Needs Assessment for Developing a Multidisciplinary Model for Trafficking Prevention and Rehabilitation of Survivors

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Abstract: Trafficking in persons is a complex issue demanding a coordinated and multidimensional response in order to achieve effective and faster results. Due to the complexity of this phenomenon, it is often challenging for organizations serving this population to identify the constantly emerging needs in a routine fashion. The aim of this study is to provide comprehensive guidance to service providers on existing needs in this field and assessing the gaps in response to trafficking in persons in United States. The results of this study reveal a number of components that have to be crucially addressed for creating a need based effective multi-disciplinary and multi-agency system of service provision for victims of human trafficking.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary approach; Human trafficking; Survey; Needs assessment; Research; Social work practice analysis

1. Introduction

Human trafficking is the fastest growing crime in the 21st century. Every day thousands of young girls and women are forced into sex- slavery and less than 5% of this number is rescued. Over past twelve years, the United States has made significant progress in creating awareness about the misery of human slavery. However, some of the issues that remain unresolved are over the definition of human trafficking, lack of evidence based practice models in this field as well as the model of human trafficking task forces which is operational across the country in various forms. Human trafficking is a horrific crime that enslaves millions across the globe. In the year 2000, we woke up to a tragic reality that after having laws against slavery, the issue remains unabated. Policies and laws were initiated to combat the crime of human trafficking. In the United States, the "Trafficking Victims Protection Act" was the first federal attempt to give attention to victims of human trafficking. More than a decade of efforts in combating human trafficking from the state department as well as independent organizations produced some

results. However, the total number of rescued victims is still significantly smaller compared to the total number of individuals trafficked across international borders[1]. The number of victims who get rehabilitation services is even lower. After being rescued, several victims go back to the life of slavery due to insufficient programs to help this population. Also, under researched practice methods are currently used with this population that has suffered severe trauma for years. With this premise, a needs assessment survey was conducted to understand the needs identified by individuals involved in serving the population of trafficked victims[2]. The results of this study revealed that practitioners who work with trafficked victims are fragmented. There is a serious divide between law enforceement and service organizations" ideology in helping this population. Faith based groups who lead the anti-trafficking movement have used a variety of methods which lack scientific evidence supporting its effectiveness. There is lack of awareness among practitioners on the research being conducted on this issue.

Problem Statement

The United States Congress defines trafficking in persons as all acts involved in the transport, harboring, or sale of persons within national or across international borders through coercion, force, kidnapping, deception, or fraud, for purposes of placing persons in situations of forced labor or services, such as forced prostitution, domestic servitude, debt bondage, or other slavery-like practice. The primary research question explored in this study focused on finding the reasons that impair the progress in combating human trafficking research and practice. Human trafficking literature focuses on the policy, laws, victim blaming practices, issues related to HIV and other health issues and lack of data[3, 4]. The analysis of publications by Goździak[5] on human trafficking yielded 218 journal articles. From the 218 research-based articles, 39 were based on empirical research, while 179 articles were based on non-empirical research. Lack of data and empirical research is a primary gap in knowledge in the area of human trafficking. 39 journal articles are based on empirical research; 36 of these articles were published in peer-reviewed journals, while three were not peer-reviewed. The majority of empirical research focuses on trafficking for sexual exploitation; only three out of the 39 journal articles deal with trafficking for labor exploitation and one focuses on domestic servitude. The remaining 35 analyze various aspects of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Of the 39 empirical journal articles, 30 discuss trafficked women, seven discuss trafficked children, and two include discussion of trafficked men[6]. With one exception, all empirical articles used qualitative methodologies. The majority of empirical articles, 27, or 66%, used convenience samples; seven, or 17%, used population samples (mostly clients in a particular program), and two articles utilized random sampling for their data collections. All samples were quite small, ranging from case studies of one to a couple hundred of victims[5]. There is serious discrepancy in data management between government organizations, task forces and NGOs. Each entity uses different methods and data to assess this problem which creates data mismanagement, confusion and discrepancies[7]. The definition of human trafficking also remain a debatable among scholarly articles[8-12]. At international level, the Trafficking in Persons report is an attempt to collect global country level data on this issue. However, when government of India uses a different definition of trafficking than the government of Canada, available data becomes meaningless and misleading. Similarly, there is no centralized data management system in place within each country that can be used by different wings involved in combating the current human trafficking situation. As a result, the literature on trafficking of human beings is vast and often incoherent. Finally, there is a tendency to underestimate the flows at the local and regional level that hamper progress in the field of human trafficking[13]. Human trafficking literature is dominant in the policy domain[10,14,15]. In literature, the slow progress in reaching the desired outcome in the field of human trafficking is often attributed to policy However, there are not many empirical studies that reflect the gaps in practice platforms with victims of

human trafficking[16]. Presently there are multiple organizations involved in combating human trafficking: FBI, ICE, regional and federal law enforcement, activists, charitable organizations, professional NGOs, coalitions and task forces, regional coalitions, Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Trafficking in Persons and several national and international human rights groups, churches and other faith based groups. All of these organizations work on a clear mandate of rescuing and rehabilitating victims of trafficking. However, the path they follow to achieve this goal varies immensely. In this survey we particularly focused on the practice models currently used with victims of human trafficking. A needs assessment survey was designed to understand the gaps in the current practice models available to help victims of human trafficking.

