Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

A Prototype Comparison of Human Trafficking Warning Signs: U.S. Midwest Frontline Workers' Perceptions

Corinne Schwarz[a], Chong Xing[b], Hannah E. Britton[c], and Paul E. Johnson[d]

[a]Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA; [b]Department of Communication Studies, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA; [c]Political Science and Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA; [d]Political Science, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA

ABSTRACT

Guided by the cognitive prototype approach, this article examines the prototype structure of the frontline workers' perceptions concerning warning sign indicators in human trafficking. Online survey responses across a range of workplace sectors were analyzed using multiple-group confirmatory factor analysis (MG-CFA) for three groups. These groups were based on respondents' self-reported human trafficking experiences: no witness (no encounter of human trafficking), sex trafficking witness, and labor trafficking witness. The MG-CFA analysis revealed a three-factor structure – physical condition, reproductive health, and personal risk – representing the participants' perceptions of the warning signs. Further analysis showed group-level mean (latent intercept) and variance differences between the prototype structures of the three witness groups. The final structural model results indicate that these group-level prototype differences can be explained by two organizational resource variables: identification protocol and training. The results are discussed in light of the current empirical literature on human trafficking identification, stereotypical frames of victimhood, and policy practices.

Introduction

Despite the creation of a legal definition of human trafficking through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), individuals and institutions continue to operate with differing definitions (Dando et al., 2016; Weitzer, 2015). For those who have no first-hand experience with this phenomenon, their view of human trafficking may be shaped heavily by news coverage, social media messages, or popular cultural depictions (Albright & D'Adamo, 2017; Denton, 2010) such as

> a young, naïve, and blameless woman, who does not know that she will be a prostitute, and who has been clandestinely transferred from one country to another to be sexually exploited by a transnational and very violent organized criminal group. (Rodríguez-López, 2018, p. 70)[1]

CONTACT Corinne Schwarz ✉ corinne.schwarz@okstate.edu 💬 Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies, Department of Sociology, 431 Social Sciences & Humanities, Stillwater, OK 74078

[1]Throughout this paper, we primarily use the term "sex worker" when describing individuals engaged in commercial sexual exchanges, economies, and labors. Within anti-trafficking scholarship, there remains a continued and contentious divide as to whether sex trafficking involves all forms of commercial sexual exchanges or whether sex trafficking and sex work should be considered two separate phenomena that sometimes overlap for individuals (Bernstein, 2010; J.L. Musto, 2009; Mac & Smith, 2018).

Though this certainly reflects some survivors' lived experiences, it is not the only form of exploitation that constitutes human trafficking. The undocumented migrant (Brennan, 2014) or visa-holding temporary resident (Owens et al., 2014) trafficked into forced labor; a male-identified survivor of human trafficking or more broadly exploitative labor practices (Allais, 2013; Howard, 2014); or a homeless or runaway youth of color exchanging survival sex (Lutnick, 2016) are often left out of this narrative, though they too legally meet the parameters for human trafficking.

This article aims to extend scholarly discussion on the stereotypical iconic victim of human trafficking (Kempadoo, 2015; Shafer & Looney, 2018; Srikantiah, 2007), a trope that can carry real material consequences for survivors who do not meet its parameters, from a cognitive prototype perspective (Cantor et al., 1982; Rosch, 1973). Based on research conducted in linguistic patterns, Rosch (1973) hypothesized that naïve individuals have shared common (lexicon) understandings of the specific features of social situations. Individuals form various prototypes through social learning to help organize and categorize information. These prototypes carry the central, defining features of social events and situations. The "iconic victim" (Srikantiah, 2007) or "master narrative" (Hill, 2016) can be conceptualized as a prototype shared by the public about human trafficking. Using a survey of Midwestern service providers as our empirical starting point, we argue that prototypical understandings of human trafficking – while potentially useful in spreading awareness about trafficking as a generalizable category – may also reify stereotypical perspectives and fail to address the complex lived experiences of sex and labor trafficking survivors.

Theorizing Stereotypes and Schemas

Cognitive Prototype Theory

Prototypes can be understood as schema, frames, or shared definitions – "a symbol and a reference point" (Cantor et al., 1982, p. 46) – for objects or phenomena. Rosch's (1973) study used colors and shapes as her prototypes of choice, asking subjects to classify between light and bright shades of a single color or standard and nonstandard variations of a single shape. Specifically, in Rosch's results for shape-based classifications, the participants "tended to 'distort' their definition of the category toward the natural prototype; that is, they tended to choose the natural prototype as the most typical member of the category even when it was actually peripheral" (p. 348). If, for example, the category "square" had one perfectly measured square and multiple imperfect boxes with jagged edges, crooked lines, and gaps, the single square served as the prototypical selection for the category, even when it was outnumbered.

Thinking of prototypes as ways to organize the world and make meaning of social experiences, it is somewhat unsurprising to see a pattern of cognitive defaulting to the most iconic or emblematic frameworks. As Cantor et al. (1982) argue, "In part, prototypes are useful to the extent that they convey information about the features that characterize a situation *and* that distinguish that situation from other events in social life" (p. 52). Individuals are reasonably able to draw a distinction between being at a birthday party or a first date – two of the examples from their study – even though they both fall under the category of a social situation.

Importantly, the authors determined that the prototypical categorization of certain situations did not just involve the actions that constituted, for example, a party versus a date. Rather, the actors involved in prototypical events played an important role, bringing their preconceived notions or expectations about who actually takes part in certain situations and what feelings or emotions are normatively associated with those moments: "It is almost as if a situation was defined and characterized in terms of the kinds of people who typically inhabit, select, and/or function well in that situation" (Cantor et al., 1982, p. 68). This finding shows that prototypes are not immune from the power of tropes or stigmas. An individual whose understanding of the world is shaped by racism may not conceive of a prototypical first date involving an interracial couple; a birthday party may be celebrating the child of a heterosexual partnership in the mind of an individual shaped by heteronormative ideologies.

As critical criminologists and legal scholars have articulated, prototypes often invoke inaccurate and often racially-charged stereotypes. For example, Bumiller (2008) critiques anti-rape policies and media reports that "reinforced iconic representations of victims (as innocent, white, and/or angelic)" (p. 9) and positioned perpetrators as "dangerous strangers, who were implicitly or explicitly marked as dark-skinned men" (p. 10). These tropes run counter to the realities of sexual violence as experienced between acquaintances or familiar individuals within racial groups. Pickel and Gentry (2017) emphasize the power of rape myths in shaping how jurors respond to prototypical versus non-prototypical descriptions of sexual violence. Their study of responses to hypothetical rape narratives does not bode well for the material reality of survivors of violence. Specifically, those whose non-prototypical experiences – in this study, being harmed by an acquaintance versus a stranger – have prototypical responses of deep affective trauma and may be completely disserved by this construction: "Victims of a non-prototypical rape who decide to tell the jury about the severe emotional distress and anguish they feel may discover to their dismay that the decision backfires" (p. 271). When a mismatch between schemas emerges, the naïve individual (Rosch, 1973) may default to a category that, while narratively more linear and easier to comprehend, fails survivors of violence because it diminishes their experiences and limits their paths to legal justice or recourse.

Stereotypes of Human Trafficking and Victimhood

Critical trafficking studies scholars take a similar approach in their analysis of anti-trafficking tropes or prototypes. For example, Bernstein (2012) explains how the structural harms of trafficking are often displaced onto "individual (often racially coded) criminal men" (p. 245), as evidenced in increased arrests of men of color for trafficking (and trafficking-adjacent) crimes. In sum, the prototypes that see feminized victims – sometimes white women, sometimes "Third World" women (Kempadoo, 2015) – and masculinized perpetrators of color perpetuate a stereotypical understanding of human trafficking that mislabels, misunderstands, and makes invisible those experiences that fall outside this normative framework.

The concept of an "iconic victim" (Srikantiah, 2007) offers ways of thinking through prototypical conceptualizations of sex and labor trafficking. As Srikantiah (2007) describes, the "prototypical victim" imagined in U.S.-based policy is "a woman or girl trafficked for sex" deemed to be compliant with law enforcement and prosecutors and passive in her lack of agency, "rescued instead of escaping from the trafficking enterprise" (p. 187). This framework erases important legal elements of human trafficking protections; namely, labor trafficking is defined in the TVPA alongside sex trafficking, and there is no language that requires survivors to simply wait for their rescue or identification by law enforcement. Similarly, Hill (2016) uses the example of a UK-based massage parlor raid to trace the contours of what she calls the "master narrative" of human trafficking: a "moral story" of commercial sex performed by non-citizens (here, Eastern European women) that must be halted through law enforcement intervention (p. 41). Sex trafficking becomes the default impression of exploitation in the public dissemination of the aftermath of this raid through "perp walk"[2] photographs in print and digital media, breaching these women's privacy and treating them as criminal actors.

Across both of these prototypical descriptions, it is important to note that human trafficking is a harm that crosses categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, and ability – no one is immune from the potential of exploitation. In fact, some survivors' experiences align with the aforementioned prototypical frameworks. Thus, the problem is not that the "iconic victim" exists as a prototype but that *all* experiences of trafficking in their complexity and nuance are measured against it.

