

# Surviving Sex Trafficking: A Phenomenological Study

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| 2023

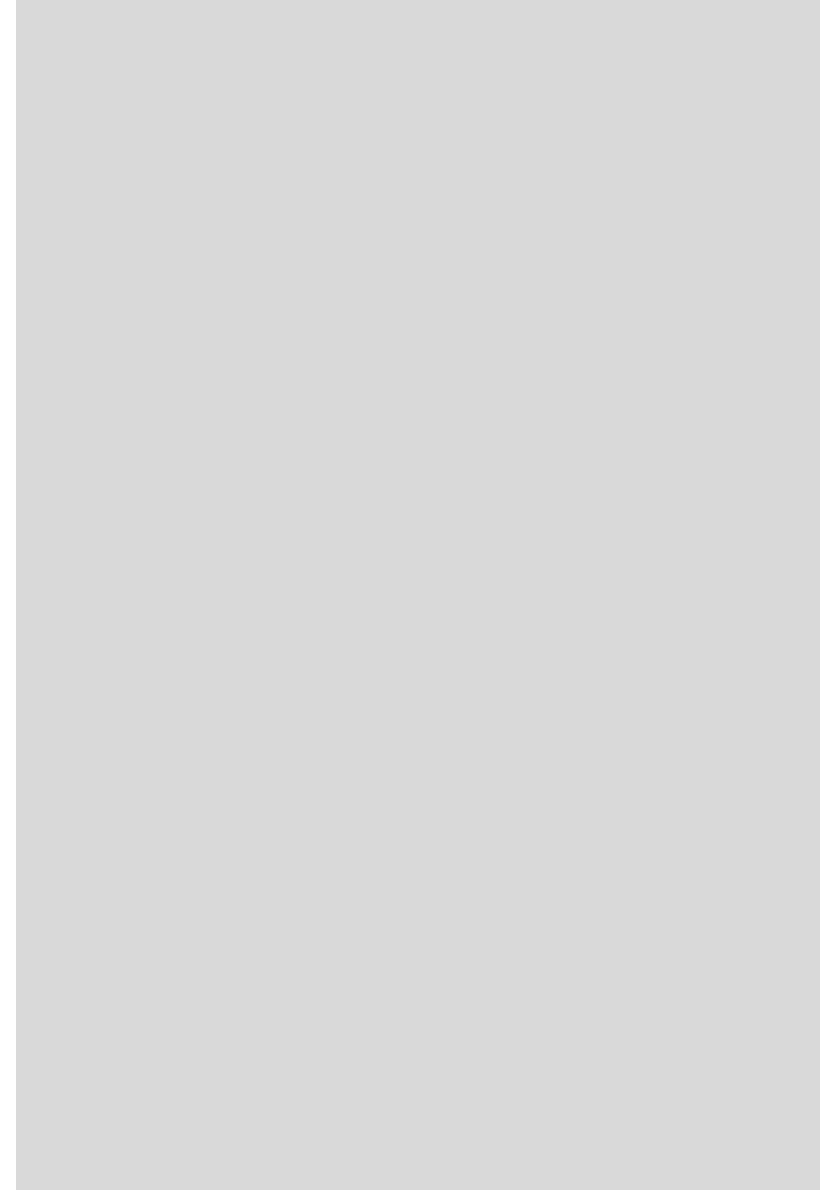
# Agenda

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Preliminary Results



# Introduction

- Part 1





# Sex Trafficking:


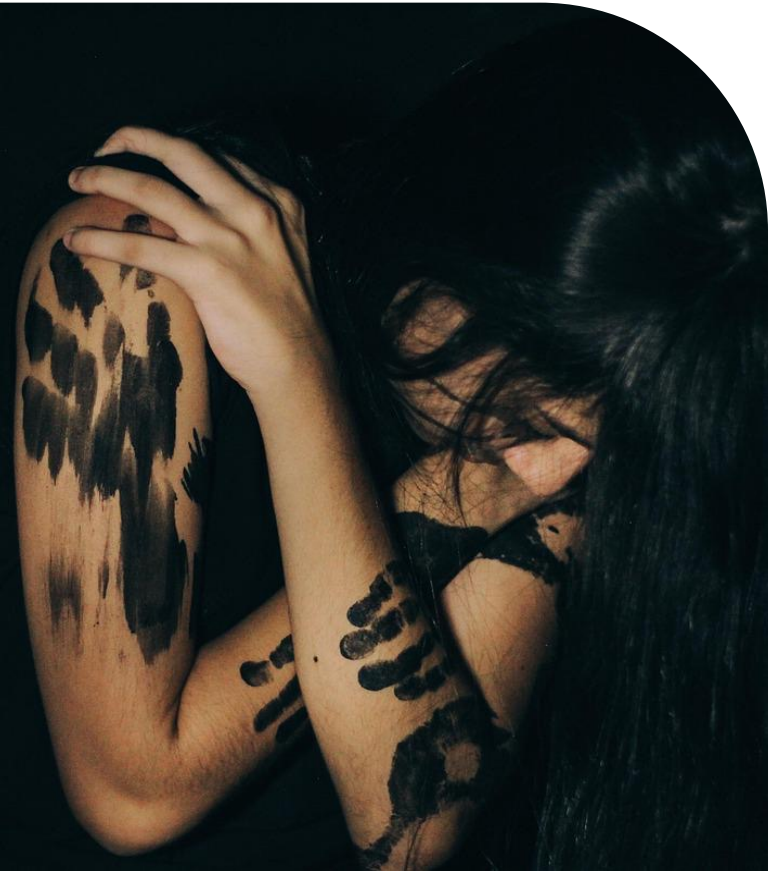
- The legal definition of the term sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.
- **Sex trafficking exists in every town, city, and community internationally and is perpetrated by every nationality, occupation, and ethnicity.**
- Because sex trafficking is inherently a hidden crime, we may never know the full extent of the issue. Recent reports indicate that the crime is growing in Texas and in the United States.

(Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106–386, 114 Stat. 1464–1548, 2000, p. 1470) ■







# Objectives



Learn about sex trafficking and sex trafficking research in the counseling literature.



Increase awareness of the survivors' mental health experiences after being trafficked using findings from interviews from a phenomenological study.



Become familiar with implications for clinical practice and strategies for counselors when working with sex trafficking survivors based on empirical findings.

# Need for the Study

- 01 A paucity of research exists regarding survivor-informed sex trafficking knowledge for counselors
- 02 Understanding trafficking survivors' experiences are essential to promote awareness, outline best treatment practices, and develop effective trainings.



# Methodology

- Part 2



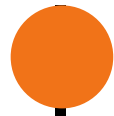




# Qualitative Transcendental Phenomenology

- Intentionality
- Intuition
- Description
- Experiences
- Grounded Data

# Research Timeline



## RECRUITING

- CESNET
- Social Media
- Snowball Sampling



