commit due to their compromised free will.

Initially, no support was found for the third hypothesis involving beliefs in culpability. No significant effects were found to support the hypothesis that the experimental group would hold less severe judgments of culpability after being shown the sex trafficking intervention when compared to the control group. However, indirectly, participants were found to have significantly

fewer beliefs in criminal culpability when they understood how the trauma and coercion a victim endures would influence their free will. The initial insignificant results may be due to the design of the materials since the participant's answers were about the vignette given, leading to a questionable reliability rating. However, the indirect effects show some support that individuals would be less likely to hold someone criminally responsible for prostitution offenses if they were aware of compromised free will and possible victimization.

Ultimately, results from this current study demonstrate that even when individuals may have a basic understanding of the sex trafficking experience, they do not understand the complex dynamics of how free will can be compromised by trauma and coercion, ultimately affecting their culpable for criminal activity. Even though this study recruited participants from the general public, these findings suggest that the currently available legislation is flawed to the extent that policymakers have the same lack of understanding as our participants. Victims are continuously not being identified as victims, and the laws and programs available exclude those who may have unwillingly committed crimes while being trafficked (Bergquist, 2015; Meiers, 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). The lack of knowledge and possible biases that formed these policies need to be addressed so that they can be more reflective of the trafficking experience, meeting victims' needs and ultimately ending their cycle of criminalization.

Limitations

This study is possibly limited by its online design; it is difficult to tell whether participants truly paid attention to the intervention or put effort into their responses, even with timing and attention checks. However, research shows that the level of attention and involvement in online experiments are seen to be no different than for participants in most laboratory studies (Thomas & Clifford, 2017). There are also concerns about the diversity of the sample using

Amazon's Mechanical Turk, and that results would not be generalizable. Fortunately, samples obtained from MTurk are seen to be as diverse and reliable as popular methods used in other research (Holden et al., 2013). Additionally, the sex trafficking intervention and knowledge questionnaire were adapted from other researchers' work and have no formal reliability or validity testing data available for them. It is possible that more results could have been significant if these instruments went through more vigorous testing before being used in this study.

Future Research

The results of this study have implications for this field that are very important. There needs to be more research analyzing the current legislation and addressing the biases of policymakers requiring an absolute victim; this work is only one step toward making sure victims' needs are being met. This study needs to be replicated with policymakers to support the claims that they have the same lack of knowledge as the general public. It would be beneficial to also replicate this study with police, lawyers, or other samples of individuals who are involved with identifying and helping victims of sex trafficking. If these populations show similar responses, then it would reflect a need for improvement in the education and training they receive as well. It would be interesting as well to empirically evaluate the current methods for the identification of victims. Every sector involved in identifying victims follows their own checklist or procedure. Working toward a more unified and reliable identification checklist, including information about proper services for the victims, could do much to improve victims' experiences once they are removed from their trafficking situation.

Lastly, the measures created and used specifically for this study should be improved upon and used in future research. Since there is so little empirical research in this field, it would be

useful to have a reliable and valid instrument that can be easily applied to future studies. The sex trafficking knowledge scale has room for improvement, and the individual questions that showed significance can be a model when adapting and improving the other items on the scale. These items also provide clues for what knowledge the public may be missing about sex trafficking and what should be focused on in future research. The system can only be improved when issues and problems are identified and the factors contributing to them are addressed, ultimately leading to positive changes in the outcomes for victims of sex trafficking in the future.

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Appendix A

MTurk Recruitment Ad

Participants Needed for an Online

Psychological Study

Study: Measuring public perceptions of sex trafficking.

Qualifiers: Must be at least 18 to 65 years of age, English speaking, and live in the United States. Participants will be screened before the start of the study, and those who are ineligible will not complete the study or receive compensation.

Duration: 20-30 Minutes

Compensation: \$1 (This will be distributed through MTurk)

Appendix B

Informed Consent

**THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Psychology Department****ORAL AND INTERNET-BASED INFORMED CONSENT**

Title of Research Study: Perception of Culpability for Sex Trafficked Individuals

Principal Investigator: Megan Korovich, B.A.
M.A. Student

Advisor: Dr. Mark Fondacaro, Ph.D., J.D.
Faculty

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are a fluent English speaker from the United States between 18 and 65 years of age.

You may wish to participate to learn how trauma and coercion can influence human decision making and thought processes and how this pertains to the life of a sex trafficking victim. You may enjoy helping us build our knowledge base on culpability for sex trafficking and prostitution, so we can better understand the perceptions of the public.