These stereotypical prototypes can also undermine the development of more accurate approximations of human trafficking at both the macro level (e.g., global and national trend estimations, policies,

---

[2]Hill (2016) uses the term "perp walk" intentionally, as it is used to describe a "much maligned" practice of taking arrested persons and "forc[ing] [them] to walk through a public space, usually to the police station or court, for the benefit of the media" (p. 42).

and legislation; Gallagher, 2017; Merry, 2016; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005; Weitzer, 2007, 2014) and the detection of such acts at the individual level (e.g., determining the occurrence of the crime and appropriate intervention follow-ups; Farrell et al., 2010; Sinha et al., 2019). In the face of scholarship that mobilizes increasingly complex and varied empirical methods, including multiple regression modeling (Perry & de Castro Pecanha, 2017), path analysis (Shafer & Looney, 2018), item response theory (IRT) (Zhang & Cai, 2015), and structural equation modeling (SEM) (Reid, 2011), the power of the "ideal victim" narrative remains salient.

Specifically, studies have shown the challenges of detecting human trafficking occurrences due to skewed perceptions about victimhood (e.g., Farrell et al., 2010; Sinha et al., 2019). Shafer and Looney (2018) conducted a factor analysis that suggested stereotypical tropes may actually work against anti-trafficking endeavors:

> [T]he reliance on the "ideal victim" frame (e.g., lower responsibility attribution) fails to acknowledge, contextualize, or educate the public about the realities of the experiences of sex trafficking victims. How victims are portrayed (e.g., disempowered, blamed) and what information is highlighted about trafficking within anti-trafficking communication efforts has the potential to reinforce harmful stereotypes about sex trafficking victims, causes, and solutions that may invert the goals of anti-sex trafficking advocates. (p. 31)

Our study suggests that inaccurate prototypes are a source of concern, but also that practitioners in the field can be guided by experience to construct more realistic expectations about human trafficking.

Current Study

Since October 2013, the interdisciplinary Anti-Slavery and Human Trafficking Initiative (ASHTI) team at the University of Kansas has conducted research to understand human trafficking service provision and prevention in the Midwest. Though most of the team's research has been qualitative, specifically grounded in semi-structured interviews, this article represents data from its first quantitative project. From July to September 2016, the research team launched an online Qualtrics survey to gain a breadth of knowledge from a range of frontline sectors who had some contact with vulnerable, exploited, or trafficked persons.

To date, ASHTI has primarily conducted research with service providers because they are in direct contact with clients who are survivors of trafficking or who may be vulnerable to future exploitation. Service providers have a broad understanding of the range of experiences that may render someone vulnerable to trafficking or that may buffer against exploitation. Service providers also have information that is applicable for identification protocols, prevention programs, and survivor services. Some service providers are drawn to this work because they are survivors, and the research team has interviewed a handful of survivors who became service providers. Much is learned from working with survivors themselves, and survivors' voices must continue to be centered in anti-trafficking endeavors. However, there are equally important concerns that some survivors have been retraumatized by a barrage of research and media requests to learn about their experience, and most have failed to be adequately, meaningfully compensated for their labor. While it was not the focus of this research, it is possible that survivor-leaders (individuals who identify as formerly trafficked persons who now work broadly in anti-trafficking work) also participated in this survey.

The research team worked collaboratively to create a survey protocol that addressed the following research questions:

(1) How do Midwestern service providers perceive human trafficking within their client bases and their communities?
(2) What unique factors about rural and/or Midwestern communities shape anti-trafficking efforts?
(3) What barriers to service exist for trafficked persons in Midwestern regions?

These questions were informed by scholarship on human trafficking identification markers (Ahn et al., 2013; Farrell et al., 2010; Musto, 2008; Konstantopoulos et al., 2013; Srikantiah, 2007) as well as region-specific research on human trafficking in the Midwest (Cole & Sprang, 2015; Heil & Nichols, 2015; Ozalp, 2009; Rajaram & Tidball, 2018; Williamson & Prior, 2009; Wilson & Dalton, 2007). In addition, the research team's prior research (Britton, 2020; Schwarz et al., 2019; Schwarz & Britton, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2017, 2016) provided useful insights into which frontline workers may have the most contact with exploited or trafficked persons.

Survey Design and Methodologies

Below, we trace the steps the research team followed in moving from developing our research questions to selecting the tools of quantitative analysis at the conclusion of the survey distribution.

Region Selection

The Midwest as a defined region is quite large, encompassing 12 U.S. states[3] (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). Increasingly, research is emphasizing more geographically-defined responses to human trafficking (Farrell et al., 2016). The research team determined that a bi-state survey would best answer their research questions within an appropriately-bounded space. While these two states have similar demographics and political climates, Midwestern State 1 has a longer history of anti-trafficking policy and structured supports for survivors. At the time of our survey, Midwestern State 2 was in a more introductory phase with certain anti-trafficking mechanisms, such as legislative task forces. Importantly, Midwestern State 2 has a slightly broader definition of human trafficking in its state-level definitions. Though both states used the same concepts of "force, fraud, and coercion" in their foundational definitions, Midwestern State 2 explicitly includes online advertisements of commercial sex in their definition of sex trafficking. This is absent from Midwestern State 1's sex trafficking definition. The research team's qualitative analysis of survey findings (Schwarz et al., 2020) provides more detail about these nuances.

The Role of Beta Testers and Stakeholder Feedback

Upon designing the survey and testing it internally, the research team used beta testers to determine if the survey was meaningful to this population of frontline workers. These stakeholders were draw from the broad field of anti-trafficking efforts and also reflected perspectives from our sampled legal/law enforcement, medical, social service, nonprofit, and foster care sectors. These beta testers offered edits on the definition of trafficking presented in the survey, the factors of human trafficking identification, the factors for each substantive question, and the terms participants could use to self-identify their workplace titles and roles. The beta testers also made recommendations on the ordering of questions, so that a shared definition of human trafficking was placed at the beginning of the survey. Upon receiving this feedback, the team members worked together to redevelop specific questions to best accommodate these critiques.

Sample Development

In order to capture the appropriate sample of frontline workers engaged with vulnerable, exploited, or trafficked persons, the research team developed its own database of possible participants for the survey in the spring of 2015. This process allowed the team to target specific populations of workers most likely to encounter sex and labor trafficking survivors as clients: the legal/law enforcement, nonprofit,

---

[3]These states include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

medical, social service, and foster care sectors. The team began with an internet-based scan of organizations and offices across both selected states. Team members used terms related to each sector,[4] in addition to digitally accessible lists of state and county-level offices and interpersonal contact with organizational representatives, creating a universe of 3,605 total frontline workers. During the research team's previous interview-based research (Schwarz et al., 2019), stakeholders suggested the range of participants to include in the survey research. We believe this sample is representative of those frontline workers across both states who are also accessible to contact via e-mail.

Survey Distribution

Each participant received an identical Qualtrics survey. The only differences were in the sector-specific references. For example, foster care participants received surveys that used the phrase "foster care sector," while nonprofit participants saw questions that used the phrase "nonprofit sector." The term "client" was used for all surveys except for those in the medical sector, who were asked about "patients." Finally, when asking for or demographic information, each survey included a list of sector-specific job titles from which they could select or write in their own answer. For example, legal/law enforcement officials were not shown a list that included jobs from the healthcare sector.

Using the Qualtrics survey platform, team members generated an e-mail sent directly to most identified sample members. Beginning in July 2016, the majority of our participants received an e-mail explaining the general parameters of the research project and the role their expertise would play in addressing larger questions about vulnerability, exploitation, and trafficking in the Midwestern U.S. Reminder e-mails were staggered throughout late July and August, with a survey closure date in September 2016.

The only differences in distribution were for select members of the legal/law enforcement and social service sectors, as well as the entirety of the foster care sector. Based on contact with administrators in these respective sectors, the research team determined it was best to allow the foster care sector to distribute an anonymous survey link through their own e-mail platform. Administrators were understandably hesitant to share their institutional e-mail lists with the research team. The administrators also believed that survey buy-in and trust would be achieved through their own distribution, not a generalized Qualtrics link. Our research team crafted an e-mail to foster care administrators that was then forwarded to their own staff lists. Reminder e-mails followed a similar process for these groups.

Participants

Out of the total 3,605 contacted participants, 667 frontline workers provided responses (response rate = 18.5%). In line with our informed consent protocols, participants were able to leave questions blank or opt out of continuing the survey at any time, so not every surveyed frontline worker can be equated to a "complete" data set. Table 1 shows the response rate by sector.

The research team deliberately limited the collection of demographic data, based on consultation with beta testers. Given the particularly small regions where some participants were conducting their anti-trafficking work, there was the concern of identifiability; for example, providing the age, race, and gender of an anti-violence advocate in one predominantly rural county could be enough to pinpoint the identity of that participant. Instead, the survey asked participants to self-define their job title, region of work, and scope of work (city-wide/community-wide, regional, statewide, national, or other). Beyond these self-definitions, the survey also asked participants to identify how many survivors

---

[4]Using Google as a starting point, the research team thought of each sector in its broadest terms. For example, when searching for appropriate members of the medical sector, team members searched for "emergency department," "federally qualified health center," "public health clinic," "crisis pregnancy center," "free clinic," "hospital," and "community health center" to identify general health providers likely to encounter vulnerable, exploited, or trafficked persons.

Table 1. Survey response rate by sector.

Public Service Sector	Surveys Received	Surveys Distributed	Response Rate
Legal/Law Enforcement	149	1073	13.9%
Medical	116	474	24.5%
Nonprofit	90	316	28.5%
Social Service	42	142	29.6%
Foster Care	270	1600	16.9%
Total Across All Sectors	**667**	**3605**	**18.5%**

of labor and sex trafficking they worked with (1) across their entire professional career and (2) within the past 12 months, with the reported numbers varying from zero to over 100. These questions worked together to provide a robust picture of anti-trafficking work in the region while maintaining confidentiality of participants.