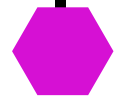
## COLLECTING DATA

- Zoom Interviews
- 30-90 Minutes
- Demographics
- 13 Open-Ended Questions Interview Protocol



## ANALYSIS

- Transcription verbatim
- NVIVO individual initial coding of interviews
- Group consensus on categorization and reduction of codes
- Preliminary analysis of themes





# Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Sex	Race-Ethnicity
Annabel	37	Female	White
Betty	30	Female	White
Cassie	41	Female	White
Crystal	42	Female	American Indian or Alaskan Native/
Gretchen	30	Female	White



# Preliminary Results

- Part 3





# Themes

Descriptive Outcomes of the Study



**Experiences of  
Grooming,  
Recruitment, and  
Sex Trafficking**



**Impact of Sex  
Trafficking**



**Implications for  
Counseling  
Survivors**



# Experiences of Grooming, Recruitment, and Sex Trafficking

*“It's that grooming process and it's almost always someone that's close to you,, someone you would never think would do that.”*  
– Crystal

*“I was kind of learning the rules and kind of mentally becoming more indoctrinated to um what I thought love was, what I thought right and wrong was, um and learning those concepts”*  
– Annabel

*“I think, also too like if you're leaving your trafficker what are you going to do?...Do you have a home? Do you have a job? Do you have stability? How are you going to survive?”*  
- Cassie

## Grooming and Recruitment

- Factors that led to ST ( $n = 98$ )
- Characteristics of Traffickers ( $n = 45$ )

## Trafficker Control

- Trauma Bond ( $n = 43$ )
- Use of Force ( $n = 27$ )
- Manipulation ( $n = 26$ )

## Experiences of Sex Trafficking

- Trafficking was not the Stereotypical Experience ( $n = 21$ )
- Leaving Trafficking ( $n = 86$ )

# Impact of Sex Trafficking

*“It's something that impacts your life forever, even if you don't want to do.”* - Crystal

