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# Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation Within the United States and Denver Colorado

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**Regis University**  
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**Final Project/Thesis**

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Running Head: HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR THE PURPOSE OF SEXUAL

HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR THE PURPOSE OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION WITHIN  
THE UNITED STATES AND DENVER COLORADO

by

Jennifer E. Templeton

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Criminology

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October, 2011

HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR THE PURPOSE OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION WITHIN  
THE UNITED STATES AND DENVER COLORADO


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### Abstract

The topic of human trafficking is not a new concept to the majority of individuals involved in any aspect of criminology. Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including prostitution, is dramatically increasing in the number of incidents opened for investigation since 2000; the increased public interest in the various elements of the sex industry only add to this problem. Human trafficking within the United States (U.S.) is not a new concept however; diminutive amounts of research as a whole have been conducted in and around the Denver, Colorado metropolitan area. This research project aimed to answer: whether experts in the field of human trafficking perceive Denver, Colorado as an incubator for human trafficking and sexual exploitation? Results determined Colorado's geographical location influenced the prosperity of human trafficking due to the layout of the state's two major highways, Interstate 25 and Interstate 70. Results obtained from experts at the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking, Prax(us) and the Safe Streets Task Force disclosed that sex trafficking is closely associated with sexual exploitation through prostitution. Results determined the populations with the highest risk of becoming a trafficking victim are homeless or chronic runaway youth. Areas for future research indicate that education and public service announcements centered on the sex industry may reduce the number of individuals falling victim to this crime.

*Keywords:* human trafficking, human trafficking victims and vulnerable populations, poverty, prostitution, sexual exploitation, criminology

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## **Introduction**

The topic of human trafficking is not a new concept to the majority of individuals intertwined in the workings of the criminal justice system or to those involved in any aspect of criminology. Researchers, clinicians, advocates, law enforcement officials and educators alike have strived to gain insight into the world of human trafficking on various levels. Human trafficking within the United States (U.S.) is not a new concept however; diminutive amounts of research as a whole have been conducted in and around the Denver, Colorado metropolitan area.

The Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT) is an anti-trafficking organization located in Denver, Colorado. The LCHT has an important role within existing anti-trafficking efforts, training “first-responders” who encounter victims and survivors of trafficking, building the capacity of organizations that serve victims and work to combat human trafficking, and filling information gaps through community-based research and community-awareness events (Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking, 2011). Their knowledge could give valuable insight as to the problem locally. This will be combined with the thorough research already obtained on this topic including possible causes and policy implications regarding human trafficking in the U.S. Economic, social implications and statistics will additionally be analyzed.

Prax(us) is a community based group which focuses on methods to end human trafficking and is also located in Denver, Colorado. Primarily dedicated to the prevention of the domestic trafficking of homeless youth, Prax(us) concentrates on “...address[ing] the root causes of exploitation by creating systemic changes and providing direct services through a comprehensive

street outreach program” (Prax(us), 2011, para. 1). A vast amount of their time is spent working with the estimated 1,135 homeless youth in the Denver area, a population extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and sexual trafficking. Within a year period Prax(us) helps to educate the community about human trafficking, support policies to end human trafficking and sexual exploitation, while still providing various forms of assistance to homeless adolescents in need of physical and emotional care. With the assistance of and information from this widely conversant organization, the research will seek to answer if the social and economic factors such as poverty and youth homeless elucidate the current sexual human trafficking trade in this area of the nation.

To gain a law enforcement perspective on the issue, an interview was conducted with a detective of the Aurora Colorado Police Department, who is additionally an active member of the Rocky Mountain Safe Streets Task Force located in Denver, Colorado. The Safe Streets Task Force was formed in 2004 by the Federal bureau of Investigations (FBI) recruiting local law enforcement agencies from Aurora, Denver, Arapahoe County, the Federal Protective Service, Lakewood, the Colorado State Patrol and Jefferson County (Cardona, 2011). Designed to handle violent crimes, this task force additionally spends an ample amount of time investigating juvenile prostitution cases. The information obtained from experts with a legal background assists in the understanding of police tactics utilized to apprehend traffickers and pimps as well as providing knowledge about the criminal aspects of prostitution.