After being presented with a legal definition for human trafficking,[5] the participants were asked "To the best of your knowledge, have you ever encountered a survivor of human trafficking in your professional capacity in the social service sector?" Participants who responded "No" to this question were classified to a "No witness" group, indicating their perceived lack of experience with human trafficking. Participants who responded "Yes" were presented with a follow-up question concerning the forms of human trafficking they witnessed: sex trafficking, labor trafficking, or both.

As Table 2 demonstrates, participants had varying levels of perceived encounters and experience with trafficked persons. Interestingly, our participants were split almost equally in terms of whether or not they had encountered trafficking in their careers, with 45% of survey participants indicating no perceived experience with human trafficking and 55% indicating they had some perceived experience. Additionally, Table 2 presents the types of trafficking our participants encountered. In our case, it was fairly common for service providers to report seeing sex trafficking only or to see both sex and labor trafficking – but it was rare for them to *only* witness labor trafficking in their work.

Survey Items

Table 3 details the survey items that correspond with the warning signs presented on the survey. Participants could respond to these items on a Likert scale with five points from "Completely Likely" to "Not At All Likely," with a sixth point for "Do Not Know." In general, warning signs represent current, recognizable factors that a frontline worker would witness in their client's life (like truancy), or embodied by their client (such as the health concerns or physical markers of interpersonal violence) that would trigger

Table 2. Cross-classification summary for the online survey respondents: service sectors and human trafficking witness experiences.

Public Service Sector	No Witness Experience	Witness Sex Trafficking Only	Witness Labor Trafficking Only	Witness Sex and Labor Trafficking	Total
Legal/Law Enforcement	72	47	1	24	144
Nonprofit	17	42	0	28	87
Medical	84	16	2	10	112
Social Service	10	25	0	5	40
Foster Care	111	123	2	26	262
Total	294	253	5	93	645

[5]For the purposes of our project, our research team used a definition reflective of the TVPA: "Human trafficking is the use of force, fraud, or coercion to exploit someone for labor or commercial sex. Under US law, any commercial sexual act performed by someone under the age of 18 is considered sex trafficking. A person's consent to enter into these exchanges does not waive the law or their protection under the law." This definition was adjusted to reflect beta testers' consideration for how to frame this question. Instead of simply copying the legal definition identically in format and structure, our beta testers advised us to make this statement more concise and less jargon-filled. The definition here is reflective of multiple conversations and rounds of feedback between the research team and beta testers.

some kind of intervention. We see these as *reactive*; if a service provider has been trained to identify trafficking, they would see these signs as an indication to step in and implement a protocol. These warning signs reflect only one of the survey questions. Participants were also asked about larger, more systemic or structural issues. We conceptualize these issues as *preventive*, holding the potential to exacerbate exploitation or vulnerability, in a section of the survey about trafficking "risk factors." This set of questions addressed other commonly recognized factors, including but not limited to a controlling presence, financial abuse/control, English language limitations, and undocumented citizenship status. When warning signs and risk factors accumulate, individuals may become more vulnerable to violence, harm, exploitation, or human trafficking (Lutnick, 2016; Nichols, 2016; Schwarz et al., 2019; Strauss & McGrath, 2017; De Vries & Farrell, 2018). Given the scope of this paper, we focus here on the warning signs named in Table 3 only, but we recognize the interplay and connection between these two sets of challenges and forms of exploitation, and we discuss these in other publications (Schwarz et al., 2019, p. 2020).

It is important to address the nuances of these factors.[6] In working with our beta testers, these particular warning signs were identified as the most encompassing of both sex *and* labor trafficking even though some (like sexually transmitted infections or tattoos/branding) may be more prototypically associated with sex trafficking. However, when combining their insights with the research team's previous interview-based research in a Midwestern metropolitan area and preexisting scholarship on "trafficking into forced labor" that includes sexual *and* non-sexual forms of work (Brennan, 2014), we found these factors did not fully exist in some kind of binary configuration (between some solely existing for sex trafficking survivors and others exclusively associated with labor trafficking).

Specifically, we spoke extensively with beta testers, interview participants, and local anti-trafficking survivor-leaders about the disproportionate attention sex trafficking receives in the anti-trafficking scholarship. They pushed against the binary division between sex and labor trafficking. Many service providers in this Midwestern region have worked with survivors who, more often than not, experienced both sex and labor trafficking, and they argued that we should be thinking about how these co-occur. Other providers went a step further to argue that sex trafficking is synonymous with labor trafficking.

While the research team did not want to further reify a potential division, we were interested to see if there were some factors that were more prominent in one condition than the other. While we recognize there are limitations with this decision, as we address later in this paper, we were guided by our stakeholders who advised us to challenge the prototypical sex/labor binary. For example, the warning

Table 3. Survey items for warning signs.

Warning Sign	Survey Items (n = 17)
WS1WS2	Physical injury (ex. broken bones, sprains)
WS3	Medical issue/illness (ex. flu, fever, infection)
WS4	Untreated chronic/acute health issue (ex. diabetes, asthma)
WS5	"On the job" injury (ex. chemical burns, falling off ladders)
WS6	Hunger/malnutrition
WS7	Untreated sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
WS8	Sexual assault
WS9	Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
WS10	Evidence of abuse or torture
WS11	Dental damage
WS12	Drug or alcohol abuse or overdose
WS13	Attempted suicide
WS14	Chronic runaway
WS15WS16	Truancy
WS17	Prior, unsuccessful involvement with social service system(s)Mental health concerns (ex. depression, manic episode)
	Presence of tattoos or branding

sign of "truancy" was listed specifically by interview participants connected to the education field as a warning sign for labor trafficking. One educator spoke in great detail how the children of undocumented parents in her community were often picking up extra shifts during school hours to help pay rent. When their truancy triggered mandatory reporting, families would move out of district to avoid closer surveillance by the school system. Similarly, other participants connected to youth and educational systems described drug trafficking as a form of labor trafficking, with specific and convincing justifications.

Taking these factors into account, the survey also included an open-ended question at the beginning, asking if participants had witnessed other forms of trafficking beyond sex or labor trafficking. We anticipated hearing possible answers of organ trafficking, or answers that pointed to the limitations of this particular binary construction, but we instead received responses that described a particular type of labor or sex trafficking.

Analysis Approach

The goal of the quantitative data analysis was to understand the possible dimensions (the factor structure) of frontline workers' perceptions of human trafficking. Specifically, based on the respondents' answers to the 17 survey items addressing warning signs, analysis aimed to address the following questions:

(1) Are the warning sign indicators reflective of a single dimension (i.e., determining an individual as a victim of human trafficking; the risk level of an individual experiencing human trafficking) across the three witness groups?
(2) If there are differential responses across the three witness groups regarding the warning sign indicators, can the mean level differences be explained by the organizational support received by the respondents?

This report presents results of a structural equation modeling (SEM) procedure using R's package lavaan (Rosseel, 2018 [Version 0.6–2]; R Core Team, 2018 [Version 3.5.1]). The model collects the survey items and groups them into conceptual dimensions. Though our survey asked questions on a five-point Likert scale, our model uses four points, as the final two points of the Likert scale ("Not Too Likely" and "Not At All Likely") were worded so closely as to induce similar responses.

As noted earlier, in line with our survey design and informed consent practices, many participants did not respond to all items. Unlike regression analysis, the structural equation estimation process does not drop cases when some items are unavailable. The estimates are based on an underlying correlation matrix between items, which is built up from "pairwise-complete" observations on all items. The process makes use of the information that is available for all pairs of items.

The main findings revolve around the extent to which these conceptual dimensions differ among practitioners with different experiences. We first establish a measurement model. The purpose is to show that the three groups of practitioners under consideration have similar understandings of the questions themselves. By establishing the so-called strong invariance property, we are able to then estimate the positions of individuals on the underlying attitudinal scales. It becomes possible to argue, for example, that the level of perceived physical danger is different among practitioners who have never encountered human trafficking than among others. Second, we conducted an exploratory SEM procedure (ESEM) to validate the structure of attitudinal dimensions (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2009; Mai et al., 2018; Marsh et al., 2014; Morin et al., 2013). The analysis suggests that there are three attitudinal dimensions that underlie the survey item responses. A priority in our analysis is to understand the differences among the providers as a function of their experience. For the final step of the analysis, two organizational support variables (having a protocol/identification tool; receiving

training) were included as predictors. The following sections provide more detailed description of the analysis and the results.

Results

Warning Signs of Human Trafficking

We started with the simple assumption that there is one underlying attitudinal dimension that drives evaluations of the warning signs for human trafficking. In structural equation modeling, these attitudinal dimensions are referred to as "factors." We quickly concluded, however, that the one-factor model was not going to be sufficient for a large number of the providers under consideration.

As illustrated in Table 4 to 6, many of the individual items seem to be poorly predicted by the single factor. The overall model fit, as represented by the root mean-square error of approximation, is 0.16, which is unacceptable. We suggest instead a three-dimensional model to account for warning signs.

ESEM was used to identify the possible latent factors and their associated indicators. A three-factor solution emerged (see Figure 1) that suggests that three perceptual components – described as the practitioner's understanding of an individual's physical condition, reproductive health, and personal risk – will help to understand differences among practitioners.Individual descriptors across the perceptual components per witness group are evident in are listed in Tables 5a, 5b, and 5c.

Table 6 shows the model estimation results for the three-factor model. Note that there are separate estimates for the three practitioner groups. The linkage between the items and the underlying attitudinal constructs is much more consistent than the one-dimensional model. In addition, the overall fidelity between the model and the entire data set is excellent (CFI =.99, TLI/NNFI = .99,

Table 4. Configural invariance model estimation results for the warning signs.