Methods

Research Method

The primary reason behind this research was to understand the gaps in current practice models that are used to intervene with victims of human trafficking. In recent years, law enforcement has become more efficient in rescuing victims of human trafficking[1]. At this point, it becomes essential to ensure that victims who are rescued are rehabilitated effectively. There is literature from international experts suggesting the lack of professional and effective service results in re-trafficking, or in other words, return of rescued victims to the trafficked settings[17]. Literature also suggests that various approaches are adopted by various agencies to serve the population of trafficked victims. It was realized in a focus group discussion with service providers earlier in 2012 that due to the differences in ideology and methodology, law enforcement and NGOs often do not work collaboratively in combating the crime of human trafficking[18].

The following steps were involved in this research:

1. Secondary Data Analysis. This included reviewing materials, academic and NGO data and other data sources from press literatures.

2. Interviews. This involved interviewing community leaders by phone.

3. Surveys. A survey was mailed to 42 service providers across United States. This was followed by a survey that was administered with 198 participants in international conference of human trafficking practitioners.

4. Data Analysis. The main themes in the interviews were analyzed and used to build survey questions. Returned surveys were entered in SPSS and analyzed based on gender, age and category of service.

5. Service Mapping/Gap Analysis. Results of the survey and interviews were compared to guide identification of gaps in existing service models used to serve victims of trafficking.

6. Best model for best practice. A theoretical practice model was developed based on results of this study.

Keeping in mind this background information, a survey was mailed out to 42 service providers. The response rate on the mailed survey was 26.1%. So, a blind survey was administered in human trafficking conferences to 198 individuals from agencies including local and federal law enforcement, NGOs, counselors, as well as lawyers and immigration officers. This survey was kept completely anonymous, keeping the ethical boundaries of this research in mind. Revealing information about agencies or individuals who filled out the survey could result in arguments or friction in various agencies involved in providing services to victims of human trafficking. Due to the sensitive nature of this survey, the demographic variables were deleted prior to data entry.

Study participants

Any research is meaningful only if there are enough and valid participants who can respond to the study/

question/issue being researched. For this study, instead of involving all stake holders and interest groups in the field of human trafficking, the participants were limited to anyone directly or indirectly involved in providing services to victims of human trafficking.

(a) Law enforcement authorities (general and specialized units); (b) Frontline officers dealing with immigration, customs, border control, social service provision, labour inspection, police patrols, detention and paralegal service provision; (c) Prosecutors, judges and other members of the judiciary; (d) Government entities, including mandated bodies, ministries with responsibilities with regard to trafficking in persons (ministry of justice, ministry of internal affairs), health service providers and Government-run shelter managers; (e) Civil society (including non-governmental organizations); (f) Medical and health professionals, (h) Task forces and coalitions and (g) Academic researchers.

Survey of Service Providers

A needs assessment survey was designed to understand the existing gaps in practice; particularly social work practice with victims of human trafficking. The survey was designed keeping in mind various organizations involved in service delivery to the target population.

- Law enforcement
- Social Welfare agencies
- Immigration, Law and Policy

This mixed methods survey included both qualitative, open ended questions, as well as quantifiable, closed ended questions. The questions were designed based on the knowledge in the field and review of existing press and academic reports, as well as a focused group discussion with service providers in this field. The primary questions in the survey focused on awareness of one service providing group about other entities engaged in serving the same population of victims of human trafficking. Main questions leading to follow-up questions in this survey are listed below.

- Do all the agencies including law enforcement, task force, coalitions, shelters and other agencies that serve victims of trafficking work in collaboration with each other? (1) Yes (2) No (3) Not sure

- Do you think that local agencies involved in anti-trafficking efforts are aware of the role of federal government in combating trafficking? (1) Yes (2) No (3) Not sure

- Do you think federal agencies are aware of the kind of services provided to victims of trafficking in your area? (1) Yes (2) No (3) Not sure

- Do you think that coalitions and task forces on human trafficking provide an interdisciplinary environment to share information in order to enhance social work practice with victims of human trafficking? (1) Yes (2) No (3) Not sure

- What is the total number of victims of human trafficking served by service providers in your area? I know (2) Does not exist (3) Don't know

- Which do you think will best serve the population of former victims of human trafficking; (1) independent organizations model (2) groups model (task force) (3) interdisciplinary model. Why?