### **Statement of Problem**

“The trafficking of young women and children for prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation is one of the most significant human rights abuses in contemporary societies”



(Hodge, 2008, p, 143). Article 3 of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially in women and children (2000) defined human trafficking as,

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (p. 2)

Increasing public interest in the various elements of the sex industry add to the problem of sexual exploitation. Massage parlors, sex/strip clubs, escort agencies and lap dancing venues, are all effective locations for prostitution activities. Some individuals who are subjugated into prostitution were lured into the business through stripping, and were consistently pressured to participate in live sex shows seen via the internet and pornography; they too are considered to be victims of sexual trafficking (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Hepburn & Simon (2010) quote Suzanne B. Seltzer, a New York lawyer recognized for her pro bono work on behalf of human trafficking victims, as saying,

People don't think about how the definition of sex trafficking is narrow and there may be types of work that you would consider sex trafficking, but don't fall under the [legal] definition, such as strippers, exotic massage, and cocktail waitress in topless bars. (p. 13)

Addressing the root causes of trafficking is a fundamental facet necessary to succeed in the fight against trafficking. Human trafficking not only undermines human rights, but also compromises the health, safety, and security of all nations it comes in contact with. Every aspect of a victim's human rights have been stolen from them so that others can benefit from their labor.

The abolishment of slavery has not taken place because human trafficking is the modern day slave trade.

When assessing any type of crime criminologists look to criminological theories. Theories provide a framework, which is open for interpretation, as to the meanings of observed patterns. All theories “measure the characteristics of criminals, crimes, and victims using various methods” (DeMelo, 2001, p. 5). Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory best describes the victim’s behaviors which may provide valuable information about the overall understanding and knowledge of the crime of sex trafficking and forced prostitution.

General Strain Theory focuses on an individual's immediate social environment, which as research will show, is a critical factor in determining those at highest risk of being a victim of any one of the various types of sexual exploitation. Agnew’s theory “argues that people are pressured into criminal or deviant acts by negative affective states” (DeMelo, 2001, p.16). General Strain theory, when evaluated in relation to victims’ circumstances present at the time where they were coerced or forced into sex trafficking is important in determining why they became victims initially.

### **Overview of Problem**

Due to the underground nature of human trafficking, exact numbers pertaining to persons involved (traffickers and victims) are difficult to ascertain. Current statistics are approximations; however, the scope of the sex trade industry appears to be more encompassing than previously thought. Studies show human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including prostitution, is dramatically increasing in the number of incidents opened for investigation since 2000 (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011). An estimated 600,000 to 800,000 people are being trafficked across international borders annually, with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

calculating that 50,000 of those being bought and sold each year throughout the United States are for work exclusively in the sex industry (Hodge, 2008). Fifty percent of those smuggled into this type of modern day slavery are reported to be children, with another 70 percent being females (U.S. Department of State, 2004). The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports a dramatic increase in the number of incidents of human trafficking opened for investigation since 2000, with the year 2010 topping the charts at an approximated 2500 people. Information such as this shows the growth of this industry; “the problem is complex and constantly changing, and everyone must play a role in creating a solution as organic and adaptive as the issue itself” (Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking, 2011).

### **Research Question**

This descriptive and exploratory research will determine what professionals in the field perceive specifically relevant to human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in and around Denver, Colorado. Examining trends at the international and national levels in sexual trafficking, interviewing of experts in the field such as employees from the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT) and Prax(us), anti-trafficking organizations located in Denver, Colorado, along with an officer from the Rocky Mountain Safe Streets Task Force is critical to ascertain. This research project aimed to answer: do experts in the field of human trafficking perceive Denver, Colorado as an incubator for human trafficking and sexual exploitation?

### **Limitations**

Research on the subject of human trafficking for any purpose is a topic in which definitive results are hard to ascertain. Methodological challenges begin with the uncertainty

surrounding the number of individuals that have been exploited for labor and/or sex. Due to the covert nature of the phenomena, it is very difficult to determine the actual number of hidden victims in any community; therefore credible estimates must be used. The downfall behind such approximations is the substantial chance that gaps in data and numerical discrepancies are present.

The general understanding of human trafficking comes mainly from secondary sources rather than from qualitative research conducted with trafficking victims and service providers leaving many questions unanswered with regards to their nature and characteristics (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy, 2010).