	No Witness	Sex Trafficking	Labor Trafficking
	Estimate(S.E.)sig	Estimate(S.E.)sig	Estimate(S.E.)sig
		Factor Loadings	
General Factor	0.74(0.03)***	0.68(0.03)***	0.70(0.06)***
Physical Injuries			
Medical Issues/Illness	0.83(0.03)***	0.82(0.02)***	0.81(0.04)***
Untreated Health Issues	0.80(0.03)***	0.80(0.03)***	0.75(0.05)***
"On the job" Injury	0.69(0.04)***	0.68(0.04)***	0.42(0.09)***
Malnutrition	0.81(0.02)***	0.71(0.03)***	0.79(0.04)***
Untreated STIs	0.89(0.02)***	0.78(0.02)***	0.89(0.04)***
Sexual Assault	0.86(0.02)***	0.79(0.04)***	0.88(0.03)***
Urinary Infections	0.90(0.01)***	0.80(0.02)***	0.89(0.04)***
Abuse/Torture	0.83(0.02)***	0.70(0.03)***	0.73(0.05)***
Dental Damage	0.78(0.02)***	0.76(0.03)***	0.77(0.04)***
Drug/Alcohol Abuse	0.87(0.02)***	0.76(0.04)***	0.76(0.04)***
Attempted Suicide	0.90(0.01)***	0.68(0.03)***	0.80(0.04)***
Chronic Runaway	0.92(0.11)***	0.81(0.03)***	0.93(0.02)***
Truancy	0.88(0.01)***	0.80(0.02)***	0.91(0.03)***
SS Involvement Fail	0.78(0.02)***	0.72(0.03)***	0.63(0.06)***
Mental Health Concerns	0.78(0.03)***	0.76(0.03)***	0.74(0.06)***
Tattoos	0.59(0.04)***	0.66(0.04)***	0.66(0.07)***
General.Factor	1.00+	Latent Variances 1.00+	1.00+
		Latent Intercepts	
General.Factor	0.00+	0.00+	0.00+
Scaled χ2 1594.4(df = 357)***		Fit Indices	
CFI	0.98		
TLI/NNFI	0.97		
RMSEA	0.15***		
SRMR	0.11		
N	593		

+Fixed parameter
$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5a. [a]*Individual descriptors for physical condition perceptual component (percentages and counts).*

	No Witness	Witness Sex Trafficking	Witness Labor Trafficking
Physical Injuries			
NTAL	11.56% (34)	11.85% (41)	10.20% (10)
SL	21.77% (64)	25.14% (87)	28.57% (28)
VL	25.17% (74)	24.28% (84)	24.49% (24)
CL	11.90% (35)	11.85% (41)	12.24% (12)
NA	29.59% (87)	26.88% (93)	24.49% (24)
Medical Issues/Illness			
NTAL	12.59% (37)	6.94% (24)	6.12% (6)
SL	19.05% (56)	23.41% (81)	23.47% (23)
VL	26.53% (78)	27.75% (96)	31.63% (31)
CL	12.59% (37)	16.47% (57)	16.33% (16)
NA	29.25% (86)	25.43% (88)	22.45% (22)
Untreated Health Issues			
NTAL	12.24% (36)	8.96% (31)	7.14% (7)
SL	21.09% (62)	23.99% (83)	16.33% (16)
VL	24.15% (71)	24.86% (86)	35.71% (35)
CL	12.59% (37)	14.74% (51)	18.37% (18)
NA	29.93% (88)	27.46% (95)	22.45% (22)
'On the job' Injury			
NTAL	29.59% (87)	30.06% (104)	8.16% (8)
SL	15.65% (46)	16.47% (57)	23.47% (23)
VL	15.65% (46)	11.56% (40)	33.67% (33)
CL	7.14% (21)	6.94% (24)	11.22% (11)
NA	31.97% (94)	34.97% (121)	23.47% (23)
Malnutrition			
NTAL	8.16% (24)	9.54% (33)	6.12% (6)
SL	13.27% (39)	22.83% (79)	28.57% (28)
VL	31.29% (92)	28.32% (98)	35.71% (35)
CL	19.39% (57)	15.61% (54)	10.20% (10)
NA	27.89% (82)	23.70% (82)	19.39% (19)
Abuse/Torture			
NTAL	5.78% (17)	4.62% (16)	8.16% (8)
SL	13.27% (39)	17.63% (61)	31.63% (31)
VL	29.25% (86)	28.03% (97)	24.49% (24)
CL	25.17% (74)	26.59% (92)	11.22% (11)
NA	26.53% (78)	23.12% (80)	24.49% (24)
Dental Damage			
NTAL	6.80% (20)	10.98% (38)	9.18% (9)
SL	21.09% (62)	23.41% (81)	26.53% (26)
VL	27.55% (81)	21.97% (76)	25.51% (25)
CL	14.63% (43)	13.29% (46)	7.14% (7)
NA	29.93% (88)	30.35% (105)	31.63% (31)
Total	294	346	98

[a]For Table 5a, 5b, and 5c, the following codes correspond to the Likert scale used on our survey:
NTAL: Not Too Likely and Not at All Likely
SL: Somewhat Likely
VL: Very Likely
CL: Completely Likely
NA: Missing Values

RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .09). The main point here is that we believe expectations about human trafficking might be more nuanced than the simple one-dimensional model. We show that while service providers who do not indicate any experience with human trafficking, who we categorize as the no witness group in our analyses, seem to have a simpler one-dimensional view, the providers that have identified or worked with trafficking survivors have differentiated expectations that reflect their perceived experiences.

The no witness group's opinions are more likely to align with the simple one-dimensional scale for human trafficking. In order to get traction for an inter-group comparison, we take the no witness

Table 5b. Individual descriptors for reproductive health perceptual component (Percentages and Counts).

	No Witness	Witness Sex Trafficking	Witness Labor Trafficking
Untreated STIs			
NTAL	7.14% (21)	1.16% (4)	11.22% (11)
SL	8.84% (26)	10.40% (36)	21.43% (21)
VL	25.51% (75)	33.24% (115)	22.45% (22)
CL	31.97% (94)	34.39% (119)	17.35% (17)
NA	26.53% (78)	20.81% (72)	27.55% (27)
Sexual Assault			
NTAL	13.61% (40)	5.20% (18)	27.55% (27)
SL	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)
VL	24.49% (72)	29.19% (101)	33.67% (33)
CL	35.03% (103)	47.11% (163)	15.31% (15)
NA	26.87% (79)	18.50% (64)	23.47% (23)
Urinary Infections			
NTAL	9.86% (29)	2.89% (10)	9.18% (9)
SL	12.24% (36)	12.14% (42)	20.41% (20)
VL	21.09% (62)	27.46% (95)	24.49% (24)
CL	27.89% (82)	31.21% (108)	12.24% (12)
NA	28.91% (85)	26.30% (91)	33.67% (33)
Total	294	346	98

group as a baseline set and then focus on the differences among the providers who have experienced human trafficking. Particularly because sex trafficking is perceived more widely, we are especially focused on comparing that group with the no witness group. In the two witness groups (sex and labor trafficking), the estimated positions of the participants on the underlying attitudinal scales are more tightly clumped than in the no witness group. The idea would be that providers without any perceived encounters with trafficked persons bring with them diverse expectations that are not shaped by direct, interpersonal experience. Especially on the dimensions of personal risk and reproductive health, diversity among the sex trafficking witness group is noticeably lower (estimated variances are 0.57 and 0.47, compared to 1.0 for the no witness group). The attitudinal dimensions of the no witness group are much more tightly correlated than the other groups. As Figure 2 illustrates, the attitudinal construct estimates in Table 6 are more noticeably differentiated among the respondents who had witnessed human trafficking (sex or labor).

We can also compare the average positions of the provider groups on the three attitudinal dimensions. The evidence indicates that professionals who have field exposure to human trafficking – either for sex or labor – developed more nuanced attitudinal prototypes. The sex trafficking witness group relies more on personal risk indicators and reproductive health indicators when judging the occurrence of sex trafficking. Given the prototypical understanding of labor trafficking – which focuses exclusively on elements of physical labor and omits the reality of sexual violence, STIs, unplanned pregnancies, and harms to future reproductive capacities (Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, 2020; Silver-Greenberg & Kitroeff, 2018)[7] – the practitioners in this survey who have worked with survivors of labor trafficking do not perceive issues of reproductive health as a major contributing factor.

Organizational Supports for Anti-Trafficking Efforts

Organizational support might enhance practitioners' ability to identify human trafficking. Our data include two indicators of organizational support. First, respondents were asked, "Do you use a human trafficking protocol/identification tool?" Second, respondents were asked "Have you received educational programming/training on human trafficking? (ex. State Attorney General's Office, local

[7]Many thanks to one of our anonymous reviewers for suggesting these additions to our analysis.

Table 5c. Individual descriptors for personal risk perceptual component (percentages and counts).