- Where do you think are the gaps in practice with victims of human trafficking at the organizational level?

- What would be your suggestions to enhance service delivery for victims of human trafficking in the United States?

- Do you think that an interdisciplinary approach to combat trafficking be more effective? How? Why?

Sampling

Random sampling was the first choice for this study. However, keeping in mind the low response rate in mailed out surveys, availability sampling method was chosen for this research. Individuals involved in anti-trafficking efforts across the country attended national conferences held on the issue of human trafficking. A national conference on trafficking was thus chosen for administering this survey. The survey instrument was distributed to all the participants including law enforcement, NGOs, lawyers and government agency professionals working directly or indirectly with victims of human trafficking.

Needs Assessment

The use of availability sampling in this study required attention to content validity. The term service providers as well as interdisciplinary services were clearly operationalized for clarity on content and participants. The purpose of this study was to understand the needs among human trafficking. In this needs assessment, following steps were followed.

1. Assess current practices- positives Vs. negatives
2. Assess short term needs Vs. Long term needs
3. Assess gaps, Severe Vs. slight gaps
4. Maintain, monitor and evaluate data
5. Develop a best practice model based on data analysis and conduct a feedback survey
6. Analyze results of the developed model and share results to guide future practice.

Response Rate

Typically, research surveys that are snail mailed have a smaller response rate. From the total mailed survey for this analysis, 26.1% surveys were completed and returned. As a result, the face to face survey was preferred. The response rate for this was 67.6%.

Data Entry and Security

Survey instruments were given numeric codes and all the quantitative data was coded and entered in SPSS data sheet. Data was then cleaned and repeated entries were eliminated to control for errors. The qualitative open ended questions were grouped. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the results. The results of Jani, N. 42 Environment and Social Psychology (2020)–Volume 5, Issue 2 quantitative data were correlated with the themes emerging from open ended answers. The electronic files where data was anonymously saved were stored in password protected format on a password protected computer. No one except the researcher was allowed access to this data. Also, the physical forms were stored in a locker without identifiable information about participants. Data security is crucial in this research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this research involved three steps.

1. Secondary data analysis
2. Qualitative pilot data analysis
3. Survey data analysis

The Secondary Data Analysis provided foundational facts about the existing methods of intervention and practice with victims of human trafficking. Based on information obtained from the secondary analysis, pilot interviews were conducted with service providers from NGOs, government, as well as law enforcement agencies. A focused group discussion was also conducted discussing which questions should be included in a national survey for needs assessment. The important themes which emerged from this qualitative pilot, included lack of

data management system, lack of interaction between agencies serving trafficking victims, gaps and conflicts between state and federal practitioners, resistance for collaboration and need for a collaborative method that can best serve the victims.

Based on the discussion, a survey was mailed and administered in conferences. Returned survey answers were coded including the qualitative, open ended questions that were thematically coded. Coded responses were then analyzed by using SPSS. The significant variables were derived based on descriptive statistics.

Results

Results of this study indicated that there are serious gaps in human trafficking service provisions. There is little literature suggesting the gaps in human trafficking and social work practice. However, the results of in-depth interviews as well as survey data suggest a current and recurring need to create a multidisciplinary and transparent method of working with victims of human trafficking. Most important theme which emerged based on qualitative data revealed a need for reducing.

Secondary data analysis

At first, 73 articles on the subject of human trafficking, which were written between the years 2000–2012, were reviewed. Out of all these articles, 19.1% (N = 73) mentioned the gaps in human trafficking. However, only two articles reviewed specifically focused issues on practice with victims of human trafficking. Since there was little information on existing gaps in practice with victims of human trafficking, this study focused on assessing the gaps identified by individuals involved in serving victims of human trafficking.

Qualitative interviews Six face–to-face interviews were conducted as part of the pilot study to determine the needs in existing systems of service delivery. The interviewees included individuals from health care, shelter, coalition of human trafficking, law enforcement, academic and faith-based organization. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed the following themes.

(i)   Lack of funding
(ii)   Lack of interaction among different groups
(iii)   Duplication of services

From the three themes, the two most repeated themes included lack of interaction and duplication of services. As one of the respondent pointed out,

"The issue is law enforcement. We have no idea sometimes about what they do, as they never attend any meetings."

Another interview participant suggested,

"All of the agencies in our area are pretty much doing the same things. Awareness projects, trainings and so on. The fact is that they don't want to build on one another. Instead of competing for the same kind of services and funding, it would make sense if we all worked on our strengths."

In addition to these two respondents commented that there has been very slow moving progress in this field due to non-cooperation from agencies which create a fearful environment for victims of human trafficking, several of whom have severe PTSD. Thus, an ongoing needs assessment and evaluation of practice with victims become necessary.