Other than self disclosure, there is no way of positively confirming if individuals, who through observation alone, appear to be victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation are in fact forced or coerced into that particular situation (Tyldum & Brunowskis, 2005). The victims of human trafficking fortunate enough to have had the ability to flee from their situation commonly have experienced extreme trauma resulting in the unwillingness to seek assistance or report their ordeal. The principal factor responsible for the clandestine nature of reporting victimization is fear. Victims tend to worry about retaliation by traffickers or pimps. In cases pertaining to foreign nationals, their fear is of government agencies and their organizations' power to deport immigrants back to their country of origin (Farrell et al., 2010). To ensure a perceived sense of security for the victims, organizations responsible for victim assistance may also be apprehensive to report incidents to law enforcement agencies. All of these factors result in the underreporting of victims, adding to the ambiguity encircling the topic and total number of persons involved.

## **Delimitations**

The study, while briefly discussing human trafficking on an international level, mainly focuses on domestic trafficking, therefore reports on other countries' efforts to combat trafficking in persons will not be incorporated in this research. This includes The State Department's human trafficking methodology which ranks countries on a three tier system ranging from countries that are the most egregious participants in trafficking to those countries who are not extensively commissioned in the industry (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

### **Definitions**

**Debt Bondage:** A widespread form of entrapment used by traffickers is called debt bondage and is also known as bonded labor. People who are tricked or trapped into working for very little or no pay are considered bonded workers. In the case of sexual human trafficking, unbeknownst to those being trafficked is the accumulation of transportation fees. Imposed by traffickers as method of asserting control over their victims while making additional money, bonded laborers are forced to work to repay debts their employer says they owe. They are not allowed to work for anyone else (Slavery Today, 2011).

**Hidden Populations:** Defined as "a group of individuals for whom the size and boundaries are unknown, and for whom no sampling frame exists" (Tyldum & Brunowskis, 2005, p. 18). Those considered to be part of this population are typically involved in some form of criminal behavior; in the case of sexual human trafficking members would include traffickers, pimps, prostitutes and victims. These individuals often refuse to cooperate or provide fallacious information to law enforcement agencies and advocate groups alike due to self protection of privacy and fear of the repercussions speaking out may bring (Tyldum & Brunowskis, 2005).

Human Trafficking: A severe form of exploitation, labor or sexual, of another human being.

Defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation” (United Nations, 2000, p. 2).

This comprehensive definition includes three main elements:

1. The activities that constitute human trafficking which refer to the recruitment, transportation, harbouring, receipt of persons.
2. The means being used; force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability.
3. The purpose, which is exploitation, including prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery.

Sexual abuse or exploitation of women and children is defined as any practices made by an adult that has the intention of, or leads to, the achievement of “sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement by abrogating that [person’s] human right to dignity, equality, physical and mental well being” (Chase & Statham, 2005, p. 7).

John: A man who is a prostitute's customer

Magazine Crews (Mag Crew): A group largely composed of younger people with difficult or problematic lives who have been recruited to sell magazines across the country. Enticed by the promises of money and opportunities to see the country, youths sign up to be part of a door to door sales team (Prax(us), 2011). Habitually these fraudulent companies will transport workers to remote, unfamiliar cities across state lines forcing them to sell magazines to benefit fictitious,

charitable organizations. In the preponderance of cases subscriptions for magazines were never actually delivered. Within a matter of days the new sales agents are likely to experience abuse and exploitation ranging from physical, psychological and sexual to property and economic abuse (Oklahoma Department of Labor, 2009).

**Pimps:** Most times people associate the word pimp strictly with men, although this is many times the truth, pimps can be anyone “who procures a prostitute for customers or vice versa, and takes a portion of the profits from the sexual activities” (U.S. Legal Definitions, 2011, para.1).

Occasionally a pimp is a family member of the victim, brokering the sexual favors of their daughter or niece for financial gains. In the majority of cases, pimps will induce drug addiction, threaten, physically and sexually abuse their prostitutes as a means of control and forced submission.

**Sex Trafficking:** May be used interchangeably within this research with the term sexual exploitation to describe actions similar to those of prostitution which were imposed on to individuals through coercive, forced, or deceptive means. “A person is forced to perform sex acts from which a third person benefits; which includes street prostitution, massage parlors, pornography, escort services, and all aspects of the sex industry” (Prax(us), 2011, para. 6).