In terms of reasons that you may not want to participate: (1) It is possible that you will find the information presented to be of sensitive content. (2) It is also possible that you will become bored. However, you may withdraw from the study for any reason, or choose to take a break at any time.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to investigate whether education on trauma and coercion faced by sex trafficked victims can influence public perceptions of free will and culpability for those victims.

Procedures:

The present experiment should take you no longer than 30 minutes. The first 5 minutes or so will be dedicated to consent procedures and demographic questions. If you choose to participate in this study, following is a list in chronological order that will take place.

- Demographic Questionnaire. You will complete a short survey that will provide important information on your background including your age, gender, ethnicity, political views, education, income, and experience with the criminal justice system.
- Instructions
- Intervention: You will be given a short article to read.

- Questionnaires and Vignette. You will be given a total of 5 questionnaires after the article is read. After the first 3 questionnaires, you will be asked to read a passage and then answer the 2 questionnaires provided after.

Time Commitment:

Your participation in this research study is expected to last for a total of 20-30 minutes.

Potential Risks or Discomforts:

This study addresses uncomfortable topics of sex trafficking and prostitution. Some information can be triggering discussing trauma and different abuses. However, we anticipate minimal discomfort, no more than one would see on TV or read in a book.

Potential Benefits:

You will not directly benefit from your participation, but you will contribute to our understanding contributing to our understanding of public perceptions on this topic, which is a key component for influencing future policy reform.

Payment for Participants:

Each complete study will be compensated \$1.00 for participation. Participants will be compensated after their responses are reviewed and it is verified that they completed the survey in its entirety by entering a code given to them on Qualtrics. Compensation will then be received directly through MTurk using Worker ID's. Participants that withdraw without completion of the study will not be compensated. If there are issues on MTurk not allowing completion, participants can contact the principle investigator and compensation will be distributed manually on MTurk.

New Information:

You will be notified about any new information regarding this study that may affect your willingness to participate in a timely manner.

Confidentiality:

We will make our best efforts to maintain confidentiality of any information that is collected during this research study, and that can identify you.

Participants will be recruited through MTurk, and then complete the study through Qualtrics. The only identifying information that will be initially collected will be MTurk Worker ID's, which will only be used for compensation purposes, and will remain on MTurk.

Any responses on Qualtrics will be recorded and stored separately with Qualtrics.com in a password protected electronic format. Qualtrics will not collect IP addresses, names or email addresses or any other personal information. Each response will be given a randomized number that will be stored with the information provided in the survey to ensure privacy. Data will later be downloaded and stored with a member of the authorized research team on a password protected computer.

The research team, authorized CUNY staff, and government agencies that oversee this type of research may have access to research data and records in order to monitor the research. Research records provided to authorized, non-CUNY individuals will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name. The information collected as part of the research, even if it contains no identifiable information about you, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

* Please note that this study will ask for sensitive information about criminal justice involvement, and there is always risk of confidentiality being breached regardless of the steps we take to ensure privacy.

Participant's Rights:

Your participation in this research study is entirely **voluntary**. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You can decide to withdraw your consent and stop participating in the research at any time, however, in order to be compensated, the research must be completed in its entirety.

Questions, Comments, or Concerns:

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the following researchers:

- Megan Korovich, M.A., John Jay College
 - Email: megan.korovich@jjay.cuny.edu
- Mark Fondacaro, Ph.D., J.D., Professor, John Jay College
 - Email: mfondacaro@jjay.cuny.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or if you would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, you can contact CUNY Research Compliance Administrator at 646-664-8918 or HRPP@cuny.edu. Alternately, you can write to:

CUNY Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
Attn: Research Compliance Administrator
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

- I. What is your age? (Text Response)
- II. What is your gender?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Other (please specify)
 - e. Prefer not to respond
- III. What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply
 - a. White/European-American
 - b. Black/African-American
 - c. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - d. Asian/Asian-American
 - e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - f. Hispanic or Latino
 - g. Other (please specify)
- IV. How would you describe your political views?
 - a. Very Liberal
 - b. Somewhat Liberal
 - c. Moderate
 - d. Somewhat Conservative
 - e. Very Conservative
 - f. Other (please specify)
 - g. Prefer not to answer
- V. Where are you located?
 - a. Urban/City
 - b. Suburban
 - c. Rural
- VI. What is an estimate of your household income?
 - a. \$0 - 10,000
 - b. \$10,001 – 20,000
 - c. \$20,001 – 40,000
 - d. \$40,001 – 60,000
 - e. \$60,001 – 80,000
 - f. \$80,001 – 100,000
 - g. > \$100,000
- VII. What is the highest level of education, or degree you have completed?
 - a. Less than high school degree