	No Witness	Witness Sex Trafficking	Witness Labor Trafficking
Drug/Alcohol Abuse			
NTAL	4.76% (14)	1.45% (5)	12.24% (12)
SL	11.90% (35)	7.51% (26)	16.33% (16)
VL	30.95% (91)	36.13% (125)	29.59% (29)
CL	26.87% (79)	33.82% (117)	16.33% (16)
NA	25.51% (75)	21.10% (73)	25.51% (25)
Attempted Suicide			
NTAL	6.12% (18)	2.89% (10)	10.20% (10)
SL	13.61% (40)	15.32% (53)	23.47% (23)
VL	28.91% (85)	37.28% (129)	28.57% (28)
CL	24.15% (71)	19.65% (68)	10.20% (10)
NA	27.21% (80)	24.86% (86)	27.55% (27)
Chronic Runaway			
NTAL	6.46% (19)	0.87% (3)	8.16% (8)
SL	8.50% (25)	8.09% (28)	17.35% (17)
VL	29.59% (87)	34.39% (119)	29.59% (29)
CL	28.91% (85)	34.68% (120)	16.33% (16)
NA	26.53% (78)	21.97% (76)	28.57% (28)
Mental Health Concerns			
NTAL	3.06% (9)	1.16% (4)	5.10% (5)
SL	11.56% (34)	8.38% (29)	11.22% (11)
VL	32.65% (96)	28.61% (99)	30.61% (30)
CL	26.53% (78)	41.62% (144)	32.65% (32)
NA	26.19% (77)	20.23% (70)	20.41% (20)
Truancy			
NTAL	8.50% (25)	1.73% (6)	6.12% (6)
SL	10.88% (32)	11.85% (41)	16.33% (16)
VL	29.59% (87)	30.64% (106)	30.61% (30)
CL	24.15% (71)	31.21% (108)	16.33% (16)
NA	26.87% (79)	24.57% (85)	30.61% (30)
SS Involvement Fail			
NTAL	4.76% (14)	1.45% (5)	5.10% (5)
SL	20.41% (60)	13.29% (46)	20.41% (20)
VL	28.91% (85)	32.95% (114)	30.61% (30)
CL	19.05% (56)	29.77% (103)	17.35% (17)
NA	26.87% (79)	22.54% (78)	26.53% (26)
Tattoos			
NTAL	7.82% (23)	4.34% (15)	16.33% (16)
SL	19.73% (58)	19.65% (68)	22.45% (22)
VL	25.17% (74)	26.88% (93)	17.35% (17)
CL	18.03% (53)	21.97% (76)	14.29% (14)
NA	29.25% (86)	27.17% (94)	29.59% (29)
Total	294	346	98

organizations/service providers)". Response options to these two questions were: "Yes, No, and Don't Know." For the purpose of the analysis, we grouped together the "Don't Know" and "No," mainly on the substantive grounds that people who do not know if they have received training are not likely to be different from people who report that they have not had training.[8] Specifically, if providers do not know if their organization has accessible educational resources or identification protocols, that means in practice the providers are not using them. These two variables were included in the three-factor three-group model as two exogenous (predictor) variables. Table 7 shows the estimation results for this structural model.

---

[8]We have estimated a model that treats "Don't Know" as missing data, and the estimates are substantively equivalent. The alternative estimates are available with the online material.

Table 6. [a]Three-factor three-group CFA model (WLSMV) estimation results for warning signs.

	No Witness	Sex Trafficking	Labor Trafficking
	Estimate(S.E.)*sig*	Estimate(S.E.)*sig*	Estimate(S.E.)*sig*
	Factor Loadings		
Personal Risk			
Drug/Alcohol Abuse	0.93(0.02)***	++	++
Attempted Suicide	0.94(0.01)***		
Chronic Runaway	0.96(0.01)***		
Truancy	0.91(0.02)***		
SS Involvement Fail	0.84(0.02)***		
Mental Health Concerns	0.88(0.02)***		
Physical Condition			
Physical Injuries	0.78(0.03)***		
"On the job" Injury	0.70(0.04)***		
Abuse/Torture	0.93(0.02)***		
Medical Issues/Illness	0.87(0.02)***		
Untreated Health Issues	0.81(0.03)***		
Malnutrition	0.85(0.02)***		
Dental Damage	0.85 (0.03)***		
Reproductive Health			
Untreated STIs	0.91(0.02)***		
Sexual Assault	0.95(0.02)***		
Urinary Infections	0.95(0.01)***		
	Latent Variances		
Personal Risk	1.00+	0.57(0.12)***	0.75(0.24)**
Physical Condition	1.00+	0.90(0.17)***	0.88(0.28)**
Reproductive Health	1.00+	0.47(0.11)***	0.74(0.24)**
	Latent Covariances		
Personal Risk w/Physical Condition	0.80(0.03)***	0.48(0.10)***	0.63(0.20)**
Personal Risk w/Reproductive Health	0.80(0.03)***	0.38(0.08)***	0.60(0.19)**
Physical Condition w/Reproductive Health	0.86(0.03)***	0.50(0.10)***	0.62(0.20)**
	Latent Intercepts		
Personal Risk	0.00+	0.26(0.11)*	−0.24(0.15)
Physical Condition	0.00+	−0.01(0.11)	−0.04(0.16)
Reproductive Health	0.00+	0.19(0.11)	−0.52(0.15)***
	Fit Indices		
Scaled χ2	1093.45(df = 385)***		
CFI	0.99		
TLI/NNFI	0.99		
RMSEA	0.09***		
SRMR	0.09		
N	432		

+Fixed parameter
++Loadings are identical in all three groups
$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
[a]For the purposes of this analysis, we found that tattoos/branding did not fit the models we were constructing. Tattoos/branding were possible indicators of human trafficking but not causal factors within this model.

The model estimation results (the latent intercepts estimates) showed that the group mean-level differences became non-significant (comparing to the three-group three-factor model above) once the two organizational support variables were taken into account. Thus, organizational support (i.e., having a standard identification tool and going through proper training) can influence the frontline workers' judgment about usefulness of the 17 warning signs.

Discussion

The overarching goal of the current study was to understand frontline workers' perceptions of warning sign indicators from a cognitive prototype perspective. Specifically, multiple-group SEM analyses were conducted to understand and sketch out a reasonable approximation for the participants' cognitive
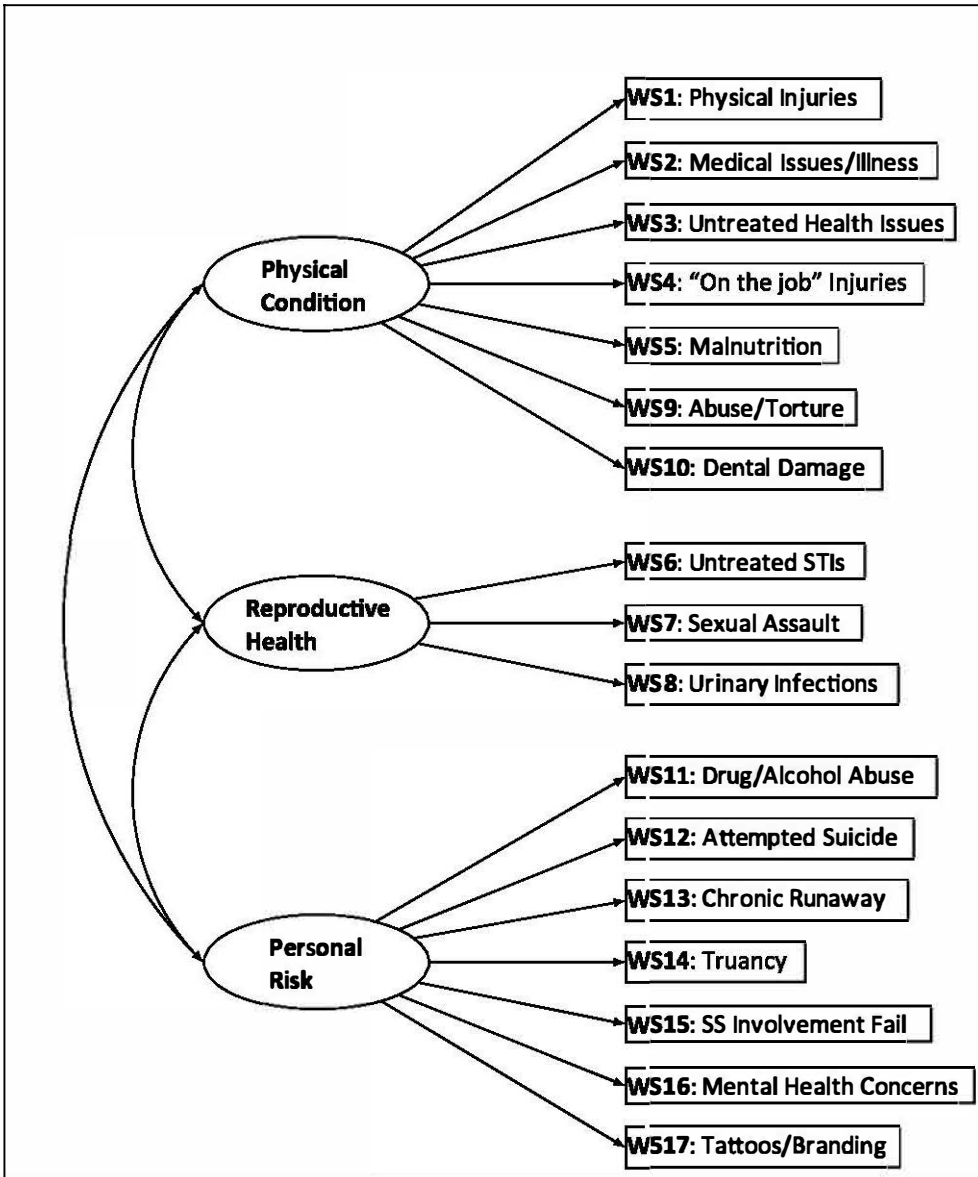
Figure 1. Three-factor structure for warning signs.

schema – how service providers understand and make sense of – human trafficking occurrence. This approach aligns with inductive human trafficking research strategies that seek to move from specific observations to more generalizable claims (Weitzer, 2014).