**Survival Sex:** A form of prostitution, also referred to as sex work, is defined as a trade of money, goods, shelter and/or other various essentials required for survival in exchange for sexual services. Depending on the severity of basic needs the sex worker may participate in this activity on a regular or infrequent basis (United Nations Population Fund, 2008). Commonly the act of survival sex is not seen as income-generating as it is the only means of staying alive certain individuals have. This practice is all encompassing; female, male, and transgender adults,

juveniles and children are at all risk of engaging in survival sex. However, poverty ridden and/or homeless youths are frequently coerced into sex work through violence, trafficking, debt-bondage or the influence of more powerful adults (United Nations Population Fund, 2008).



### **Review of Literature**

The following collection of research provides essential background information necessary to update the reader on the history of various elements surrounding the issue of trafficking specifically for the purpose of exploitation in the United States as it relates to this research project involving perceived human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Denver, Colorado. Research provided for context review includes peer reviewed, scholarly material from criminological journals and articles as well as relevant news worthy reports. Data and research materials were retrieved from academic databases including Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost and Google Scholar. The interlibrary loan was utilized and granted access through the Regis University Library and assisted in providing articles from sources as Science Direct-Journal of Criminal Justice. Electronic searches were performed through use of keywords pertaining to “criminology”, “criminal theories”, “human trafficking”, “human trafficking victims and vulnerable populations”, “poverty”, “prostitution “sexual exploitation”, “survival sex”, “United States human trafficking”, “Denver human trafficking”, “human trafficking laws/bills” and “youth homelessness”.

Research about human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the U.S, including methods used to obtain victims, what constitutes a human trafficking victim, what the operation of trafficking in persons entails, economic approximations, types of police involvement and U.S. laws and regulations are essential in providing the reader with current and background information about this topic. From this information the subject matter will be then narrowed down to focus strictly on and around the Denver, Colorado area. The United States, a leading country on a global level, is fighting human trafficking and Colorado is no different; the

punishment tactics used locally combines present laws and policies used by the United States as a whole.

Researchers and experts in the field of human trafficking and sexual exploitation have comprised a list of factors they deem most influential in the promotion of sexual trafficking worldwide. Some of the most predominate causes are due to the globalization of the economy which leads to the expansion of sex industries transnationally, making it easier for traffickers to operate without borders. Social and economic inequalities throughout communities around the world are increasing poverty stricken women and children into situations of sexual exploitation. Predatory recruiters waste no time in taking full advantage of listed vulnerable individuals (Raymond, 2003; Raymond & Hughes, 2001). With regards to the situation in Denver, Colorado the poorest groups of people are not necessarily women and children, but the homeless or habitual runaways within the juvenile population.

Internationally trafficked victims tend to originate from less developed regions and work in industrialized, wealthy nations where the sex industry is a fruitful enterprise (Hodge & Lietz, 2007). The United States is one of the top ten destinations for human trafficking, with most of the cases occurring in New York, California, and Florida due to their large cities which are regarded as popular tourist destinations. Found along the borders of the United States, traffickers also see these areas as one of the easiest targets which to enter the country (Hepburn & Simon, 2010; ILO, 2005). Denver is a landlocked city, but its proximity to the city of Nogales, Sonora Mexico, one of the closest cities located on the edge of on the Mexico- United States border, is approximately just over 900 miles away (Rand McNally, 2011).

“Human trafficking is not new. What is new is the global sophistication, complexity and control of how women and children are trafficked from/to/in all parts of the globe” (Raymond,

2003, para. 2). It is a fact, human sex trafficking affects nearly every sector of the world, but sex slaves are easier to procure from inhabitants that are living in extreme poverty rather than those who reside in countries that have a higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Poorer countries and financially inferior communities within the United States are prime targets due to the lack of economic opportunities and a sustainable income; often women and children are desperate for any type of employment (Yen, 2008). The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2005) supports this concept by saying,

The poorest and most vulnerable members of society can be compelled to work, or induced into debt which they or even their descendants find impossible to repay despite very long hours of arduous work. They thus become locked in a cycle of poverty from which they cannot extricate themselves. (p. 30)

Generally, in poorer areas the accessibility and the value of an education is secondary to finding employment, and recruiters use this to their advantage. If the potential victim is illiterate and without knowledge of an urban life, the chances are greater this individual will rely heavily on their exploiters to physically and mentally survive (Hodge & Lietz, 2007).