- b. High School
 - c. Some College
 - d. 2-year Degree
 - e. 4-year Degree
 - f. Master's Degree
 - g. Doctoral Degree
 - h. Professional Degree (MD, JD)
- VIII. What is your experience with the criminal justice system? (Note: All responses are confidential, and your name will not be associated with the answers.)
- a. Do you have a criminal record?
 - i. Yes
 - 1. If yes, were you convicted of a:
 - a. Felony?
 - b. Misdemeanor?
 - c. Prefer not to answer.
 - ii. No
 - b. Have you ever been incarcerated?
 - i. Yes
 - 1. If yes, for how long?
 - a. Text response.
 - ii. No
 - c. Have you had a family member who has been incarcerated?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
 - iii. Prefer not to answer
 - d. Have you ever been the victim of a crime?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
 - e. Has a family member ever been a victim of a crime?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No

Appendix D

Experimental Intervention

“A number of tactics are used to recruit victims of sex trafficking (Siskin & Wyler, 2013). Both internationally and in the United States (U.S.), there are documented cases where minors are kidnapped via drugs or abducted via force by strangers, acquaintances, or family members for the purpose of sex trafficking (Raymond & Hughes, 2001; Silverman, Decker, McCauley, & Mack, 2009)...They are forced into sexual service through threat or coercion.

Children and adolescents are also recruited at U.S. coffee shops, malls, bus depots, clubs, and college campuses (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Traffickers befriend their victims and then entrap them through emotional tactics, substance dependence, or violence...Traffickers often prey upon vulnerabilities and entice victims using love, money, glamour, promises of belonging, and protection (Friedman, 2005; Lloyd, 2011)...After minors are recruited, the trafficker uses various tactics to control victims and to exploit them. How and when a victim is exploited is dependent upon the trafficker and level of control the trafficker perceives he or she has initially (Friedman, 2005). Friedman documented that the time from recruitment to “the streets” varies from one week to about six months. Various tactics are used to gain control of victims and make them subservient to the traffickers. Some traffickers use sex and seduction to gain emotional dependence and then to convince the victim to have sex on the streets for the “good” of the relationship (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Other traffickers take the victims to abandoned locations and indoctrinate them using gang rape before sending them to the streets (Friedman, 2005). As a mean to demonstrate power and induce dependence and subservience, traffickers often deprive victims of food, water, and sleep (Cacho, 2014)...Personal freedoms are restricted (Zimmerman et al., 2008); some victims are put under guard at compounds and brothels (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). In most cases, the victims are given false names, and false identification. Sex trafficking victims are often “branded” or tattooed to signify possession of a specific trafficker.

Abuse or worse is threatened, and traffickers compel victims to continue to serve their interests through physical and psychological means (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Trafficking victims are subjected to psychological and physical torture, including threats of assault, threats to harm loved ones, intimidation, pharmacological manipulation, witness torture and murder, economic abuse, and isolation (Cacho, 2014; Gjermeni et al., 2008; Hodge & Lietz, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Traffickers are experts at making their victims feel isolated, worthless, and lonely, convincing them that no one cares (Hodge & Lietz, 2007; Phelps, 2012). Freidman (2005) documented regular beatings; being hit with a two-by-four, baseball bat, pipes, and hammers on the back, head, arms, and toes as discipline when young girls broke the rules of their traffickers. Being pistol-whipped, burned with acid, and tied to doorknobs constitute

regular punishment, and broken bones, head trauma, and bruises are realities for many victims (Freidman, 2005; Raymond & Hughes, 2001; Zimmerman et al., 2003).

...Domestic sex trafficking victims are forced to commit crimes involving illegal drugs and humiliating sexual acts; threats of exposure to law enforcement or harm to the victim's family are used to ensure compliance with exploitation and deter or prohibit escape (Hom & Woods, 2013). Victims who try to escape are beaten or killed (Yen, 2008). Other victims, after an extended time, become psychologically broken or brainwashed. They do not see themselves as victims but rather criminals with no self-worth. Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable when it comes to not recognizing the exploitive situation they are in, and many may even take responsibility and blame themselves for their victimization (e.g. "This is my punishment for running away."). Some even identify with their trafficker, a phenomenon that parallels Stockholm syndrome (Friedman, 2005). This is referred to as the "trauma bond" in sex trafficking literature (Kalergis, 2009). Through dissociative mechanisms, victims come to believe that their traffickers have their best interest in mind and love them. They are convinced that the trafficker will follow through with all the promises made. Thus, upon rescue, a victim may at first be combative or protective of the trafficker, giving the illusion that the sexual exploitation is a choice or made voluntarily (Farley, 2004). Like Stockholm syndrome, those most susceptible to "trauma bonding" are those who perceive that their captors are capable of following through with a threat basic to their survival, believe they cannot escape, and are isolated from any perspective other than that of their captors (Lloyd, 2011). Many sex trafficked victims are never identified and are never given an opportunity to escape from traffickers (Macy & Graham, 2012; Okech, Morreau, & Benson, 2011)."