In general, service providers who have seen either sex or labor trafficking, as a group, have more clarity about warning signs. For those who have not seen trafficking in their work, there is a much wider set of indicators that could be associated with trafficking. This has some interesting implications. For example, if you have seen sex trafficking, this may mean that your broader perceptions of trafficking are more informed by the lived experiences of trafficked persons in your community rather than by the media. It also may mean that you may begin to see sex and labor trafficking through a narrower lens. This is not inherently positive, as a more restrictive definition of trafficking may eliminate some real forms of harm that require legal or medical assistance.
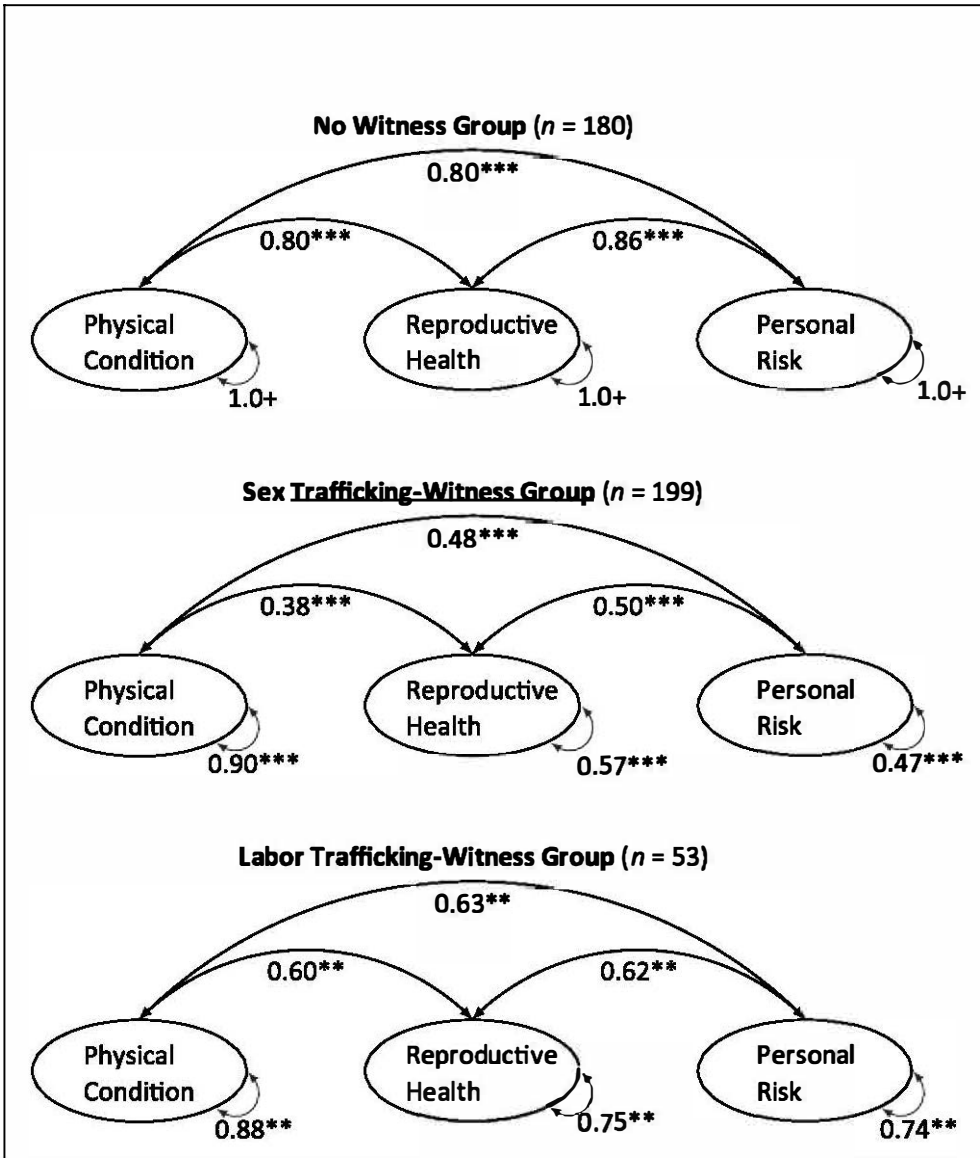
Figure 2. Three-factor three-group CFA model estimation results.

Based on our findings regarding organizational support, identification tools and formalized trainings do have an influence on participants' perceptions of trafficking. Again, it is important to take into consideration the content of these mechanisms and programs. If frontline workers are being prepared to identify trafficking per a prototypical understanding rooted in stereotypes, the efficacy and ethical orientation of these interventions should be revisited to perhaps more authentically reflect the exploitation found in their communities. If survivors' experiences happen to align with prototypical narratives, then responses should align accordingly – but we should not be treating complex problems with "one size fits all" anti-trafficking efforts.

The results here also indicate that service providers believe they have more experience with sex trafficking than labor trafficking. This does not necessarily mean that sex trafficking occurs more frequently than labor trafficking – returning to our first research question, it is simply perceived to

Table 7. Three-group structural model estimation results for the warning signs: identification protocol and training as two predictors.

	No Witness	Sex Trafficking	Labor Trafficking
	Estimate(S.E.)*sig*	Estimate(S.E.)*sig*	Estimate(S.E.)*sig*
	Factor Loadings		
Personal Risk			
Drug/Alcohol Abuse	0.92(0.02)***	++	++
Attempted Suicide	0.94(0.01)***		
Chronic Runaway	0.96(0.01)***		
Truancy	0.90(0.02)***		
SS Involvement Fail	0.83(0.03)***		
Mental Health Concerns	0.87(0.03)***		
Physical Condition			
Physical Injuries	0.75(0.03)***		
"On the job" Injury	0.69(0.05)***		
Abuse/Torture	0.92(0.02)***		
Medical Issues/Illness	0.88(0.02)***		
Untreated Health Issues	0.80(0.03)***		
Malnutrition	0.83(0.03)***		
Dental Damage	0.84(0.03)***		
Reproductive Health			
Untreated STIs	0.91(0.02)***		
Sexual Assault	0.94(0.02)***		
Urinary Infections	0.95(0.01)***		
	Regression Slopes		
Personal Risk			
Received Training	−0.18(0.19)	0.27(0.16)	−0.26(0.42)
Protocol/Identification Tool	0.45(0.19)*	−0.07(0.13)	−0.04(0.27)
Physical Condition			
Received Training	−0.13(0.18)	0.27(0.22)	−0.15(0.56)
Protocol/Identification Tool	0.58(0.18)**	0.17(0.18)	0.27(0.34)
Reproductive Health			
Received Training	−0.26(0.19)	0.16(0.17)	−0.12(0.38)
Protocol/Identification Tool	0.52(0.20)*	−0.06(0.13)	0.08(0.27)
		Latent Variances	
Personal Risk	1.00+	0.58(0.14)***	0.64(0.28)*
Physical Condition	1.00+	1.26(0.37)***	1.17(0.50)*
Reproductive Health	1.00+	0.64(0.20)**	0.66(0.26)*
		Latent Covariances	
Personal Risk w/Physical Condition	0.79(0.03)***	0.58(0.14)***	0.64(0.25)*
Personal Risk w/Reproductive Health	0.78(0.03)***	0.44(0.11)***	0.49(0.20)*
Physical Condition w/Reproductive Health	0.85(0.03)***	0.68(0.16)***	0.66(0.24)**
		Latent Intercepts	
Personal Risk	0.00+	0.21(0.47)	0.39(0.88)
Physical Condition	0.00+	−0.14(0.53)	0.36(1.17)
Reproductive Health	0.00+	0.35(0.50)	−0.33(0.85)
		Fit Indices	
Scaled χ2 1002.52(df = 463)***			
CFI	0.99		
TLI/NNFI	0.99		
RMSEA	0.07***		
SRMR	0.10		
N	401		

+Fixed parameter
++Loadings are identical in all three groups
*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

exist at higher rates. This finding could reflect the stronger policy emphasis and public discourse on sex trafficking than on labor trafficking (Berg, 2015; Weitzer, 2007), as well as the concept of "iconic" (Srikantiah, 2007) or prototypical victimhood as aligning with definitions of sex trafficking. This is an issue that continues to be debated and critiqued within critical trafficking studies.

Our findings point to the need for more targeted research exclusively focusing on labor exploitation and trafficking, including how these forms of violence are perceived by the frontline workers with

whom survivors may be engaging. The mainstream discourse that equates human trafficking exclusively with sex trafficking is powerful, and robust empirical data must add to the vocal activist communities and advocacy groups forging the conversations on the exploitation of domestic workers, agricultural laborers, and "gig economy" contractors (Hafiz & Paarlberg, 2017; Thibos & Quirk, 2019; Van Doorn, 2017). Though the harms faced by a forced laborer in a restaurant or on a construction site may not resemble those faced by a precarious contract laborer, they are part of a broader continuum of exploitation that goes unchecked because it currently exists outside of paradigmatic conceptions of what constitutes human trafficking.

Our findings may also point to the value of combining systems-wide understandings of warning signs as seen by a range of service providers. This range ought to also be informed and enlivened by survivors' narratives and individual experiences with both sex and labor trafficking. Training programs could highlight prototypical and non-prototypical trafficking narratives, such as the recurring trauma of polyvictimization (De Vries & Farrell, 2018) which complicates the "master narrative" prototype (Hill, 2016) of trafficking as one identifiable moment. As Cojocaru (2016) argues in her autoethnographic critique of an anti-trafficking art exhibition, "the factors influencing personal experiences are multifaceted and complex, especially in cases involving interpersonal violence" (p. 19). With appropriate compensation and thoughtful acknowledgment of the trauma that might accompany retelling one's story, survivors can and should participate in the development of identification protocols and the training of frontline workers. This dual approach of system-wide perspectives and survivor-centered experiences working in tandem may help avoid the entrenchment of one prototype that equates human trafficking exclusively with one specific manifestation of trafficking or that targets only certain populations.