False promises and the guarantees for a better, more propitious life, generally in a richer nation, are commonalities often used among traffickers as a technique to attract young women and children into the U.S. Several reported instances involved females, some barely 14 years of age, who were trafficked to Florida from Mexico with the notion they would be working as servers, nannies, or housekeepers (Hepburn & Simon, 2010). Upon arrival in the United States, the truth was revealed and the victims found themselves being treated as sex slaves. The same

situations may be found in domestic trafficking, along with situations in and around Denver, Colorado.

Along with poverty comes the chance of experiencing homelessness which in many instances leads to the possibility of falling victim to domestic human trafficking. Prax(us) (2011) states that runaway and homeless youth, persons living in poverty, particularly women and girls are most susceptible to human trafficking within the United States. The State of Homelessness Report affirms that challenges are present when it comes to counting homeless youth nationwide and admits there is an undercount of this population due to absence of information. The Prax(us) association along with Urban Peak, a Denver based organization that provides services for homeless and runaway youth, estimate between 1,200 and 1,500 youth ages 13-24 are homeless in Denver on any given night (Prax(us), 2011; Urban Peak, 2011). The greater part of said individuals are chronic runaways, who believe living on the streets would be better than whatever situation they are dealing with at home (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011). Without parental support or guidance many youth will utilize any means necessary in order to survive.

From the moment a young person becomes homeless they are faced with the endless risk of victimization. New research from the National Alliance to End Homelessness indicates approximately one out of four homeless youths engages in survival sex. The realities homeless youth face everyday are harsh, "...of the youth engaging in survival sex, 48 percent reported exchanging sex for housing or food, 22 percent traded sex for drugs, and 82 percent traded sex for money" (Moriarty, 2009, para. 2). The statistics linking homeless youth, sex trafficking and prostitution are staggering; 40-60 percent of homeless youth have experienced physical abuse with 17-35 percent having experienced sexual abuse. This demographic is one of highest

populations prone to being coerced into survival sex, prostitution, and sexual exploitation within the United States and Denver, Colorado alike (Moriarty, 2009; Prax(us), 2011).

The enhancement of police tactics occurs when knowledge of a crime becomes better recognized; therefore, in order to maintain a lucrative business and avoid prosecution, criminals involved in sex trafficking need to intensify their seduction strategies. In order to stay one-step ahead of the law, criminals have initiated more subtle forms of coercion, with the hopes that such methods will be harder for officials to identify. Certain modes of recruitment may vary depending on the location, but the conventional schemes consist of misleading media advertisements and private recruitment organizations that are fronting as travel agencies or door to door sales are continuously employed.

Prax(us) (2011) states that a common practice for harboring victims within the Denver area is through the recruitment of employees to sell fictions magazines to houses in a specified area or neighborhood. Youth who are without support or basic survival resources are prime targets for Magazine Crews. Magazine Crews promise workers a daily salary, free accommodations and meals as incentives to join their company; however all of these guarantees are fabrications (Pierce, 2009). Once involved with a magazine crew, workers learned of the tortures they would be forced to endure; mental and physical abuse along with sexual exploitation occurred on a daily basis, many times miles away from areas youth would call home.

Pimps recruit a significant number of females in the United States by preying upon their vulnerabilities and promising them the opportunity to make considerable amounts of money. Unaware the pimps controlled the majority of cash the women made, the sex workers often had their wages withheld for them. Prax(us) (2011) states that 1 out of 3 teens will be recruited by a

pimp within 48 hours of leaving home or becoming homeless. Another 75 percent of all runaway and sexually exploited girls are controlled by pimps. It is not uncommon for women to have intimate relationships with the men who pimp them, using emotional and physical coercion as a method of breaking down the women's aversion to prostitution.