*adapted from: Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., Spaulding, L. S., Justice, J. S., & Owens, D. (2017). Identify, intervene, and advocate: Human services workers' role in youth sex trafficking. *Journal of Human Services, 37*(1), 63-76.

Appendix E

Control Intervention

“Optical illusions fascinate us, challenging our default notion that what we see is real. They demonstrate that all our perception is illusion, in a sense – incoming sensory information is interpreted, yielding the internal representation of the world. Therefore, after our eyes have filtered the visual input we need sound judgement of information in order to create our inner reality: “Your senses then you’ll have to trust, / They’ll let you see what’s true and just, / Should reason keep your mind awake”. What is an optical illusion? “I know it when I see one” could not be farther off the track – as the best illusions are the ones where a discrepancy from reality is not ‘seen’ until one uses other modalities (e.g. touch) or instruments (rulers, light metres). And even when we know that we are subject to an optical illusion, most illusory percepts still persist – a phenomenon called cognitive impenetrability. As Gregory aptly stated it “it is surprisingly hard to define ‘illusion’ in a satisfactory way”. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Collegiate Dictionary, an illusion is 1. something that deceives or misleads intellectually; 2. perception of something objectively existing in such a way as to cause misinterpretation of its actual nature.

What is old, what is new? Some illusions are long known to mankind, e.g. the waterfall illusion was mentioned by Aristotle: after staring at a waterfall for a couple of minutes neighbouring objects seem to be shifting upwards. This was followed up by Lucretius, Purkinje and Addams who coined the term ‘waterfall illusion’. Recent evidence suggests that this motion aftereffect is not due to ‘fatigue’ but rather due to a gain adjustment, an optimal adaptation to prevailing conditions. The description of numerous illusions, in particular geometric illusions, in the 19th century was followed by striking new ones, many of which rely on computer animation, in the last decade. The ‘Hermann grid’ was discovered in 1870 by the physiologist Ludimar Hermann...For half a century this illusion was explained on the basis of lateral inhibition; this assumes that we see the world as our retinal ganglion cells encode and thereby compress it. However, in most situations our visual cortex undoes the retinal encoding by spatial integration to approach a veridical luminance perception. A complete explanation of the Hermann grid would have to include why this mechanism fails here. Recently János Geier showed that just a slight torsion of the grid lines abolishes the appearance of the grey patches...highlighting the additional role of cortical processing, i.e. orientation selective neurons.

It may take a few seconds and exploring eye movements to appreciate the effect – still, not everyone perceives this illusion. The complete explanation of this illusion is not fully established in spite of promising recent efforts. Prerequisites are: asymmetric luminance steps, eg. from dark to dark-grey and white to light-grey and eye movements. When they suddenly appear (= temporal modulation), the asymmetric luminance steps drive motion detectors. The eye movements affect temporal modulation with the help of either adaptation1 or possibly

saccadic suppression. A grouping arrangement enhances the effect, but colour is not necessary. The German astrophysicist J Zöllner discovered in 1860 that parallel lines intersected by short lines at an acute angle appear to diverge: The crossings of the short lines evoke a depth perception so that one end of the long lines appears to be closer to the observer than the other. This class also comprises Fraser's Spiral, the Poggendorff and Hering illusions. Common to all of them is that small angles are overestimated, but the precise underlying mechanisms remain to be clarified.

Plato already alerted us to the discrepancy between perception and reality in his "Allegory of the Cave". In all likelihood, we will never be able to turn around and see the true reality, but we can do our best to understand it. Many illusions remain unsolved to date, and there will be more to come. In the meantime, we can enjoy their viability as a research tool, and also to introduce the next generation to the fascination of science."

*adapted from: Bach, M., & Poloschek, C. M. (2006). Optical illusions. *Advances in Clinical Neuroscience and Rehabilitation*, 6(2), 20-21.