Limitations

One major limitation of this research is the self-selection of the sample. Though the research team and beta testers were careful to structure the survey in a way to clearly, accessibly define human trafficking, it is not unreasonable to assume that some potential participants did not identify their own experiences within this framework. Another possible limitation was the ordering of the questions. While beta testers suggested that the survey begin with a definition of human trafficking, it is possible that participants did not see their work or their clients as existing within that definition and then self-selected out of the survey after that initial definition. While the research team was interested in the perceptions of service providers who had encountered a range of vulnerable populations, it is possible that beginning the survey with the definition of human trafficking may have limited their participation.

Additionally, the limited demographic data we collected regarding our survey participants restricts certain kinds of analyses. We are unable to draw any conclusions about the relationship between a service provider's age, race, gender, or other identity categories and their understanding of human trafficking in the Midwest. Though we asked participants to estimate the numbers of trafficked persons with whom they had worked throughout the past year and their overall career, we did not ask them to assess the number of years they identified as working with trafficked persons. While this question may have alienated participants who did not identify as trafficking stakeholders *first* – for example, the law enforcement officers who address a slate of criminalized activity in addition to human trafficking or the foster care case managers who care for youth with mental health concerns, housing needs, and sexual exploitation – it also restricts our ability to control for expertise along this metric. In our other interview-based research, we have the opportunity to consider these factors more intentionally.

With respect to the warning signs, it is critically important to think about how these factors may or may not connect to larger tropes of victimhood and exploitation (Kempadoo, 2015; Shafer & Looney, 2018; Srikantiah, 2007). Though we did not ask specific questions about participants' consumption of trafficking-related media, these prototypical images disseminated in TV programs and documentaries

are widely accessible and were referenced at other stages in our research project.[9] Mass media depictions of human trafficking are highly influential and shape policy and practice, reinforcing a particularly limited understanding of human trafficking as a singular moment of sexualized violence (Schwarz & Grizzell, 2020). As Small (2012) explains, the presumed "truth" and "authenticity" of fictional trafficking films can serve as a legitimizing force that promotes specific misunderstandings of sex trafficking and appropriate humanitarian responses. Our warning sign indicators, though vetted through beta testers and confirmed against academic literature, may still not fully encapsulate the lived experiences of trafficked people in the Midwest or the language they use to describe their exploitation to service providers. Conversely, survey respondents may be reflecting this dominant, media-supported idea of human trafficking in their responses, and the risk indicators their clients articulate may be defined as something other than trafficking, leaving these factors absent from our findings.

Finally, the factor structure revealed in this study is an approximation of frontline workers' cognitive reference map, an analysis of perceptions rather than a comprehensive study of quantifiable numbers of trafficked persons. Again, thinking of our first research question, these perceptions may mobilize particular stereotypes and fail to meaningfully reflect the lived experiences of some trafficked persons. In line with the limitations addressed above, future iterations of the survey need to add more or omit specific warning signs. It is critically important to include risk indicators that are linked to empirical data, not those that potentially exacerbate the stereotypical depictions of trafficking that lead to misidentification of survivors.

Conclusion

Though nebulous, prototypes and perceptions of human trafficking powerfully shape the material context of anti-trafficking efforts. Based on our survey of Midwestern service providers, if sex trafficking is perceived to occur more frequently than labor trafficking – and if certain warning signs are more commonly associated with specific forms of exploitation – frontline workers may be more primed to identify sex trafficking in their community. The "mundane" exploitation (Chapkis, 2003) faced by marginalized workers in a variety of labor industries will continue to thrive if it not perceived to meet the prototypical expectations of ideal victimhood. We are not asking for labor trafficking to face the same sort of prototypical construction as sex trafficking, which would not serve the complexity of survivors' experiences in any way. Instead, we must grapple with the vast range of harms that undergird the economy in the U.S. While sex trafficking is framed as sensational and exceptional, labor trafficking, if discussed further at all, is reduced to a harsh reality of life under global capitalism, especially for migrant populations (Brennan, 2014; Campbell & Zimmerman, 2017; Chapkis, 2003; Peksen et al., 2017).

Eradicating human trafficking requires a multi-sector, collaborative endeavor, and these endeavors cannot replicate the harms of stereotyping survivors based on their adherence to specific tropes of victimhood or displays of certain warning signs. And yet, as our findings demonstrate, knowledge of these warning signs matters. As anti-trafficking advocates and scholars, we must be comfortable holding these two mechanisms in tension: increasing opportunities for training and protocol development while constantly checking our prototypes and assumptions against the reality of trafficked persons' lived experiences. If our methods of identification marginalize or stigmatize certain displays of trafficking, we are doing a grave disservice to those facing harms and violence on the larger continuum of exploitation and trafficking.

---

[9]In addition to this survey, Schwarz conducted a set of semi-structured interviews with 54 participants building off the presented data. Those participants widely referenced media, including *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Human Trafficking* (a Lifetime TV movie), and *Nefarious* (an Exodus Cry-produced religious anti-trafficking documentary).

Funding

References

Ahn, R., Alpert, E. J., Purcell, G., Konstantopoulos, W. M., McGahan, A., Cafferty, E., Eckardt, M., Conn, K. L., Cappetta, K., & Burke, T. F. (2013). Human trafficking: Review of educational resources for health professionals. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 44*(3), 283–289. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2012.10.025

Albright, E., & D'Adamo, K. (2017). The media and human trafficking: A discussion and critique of the dominant narrative. In M. Chisolm-Straker & H. Stoklosa (Eds.), *Human trafficking is a public health issue: A paradigm expansion in the United States* (pp. 363–378). Springer.

Allais, C. (2013). The profile less considered: The trafficking of men in South Africa. *South African Review of Sociology, 44*(1), 40–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2013.784447

Asparouhov, T., & Muthén, B. (2009). Exploratory structural equation modeling. *Structural Equation Modeling, 16*(3), 397–438. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705510903008204

Berg, H. (2015). Trafficking policy, meaning making and state violence. *Social Policy and Society, 14*(1), 145–155. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746414000414

Bernstein, E. (2010). Militarized humanitarianism meets carceral feminism: The politics of sex, rights, and freedom in contemporary antitrafficking campaigns. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 36*(1), 45–71. https://doi.org/10.1086/652918

Bernstein, E. (2012). Carceral politics as gender justice? The "traffic in women" and neoliberal circuits of crime, sex, and rights. *Theory and Society, 41*(3), 233–259. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-012-9165-9

Brennan, D. (2014). *Life interrupted: Trafficking into forced labor in the United States.* Duke University Press.

Britton, H. E. (2020). Understanding risk and prevention in Midwestern antitrafficking efforts: Service providers' perspectives. *Georgia State University Law Review, 36,* 1105–1128. https://readingroom.law.gsu.edu/gsulr/vol36/iss4/9

Bumiller, K. (2008). *In an abusive state: How neoliberalism appropriated the feminist movement against sexual violence.* Duke University Press.

Campbell, L. M., & Zimmerman, Y. C. (2017). Forced labor and the movement to end human trafficking. In S. Kim & K. Day (Eds.), *A companion to public theology* (pp. 271–297). Brill Publishers.

Cantor, N., Mischel, W., & Schwartz, J. C. (1982). A prototype analysis of psychological situations. *Cognitive Psychology, 14*(1), 45–77. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(82)90004-4

Chapkis, W. (2003). Trafficking, migration, and the law: Protecting innocents, punishing immigrants. *Gender & Society, 17*(6), 923–937. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243203257477

Cojocaru, C. (2016). My experience is mine to tell: Challenging the abolitionist victimhood framework. *Anti-Trafficking Review, 7,* 12–38. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121772

Cole, J., & Sprang, G. (2015). Sex trafficking of minors in metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural communities. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 40,* 113–123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.07.015

Core Team, R. (2018). *R: A language and environment for statistical computing (Version 3.5.1)* [Computer software manual]. R Foundation for Statistical Computing. https://cran.r-project.org/doc/manuals/r-release/fullrefman.pdf

Dando, C. J., Walsh, D., Brierley, R., & Dalal, K. (2016). Perceptions of psychological coercion and human trafficking in the West Midlands of England: Beginning to know the unknown. *PLoS ONE, 11*(5), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0153263

De Vries, I., & Farrell, A. (2018). Labor trafficking victimizations: Repeat victimization and polyvictimization. *Psychology of Violence, 8*(5), 630–638. https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000149

Denton, E. (2010). International news coverage of human trafficking arrests and prosecutions: A content analysis. *Women & Criminal Justice, 20*(1–2), 10–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/08974451003641321

Farrell, A., DeLateur, M. J., Owens, C., & Fahy, S. (2016). The prosecution of state-level human trafficking cases in the United States. *Anti-Trafficking Review, 6,* 48–70. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121664

Farrell, A., McDevitt, J., & Fahy, S. (2010). Where are all the victims? Understanding the determinants of official identification of human trafficking incidents. *Criminology & Public Policy, 9*(2), 201–217. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2010.00621.x

Gallagher, A. T. (2017). What's wrong with the global slavery index? *Anti-Trafficking Review, 8,* 90–112. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121786

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women. (2020, March 6). *End gender-based violence against women migrant workers, GAATW International Secretariat.* https://www.gaatw.org/events-and-news/68-gaatw-news/1022-end-gender-based-violence-against-women-migrant-workers

Hafiz, S., & Paarlberg, M. (2017). *The human trafficking of domestic workers in the United States: Findings from the beyond survival campaign.* Institute for Policy Studies and National Domestic Workers Alliance.