Research conducted by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, discovered the methods most widely used to control women in the sex industry included, "... denying freedom of movement, isolation, controlling money, threats and intimidation, drug and alcohol dependencies, threatened exposure of pornographic films, and physical and sexual violence" (Raymond & Hughes, 2001, p. 11). Due to the violent nature of human trafficking, exact statistics surrounding victimization are difficult to ascertain. Raymond and Hughes (2001) research identifies that violence is an inherent part of prostitution, but believes a vast amount of underreporting occurs with relation to these crimes possibly because of the victim's fear of retaliated violence. 86 percent of domestically trafficked women report frequent physical abuse, 80 percent admitted to psychological intimidation while 70 percent report being sexually assaulted by pimps and traffickers alike (Raymond & Hughes, 2001).

Another means of control consists of pimps and traffickers creating emotional and physical dependencies for their victims (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). In Denver, Colorado the most vulnerable population for sexual exploitation is youth, therefore pimps often know times young individuals can be easily convinced to experiment with illegal or addictive substances. Once addicted to drugs or alcohol, the victims must rely on their captors to supply their habit, again allowing the people in control with the power necessary to easily manipulate and dominate their workers (Raymond & Hughes, 2001).

Victims are often hesitant to attempt escape due to the fear of possible violent repercussions such an experiment could bring. Gaining control over the victims may involve drastic measures, in one instance two trafficked women were murdered, thrown off a balcony, while the other women were forced to watch (Hodge & Lietz, 2007). This is usually an infrequent practice, although unbeknownst to the victims, due to the loss of profits. Other methods traffickers and pimps utilize include, but are not limited to, threats against the victims themselves or their families, coercion schemes, and/or the withholding of their visas or other forms of identification, therefore making it impossible to escape their surroundings (Batsyukova, 2007). Pimps will exhaust all means necessary to prevent their sex slaves from contacting any support networks, primarily their friends and family (Hodge & Lietz, 2007).

Debt bondage or bonded labor is another tactic widely used by traffickers. Hodge & Lietz (2007) reveal transnationally trafficked women and children typically pass through a number of organizations in different countries on their way to a final destination. This allows traffickers to charge sizable transportation fees. Individuals who experience this form of debt bondage will rarely receive their money consequently being forced to actively work in the sex industry until their accumulated debts were paid. Prax(us) (2011) states that pimps will often charge their workers for transportation to various local hotels around the Denver, Colorado area to meet Johns. An international example of debt bondage is one of greater financial proportions. Assuming transportation fees to the United States were deemed \$2,000 a person, Hepburn & Simon (2010) disclose that women who earned approximately \$3 per job would need to have sex with 667 men to alleviate their debt owed to their proprietors. This practice leaves the victims in debt, most of these individuals will never receive their money, as traffickers will keep their profits as payment towards their ongoing financial obligations.

The consequences those victimized by sexual exploitation or human sexual trafficking have suffered are difficult to recover from. Children are more likely to experience progressive exploitation which consists of being resold numerous times to various buyers (U.S. Department of State, 2004). Victims who have been the property of various traffickers have a higher probability of being exploited and globally transported.

Women forced into prostitution reported that the majority of their buyers expected them to comply with their sexual requests and an approximated 47 percent said it was a common practice for men to expect sex without a condom (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Men were willing to pay more for those women who would have unprotected sex and would inherently turn violent if the women insisted on using a condom. Because of this most women who have been sexually exploited by trafficking or prostitution will contract a sexually transmitted disease.

When evaluating the results of a survey conducted with 185 clients who have admitted to paying for sexual acts with a prostitute an abysmal outcome was revealed (ILO, 2005). Only half of the participants would report a trafficked prostitute to authorities. The other half refused to disclose any information and would rather look the other way than making an effort to save someone from a life of servitude. This could possibly be due to the illegal actions they themselves are engaging in. This group of customers also stated that they would prefer a younger sex slave because of their tendency to be more obedient and submissive (ILO, 2005).

All victims are subject to physical torture that may lead to long term or permanent injuries, one example being irreversible damage to their reproductive organs. "Sex trafficking has devastating consequences for minors, including long-lasting physical and psychological



trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and possible death” (U.S. Department of State, 2011, para. 11).

Head, mouth and teeth injuries received from beatings and/or rapes are also common grievances found among these women and children (Hodge, 2008; Raymond & Hughes, 2001). A young victim speaks about the torment imposed upon her saying, “After eight days of torture, I thought I will accept the job to save my life” (Hodge & Lietz, 2007, p. 168).