Appendix F

Sex Trafficking Awareness

Before today, how much did you know about sex trafficking? (Please select all that apply)

- I was a victim of trafficking.
- I personally knew someone who was trafficked.
- I know someone who knows someone who was trafficked.
- Someone I know (relative, colleague, friend) told me about it.
- I watched a news program about it on TV.
- I watched a documentary about it.
- I watched a film that discussed it.
- I listened to a news program on the radio.
- I read an article about it in the newspaper.
- I read about it on the internet.
- I learned about it via social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
- I saw an advertising campaign about it on public transportation.
- I saw an advertising campaign about it on the street.
- I attended a training on it, (please specify) _____
- I learned about it at school, (please specify) _____
- I learned about it at work, (please specify) _____
- Other source not listed, (please specify) _____
- N/A; never heard about it before today.

Appendix G

Sex Trafficking Knowledge Questionnaire

5-point scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)

1. Pimps often use physical force to control the women they prostitute.
2. Prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation.
3. Prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing.
4. I believe that most girls used in prostitution are controlled by a sex trafficker or “pimp”.
5. Most people who engage in prostitution choose to do so willingly.
6. Juveniles used in prostitution are victims of sex trafficking.
7. Individuals used in prostitution should be arrested for breaking the law.
8. Individuals involved in prostitution should be treated as victims, not criminals.
9. Individuals involved in prostitution deserve to be treated with respect.
10. Most people who have been prostituted/trafficked are affected psychologically.
11. Sex trafficking victims are always people from other countries.
12. Sex trafficking is a harmless crime.
13. Sex trafficking victims are always female.
14. If someone is being trafficked, they will seek help.
15. Sex trafficking victims are free to leave whenever they want.
16. People choose to be trafficked to make a living.
17. Prostitutes are free to leave whenever they want.
18. Most sex trafficking victims are under the age of 18.
19. Trafficking victims often do not see themselves as victims.
20. People choose prostitution to make a living.
21. Prostitutes often do not see themselves as victims.
22. Prostitution is a harmless crime.
23. Many juvenile victims of sexual exploitation are arrested on charges of prostitution.
24. Organized criminals bear the main responsibility and punishment for sex trafficking.
25. Sex trafficking is a problem in this country.
26. If a child (under the age of 18) is being used to commit a commercial sex act, the child is considered a victim of trafficking and no evidence of force, fraud or coercion is needed.
27. Plenty of services are available to victims of sex trafficking.
28. Individuals who are trafficked later choose to enter prostitution.
29. Individuals who have been trafficked deserve to be treated with respect.
30. Individuals become sex trafficked at their own fault.

Appendix H

Free Will Subscale of the FAD-Plus

Instructions: For each statement below, choose a number from 1 to 5 to indicate how much you agree or disagree.

1: People have complete control over the decisions they make. (5-point end labeled: 1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

2: People must take full responsibility for any bad choices they make. (5-point end labeled: 1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

3: People can overcome any obstacles if they truly want to. (5-point end labeled: 1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

4: Criminals are totally responsible for the bad things they do. (5-point end labeled: 1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

5: People have complete free will. (5-point end labeled: 1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

6: People are always at fault for their bad behavior. (5-point end labeled: 1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

7: Strength of mind can always overcome the body's desires. (5-point end labeled: 1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

Appendix I

Culpability Vignette

“Mia is a 16 y/o female with an unstable family background. Mia started a relationship with an older man who promised to take care of her better than her family does. After a few months he became controlling and started isolating her from her friends and family. He took Mia out, bought her gifts, and told her that he loved her. Eventually, he took control of all of Mia’s belongings, including her driver’s license, phone, computer, and her car. He forced Mia to go on dates with other men and engage in commercial sex. Sometimes he makes her complete a drug exchange on those dates. Mia reported that he frequently used physical violence, threats, and verbal abuse as a way to keep her in the situation. If Mia refused any of the dates or sex acts, he would beat her. He convinced her that if she tried to escape, no one would help her. She had attempted once to report him and her trafficking situation to the local police in her town, however they did not understand her situation and her attempt to report was unsuccessful. Mia knows what she has done is illegal but is afraid of harm and fully believes she won’t be able to get outside help.”

Appendix J

Culpability Scale

Please rate the following questions about the culpability of the defendant.

1: How much do you think a crime was actually committed? (7-point end labeled: Very Unlikely=1, Very Likely=7)

2: How much do you think the defendant was aware of that her actions were a criminal act for which he could be prosecuted? (7-point end labeled: Very Unlikely=1, Very Likely=7)

3: How much do you think the defendant intended to commit a crime? (7-point end labeled: Very Unlikely=1, Very Likely=7)

4: How much do you think the defendant is responsible (blameworthy) for the alleged crime? (7-point end labeled: Very Unlikely=1, Very Likely=7)