*“Well, like, when I applied for my job <laugh/> they said that I needed to be five years out of my situation to be like fully healed and I was literally only like one year out of it, but I said I was five years out of it because I needed the job.”* - Gretchen

## Multidimensional Impact of Sex Trafficking

### Physical ( $n = 73$ )

- Medical and Health concerns
- Physical Damage to Body

### Vocational ( $n = 18$ )

- Impact on Education and Work

### Psychological ( $n = 269$ )

- Mental Health Diagnoses
- Difficulty with Autonomy and Freedom
- Long-lasting Impact
- Identity after Trafficking
- Regaining Sense of Control

### Relational ( $n = 202$ )

- Relationships with Self
- Relationships with Others
- Romantic Relationships
- Relationship with Trafficker after Trafficking

### Spiritual ( $n = 72$ )



concern  
afraid exploded hospitalized  
challenging breakdown religious  
hungry started thought different shock  
trafficking dissociation nothing  
awful addicted parts alcohol empty  
family weird trauma sound attempted  
complex fear addiction •dies• adaptive  
blame blame addicts drugged suicide sounds  
pain disorder drugs ptsd eating  
illness die bipolar drug remember health  
victim anxiety cut worth situation kindness  
binge issues mental fault abuse injury cocaine  
high ashamed struggle depression sleep blocked  
belief brain dangerous protected twitches hit aversion  
feeling asserting diagnosed broken  
believe empowerment sirens  
medicine

# Impact of Sex Trafficking

*“So, and then other than that, like relationships would be the next probably most common challenge...wanting to have sex is not necessarily <pause/> a thing that you'll ever want again after this experience, especially the more traumatic ones where they're like really truly like forced to do what they are doing.”*

- Betty

*“I like didn't have faith for uhm like 11 years...then I started going back to church again and, like listening to sermons and pouring into God and like getting my faith back...the only way that I like have gotten through it is through my faith.”*

- Gretchen

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### Spiritual ( $n = 72$ )

# Impact of Sex Trafficking

“I’m very kind and compassionate and caring. I love the work that I do, I love helping other people. I don't care how I’m helping them, what capacity, as long as I’m helping, I am happy.” - Crystal

## Growth After Sex Trafficking

- Desire to Help Others ( $n = 30$ )
- Interest in Helping Profession ( $n = 25$ )



# Implications for Counseling Survivors

*“So I think for clinicians it's important to create a neutral space um that doesn't. It doesn't mean they can't have their own belief systems, but they um need to understand that maybe the things that bring them solace are things that were instruments of oppression for other people.” - Annabel*

*“There's a difference between how we teach it [ethics] versus how we practice it and I think that that scares students into believing that the role of the gut is not important...the difference is like the codified rules and staying in the lines versus like that that gut thing that flares up that tells you this is not right...It's a controversial stance, it really is.” - Annabel*

## Attributes

- Safe ( $n = 28$ )
- Trustworthy ( $n = 12$ )
- Relational ( $n = 10$ )
- Validating ( $n = 7$ )
- Empathic ( $n = 2$ )
- Honest ( $n = 3$ )
- Humility ( $n = 2$ )

## Knowledge and Skills

- Understanding non-verbal behavior
  - Survivors ( $n = 119$ )
  - Counselors ( $n = 12$ )
- Knowledge of
  - Sex Trafficking ( $n = 84$ )
  - Trauma ( $n = 25$ )
- Assessment and Identifying Sex Trafficking ( $n = 23$ )
- Understanding Client's Engagement ( $n = 50$ )
- Ethical Practice ( $n = 13$ )

# Implications for Counseling Survivors

*“The support groups really saved me, uhm, because I didn't have a mom that I could call or you know, a best friend or somebody in my life like that...I had to turn to advocates in action.”*

- Cassie

*“So what was helpful was just getting it out, really I didn't get a lot of feedback, it was just getting it out, you know and a lot of times you just need to process it...you just need someone to listen. But then it when it didn't feel safe, then I closed up and then didn't want to go back anymore.”*

- Crystal

## Helpful Practices

- Providing Resources ( $n = 127$ )
- Providing Support ( $n = 60$ )
- Empowerment of the Client ( $n = 39$ )
- Modeling Healthy Boundaries ( $n = 28$ )
- Psychoeducation ( $n = 14$ )



# Limitations

## CURRENT STUDY

- Preliminary analysis
  - Member checking
  - External auditing
- Self-Report
  - Impression management
  - Social desirability





# Thank you!

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