Heil, E. C., & Nichols, A. J. (2015). *Human trafficking in the Midwest: A case study of St. Louis and the bi-state area.* Carolina Academic Press.

Hill, A. (2016). How to stage a raid: Police, media, and the master narrative of trafficking. Anti-Trafficking Review, 7, 39–55. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121773

Howard, N. (2014). Teenage labor migration and antitrafficking policy in West Africa. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 653*(1), 124–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716213519242

Hoyle, C., Bosworth, M., & Dempsey, M. (2011). Labelling the victims of sex trafficking: Exploring the borderland between rhetoric and reality. *Social & Legal Studies, 20*(3), 313–329. https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663911405394

Kempadoo, K. (2015). The modern-day white (wo)man's burden: Trends in anti-trafficking and anti-slavery campaigns. *Journal of Human Trafficking, 1*(1), 8–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2015.1006120

Lutnick, A. (2016). *Domestic minor sex trafficking: Beyond victims and villains.* Columbia University Press.

Mac, J., & Smith, M. (2018). *Revolting prostitutes: The fight for sex workers' rights.* Verso.

Macias Konstantopoulos, W., Ahn, R., Alpert, E. J., Cafferty, E., McGahan, A., Williams, T. P., Castor, J. P., Wolferstan, N., Purcell, G., & Burke, T. F. (2013). An international comparative public health analysis of sex trafficking of women and girls in eight cities: Achieving a more effective health sector response. *Journal of Urban Health, 90*(6), 1194–1204. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-013-9837-4

Mai, Y., Zhang, Z., & Wen, Z. (2018). Comparing exploratory structural equation modeling and existing approaches for multiple regression with latent variables. *Structural Equation Modeling, 25*(5), 737–749. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705511.2018.1444993

Marsh, H. W., Morin, A. J. S., Parker, P. D., & Kaur, G. (2014). Exploratory structural equation modeling: An integration of the best features of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 10*(1), 85–110. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032813-153700

Merry, S. (2016). *The seductions of quantification: Measuring human rights, gender violence, and sex trafficking.* University of Chicago Press.

Morin, A. J. S., Marsh, H. W., & Nagengast, B. (2013). Exploratory structural equation modeling. In G. R. Hancock & R. O. Mueller (Eds.), *Structural equation modeling: A second course* (2nd ed., pp. 395–436). Information Age.

Musto, J. L. (2008). The NGO-ification of the anti-trafficking movement in the United States: A case study of the coalition to abolish slavery and trafficking. *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies, 5,* 6–20. ProQuest. http://sites.cortland.edu/wagadu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2014/02/musto1.pdf

Musto, J. L. (2009). What's in a name?: Conflations and contradictions in contemporary U.S. discourses of human trafficking. *Women's Studies International Forum, 32*(4), 281–287. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2009.05.016

Nichols, A. J. (2016). *Sex trafficking in the United States: Theory, research, policy, and practice.* Columbia University Press.

Owens, C., Dank, M., Breaux, J., Bañuelos, I., Farrell, A., Pfeffer, R., Bright, K., Heitsmith, R., & McDevitt, J. (2014). *Understanding the organization, operation, and victimization process of labor trafficking in the United States.* Urban Institute.

Ozalp, J. E. (2009). Halting modern slavery in the midwest: The potential of Wisconsin Act 116 to improve the state and federal response to human trafficking. *Wisconsin Law Review, 6,* 1391–1433. HeinOnline. https://repository.law.wisc.edu/s/uwlaw/media/19379

Peksen, D., Blanton, S. L., & Blanton, R. G. (2017). Neoliberal policies and human trafficking for labor: Free markets, unfree workers? *Political Research Quarterly, 70*(3), 673–686. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917710339

Perry, C. L., & de Castro Pecanha, V. (2017). Sex-trafficked survivors: The relation between posttraumatic growth and quality of life. *Journal of Human Trafficking, 3*(4), 271–284. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2016.1224761

Pickel, K. L., & Gentry, R. H. (2017). Mock jurors' expectations regarding the psychological harm experienced by rape victims as a function of rape prototypicality. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 23*(3), 254–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2016.1239101

Rajaram, S. S., & Tidball, S. (2018). Survivors' voices—Complex needs of sex trafficking survivors in the Midwest. *Behavioral Medicine, 44*(3), 189–198. https://doi.org/10.1080/08964289.2017.1399101

Reid, J. A. (2011). An exploratory model of girl's vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation in prostitution. *Child Maltreatment, 16*(2), 146–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559511404700

Rodríguez-López, S. (2018). (De)constructing stereotypes: Media representations, social perceptions, and legal responses to human trafficking. *Journal of Human Trafficking, 4*(1), 61–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2018.1423447

Rosch, E. H. (1973). Natural categories. *Cognitive Psychology, 4*(3), 328–350. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(73)90017-0

Rosseel, Y. (2018). *lavaan: Latent variable analysis (Version 0.6-2) [Computer software manual].* The Comprehensive R Archive Network. https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/lavaan/lavaan.pdf

Schwarz, C., Alvord, D., Daley, D., Ramaswamy, M., Rauscher, E., & Britton, H. (2019). The trafficking continuum: Service providers' perspectives on vulnerability, exploitation, and trafficking. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 34*(1), 116–132. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109918803648

Schwarz, C., & Britton, H. E. (2015). Queering the support for trafficked persons: LGBTQ communities and human trafficking in the heartland. *Social Inclusion*, 3(1), 63–75. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v3i1.172

Schwarz, C., & Grizzell, T. (2020). Trafficking spectacle: Affect and state power in operation cross country X. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 41(2), 57–81. https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.41.2.0057

Schwarz, C., Kennedy, E. J., & Britton, H. (2017). Aligned across difference: Structural injustice, sex work, and human trafficking. *Feminist Formations*, 29(2), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2017.0014

Schwarz, C., Unruh, E., Cronin, K., Evans-Simpson, S., Britton, H., & Ramaswamy, M. (2016). Human trafficking identification and service provision in the medical and social service sectors. *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 18(1), 181–192. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5070690/

Schwarz, C., Xing, C., Daugherty, R., Watt, S., & Britton, H. E. (2020). Frontline workers' perceptions of human trafficking: Warning signs and risks in the Midwest. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 6(1), 61–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2018.1562316

Shafer, A., & Looney, B. (2018). Victims profiles: Direct and indirect effects of anecdotes and responsibility attribution on support for sex trafficking victims. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 4(1), 21–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2018.1423444

Silver-Greenberg, J., & Kitroeff, N. (2018, October. 21). Miscarrying at work: The physical toll of pregnancy discrimination. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/21/business/pregnancy-discrimination-miscarriages.html

Sinha, R., Tashakor, E., & Pinto, C. (2019). Identifying victims of human trafficking in central Pennsylvania: A survey of health-care professionals and students. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 5(2), 165–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2018.1448956

Small, J. L. (2012). Trafficking in truth: Media, sexuality, and human rights evidence. *Feminist Studies*, 38(2), 415–443. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23269193

Soltis, K., & Walters, R. (2016). 'What's in a name?': Mislabelling, misidentification, and the US government's failure to protect human trafficking survivors in the Central American refugee crisis. *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 11, 85–102. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218116

Srikantiah, J. (2007). Perfect victims and real survivors: The iconic victim in domestic human trafficking law. *Boston University Law Review*, 87(1), 157–211. HeinOnline. https://www.bu.edu/law/journals-archive/bulr/volume87n1/documents/SRIKANTIAHV.2.pdf

Stoklosa, H., Dawson, M. B., Williams-Oni, F., & Rothman, E. F. (2017). A review of U.S. health care institution protocols for the identification and treatment of victims of human trafficking. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 3(2), 116-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2016.1187965

Strauss, K., & McGrath, S. (2017). Temporary migration, precarious employment and unfree labour relations: Exploring the 'continuum of exploitation' in Canada's temporary foreign worker program. *Geoforum*, 78, 199–208. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.01.008

Thibos, C., & Quirk, J. (eds). (2019). *The future of work.* openDemocracy.

Tyldum, G., & Brunovskis, A. (2005). Describing the unobserved: Methodological challenges in emprirical studies on human trafficking. *International Migration*, 43(1–2), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-7985.2005.00310.x

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). *Midwest census region.* United States Department of Labor.https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/midwest.htm

van Doorn, N. (2017). Platform labor: On the gendered and racialized exploitation of low-income service work in the 'on-demand' economy. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(6), 898–914. https://doi.org//10.1080/1369118X.2017.1294194

Weitzer, R. (2007). The social construction of sex trafficking: Ideology and institutionalization of a moral crusade. *Politics & Society*, 35(3), 447–475. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329207304319

Weitzer, R. (2014). New directions in research on human trafficking. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 653(1), 6–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214521562

Weitzer, R. (2015). Human trafficking and contemporary slavery. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41(1), 223–242. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112506

Williamson, C., & Prior, M. (2009). Domestic minor sex trafficking: A network of underground players in the Midwest. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 2(1), 46–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361520802702191

Wilson, J. M., & Dalton, E. (2007). *Human trafficking in Ohio: Markets, responses, and considerations.* Rand Corporation.

Zhang, S. X., & Cai, L. (2015). Counting labour trafficking activities: An empirical attempt at standardized measurement. *Forum on Crime and Society*, 8, 37–61. https://doi.org/10.18356/d8237c59-en