Survey

The total number of participants in this study was 145. Out of a total of 42 surveys mailed out, 26.1% (N = 11) surveys were returned and included in this study. From the total of 198 surveys distributed in conferences,

67.6% (N = 134) were returned and included in this study. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of answers on quantitative questions. It is evident from the quantitative survey data that lack of awareness and collaboration is a serious gap in practice with victims of human trafficking. Apart from these multiple choice questions, some of the qualitative questions also resulted in similar conclusions. Some of the gaps identified from qualitative analysis included lack of funding, lack of trained professionals, lack of evidence based practice methods particularly tested on trafficking victims or survivors, overlaps in practice, lack of legal knowledge among health care providers and social workers, lack of interaction between service providers and lack of reliable evidence-based data. The most important suggestions to improve practice with victims of human trafficking that resulted from this survey include, creating regular communication between state, federal and local agencies, increasing memberships and attendance in collaborative meetings offered by task forces and coalitions and increasing funding to hire and train service providers to better serve victims of human trafficking. Out of the total respondents, 93.7% (N = 136) believed that an interdisciplinary model can improve practice with victims of human trafficking. Based on the suggestions from study participants, the following model is derived to improve practice with victims of human trafficking (**Figure 1**). Representatives from each of the listed fields can meet periodically and learn from each other's practice experience. This model will reduce duplication of efforts and build collaborations between various branches trying to improve service for human trafficking victims. Some of the suggestions also included centralized practice monitoring and an evaluation system.

Table 1. The need for collaboration and interdisciplinary approach in practice with victims of trafficking.

Questions	Frequency Distribution of quantitative answers		
Number of cases	Positive (*f*)	Negative (*f*)	Not sure (*f*)
Current Collaboration	-	127	16
Awareness about federal policy/practice	32	69	41
Collaborative environment in coalitions and task forces	46	77	12
Number of victims	-	142	2
The model Supported	Independent 8	Group 3	Interdisciplinary 138

a. N = 145

Limitations

This is a pioneering study to develop practice methods that can serve victims of human trafficking. This study moves forward from existing criticisms into assessing the needs by using scientific methodology. However, there are several unavoidable limitations in this research. Random sampling was not a possibility and thus threats to validity and reliability could not be controlled. Also, there is no validated scale available that can fit this particular study. Thus, a mixed method multi-stage research method was used. The biggest limitation of this needs assessment is that the lower response rate did not allow for the researchers to run robust statistical analysis to assess future needs and test the proposed model. However, the primary contribution of this study is an immediate need for collaboration among various disciplines engaged in studying and serving victims of human trafficking.
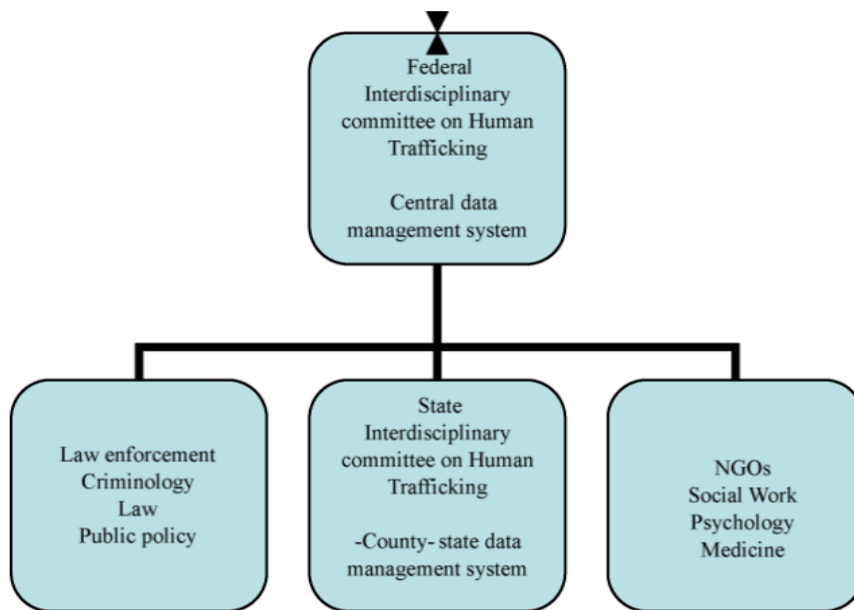
Figure 1. Interdisciplinary model to serve victims of human trafficking.

Implications for Research and Practice

The results of this study revealed some pressing issues that impair effective practice and research in the field of human trafficking. While several studies describe the need for evidence-based data in human trafficking, results from this study emphasized on the reasons that result in failures of effective research or practice in the field of human trafficking. The study signifies the need for strategic collaboration among individuals and agencies from various disciplines including healthcare, law, social work, psychiatry, and criminology and law enforcement that can improve evidence based research as well as efforts to deliver various services to victims of human trafficking in the United States.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article

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