As atrocious as the previously stated consequences of the human sex trafficking world are, the psychological harm done is often much more detrimental. The U.S. Department of State (2004) reports many women and children who are detained against their will, demoralized sexually, or used as prostitutes suffer extreme damage to their mental state because of being kept in isolation. These individuals have not had the opportunities to engage in any sort of moral, spiritual, or social situations, therefore halting their emotional development (U.S. Department of State, 2004). Hodge (2008) notes the widespread feelings of depression, anxiety and insecurity as well as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) found in victims of human trafficking. An approximated 63 percent of women domestically trafficked claim to have attempted self injury or suicide because of their ordeals (Raymond & Hughes, 2001).

Trafficking in juveniles deprives youth of their childhood while exposing them to extreme violence; it violates their rights to grow up in a family environment, gain access to education, and reach their full potential (UNICEF, 2010). Many who fall victim to sexual trafficking, runaway and homeless youth being the prime examples, do not have an education or the knowledge of how to effectively survive by legitimate methods. Tom Manning, spokesman for Covenant House, which helps those who are young and homeless is quoted as saying, “...the

18-year-olds who [have] very limited education really need to start from square one. Pimps and traffickers, they spot these kids and go after them. If we don't get to them, many will end up on drugs or in prison” (Spellman, 2010, para. 14).

Women who were forced or coerced into sexual labor report having few other options for survival and disclose that once part of the industry it was nearly impossible to get out. “Many women tried, sometimes multiple times, to leave the sex industry. 52 percent of the U.S. women said economic necessity, drug dependencies and pimps who beat, kidnapped, and/or threatened them or their children prevented them from leaving” (Raymond & Hughes, 2001, p. 12).

The benefits human traffickers gain from trafficking persons with the intent of forcing them into sexual servitude are much greater than the punishments they may face if apprehended. Criminal groups, such as sex traffickers, have discovered the profits they will collect far outweighed the risks associated with being caught. One international trafficker confirmed, “You can buy a women for \$10,000 and you can make your money back in a week if she is pretty and she is young. Then everything else is profit” (Yen, 2008, p. 658). To ensure traffickers and pimps gain the maximum amount of money from their workers, women and children are recycled, or used repeatedly by a varied amount of customers. Sexually exploited women in Europe earn an approximated \$124,000 a year in U.S. currency, all of which goes directly to their pimps (Hodge & Lietz, 2007).

With the passing of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000 in the United States, punishments for those caught trafficking humans became much stricter (Yen, 2008). Prior to the approval of this act, penalties for human trafficking were less than those imposed for drug dealing. Offenders facing drug charges could be imprisoned for life depending upon the amount and type(s) of drugs that were confiscated, verses the punishment imposed on individuals

connected with sexual servitude. Yen (2008) states the maximum punishment human traffickers could be sentenced to was a mere ten years. Statistics such as these demonstrate why forms of trafficking have become the preferred choice of illicit activity among many criminal organizations.

When looking at human trafficking from an economical standpoint, forced labor makes profits of approximately \$32 billion in U.S. currency annually, half of which is made in industrialized countries (Amin, n.d.). Research has exposed that the profits generated from the human trafficking industry have a direct impact on other types of crime. Human trafficking is the third largest criminal enterprise in the world following narcotics and the sale of arms, generating an estimated 9.5 billion USD in annual revenue (U.S. Department of State, 2004).

### **Strain Theory**

The victims of human trafficking are not solely those enslaved, but repeatedly include the families of the victims. Within the poorer sanctions of the world, children, usually females, are sold by family members into sex trafficking as a means of survival. In Denver, Colorado the family members of youths who make the decision to leave home at an early age are also affected by the events in which their children may endure. The stated individuals and their families will henceforth be categorized as victims, as they too are suffering the consequences of human trafficking. The dire need for money overshadows poverty ridden households in economically desperate communities in major cities all over the U.S. therefore the selling of one's only possession, their body, may appear to be the only option left.

Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory effectively explains the natural phenomena and/or the behaviors demonstrated by this group. The General Strain Theory has defined

measurements of strain; the major types of strain being cognitive, behavioral, and emotional, as well as the links between strain and crime (Agnew & Broidy, 1997). Agnew purposed "...actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals, actual or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli, and actual or anticipated presentation of negative stimuli all result in strain" (DeMelo, 2001, p. 16). The major type of pressure or strain is desperation felt by said individuals to sustain life for themselves or for their families.

The research presented focuses on sexual exploitation through trafficking and assess the populations at greatest risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking. Individuals most susceptible to victimization worldwide are those living in poverty, the same is true within Denver Colorado, however a significant preponderance of the poverty ridden population living in this area are homeless and runaway youths. Acknowledgment of the various sources of strain and the ways in which individuals may adapt to it, the strain theory mainly focuses on adolescent criminality, unorthodox and/or deviant behavior (DeMelo, 2001).

## **Method**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this research, as with most types of social research is to find out the unknown. To provide a sufficient amount of information on this subject, descriptive research methodology will be used in conjunction with exploratory means; descriptive research generally precedes explanatory research (Babbie, 2007). The descriptive research will be able to describe situations and events, explaining the characteristics about the population being studied (Babbie, 2007). In this research, the population being scrutinized is the inhabitants of Denver, Colorado and will include the runaway and homeless youth in the area.

Since "...studies are seldom limited to merely a descriptive purpose, researchers will usually go on to examine why the observed patterns exist and what they imply" (Babbie, 2007, p. 89). The exploratory research methodology applied within will "satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for a better understanding and test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study..." (Babbie, 2007, p. 88). The research conducted seeks to provide answers to a problem that has not been clearly defined; in this case, do professionals in the field perceive Denver, Colorado as an incubator for human sexual trafficking? Exploratory research is based upon the secondary research made available in the literature review. Qualitative methods are additionally implemented through in-depth, qualitative interviews with employees who have an extensive knowledge of the topic since they work either with victims of trafficking or are responsible for apprehending traffickers and pimps themselves. The results obtained through the use of qualitative research will offer an indication as to why and/ or how trafficking and

prostitution cases occur. Limitations prevent this type of research the ability to specifically answer how often or how many people are involved in trafficking at any time (Babbie, 2007).

### **Research Design**

The research conducted was analyzed through descriptive designs and provided an explication of the indentifying factors in human trafficking in Denver, Colorado. Ascertaining which social and economic factors aid in the success of the current sexual human trafficking trade in this area of the nation was accomplished by soliciting assistance of the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking, Prax(us) and the Safe Streets Task Force. The objective was to expose indentifying factors in human trafficking in Denver, Colorado to determine if social and economic factors such as youth homeless, transportation, geographic location and certain human trafficking laws illuminate and magnify the current sexual human trafficking trade in this area of the nation. The demographics, also referred to those at greatest risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking, will be critical to determine and will be assessed to reveal vulnerabilities within the given population.

One variable present within the research project is the geographic location of the city with regards to international borders. The accessibility to Denver, Colorado from various means of transportation facilitate in understanding why Denver may be considered a prosperous location for trafficking. The local demographics about the population of Denver will be critical to determine and will be assessed to reveal if any common vulnerabilities exist within the inhabitants. Research will seek to provide an insight as to what, if any, training methods in anti-trafficking lowers the rate in sexual human trafficking as a whole.

The initial gathering of data on the issue of human trafficking for the primary means of sexual exploitation through in the United States is an essential background collection of factual knowledge. Literature provided is intended to offer a thorough basis for examining local Denver Colorado variables that impact human trafficking, sexual exploitation and prostitution.

## Results

This descriptive and exploratory research sought to determine what professionals in the field perceived specifically relevant to human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in and around Denver, Colorado. Through examination of trends at the international and national levels in sexual trafficking combined with data obtained through interviews conducted with professionals at Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT), Prax(us) and Rocky Mountain Safe Streets Task Force, this research project successfully provided information necessary to determine if experts in the field of human trafficking perceived Denver, Colorado as an incubator for human trafficking and sexual exploitation?

When initially researching the topic of sex trafficking in Denver, Colorado an interview with Jim Smithwick, Program Manager at the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking, provided extremely insightful in determining how Colorado's geographical location influenced the prosperity of the issue. Interstate 25 (I-25) is the main north- south running highway passing directly through Denver Colorado established to connect travelers and from New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming. Intersecting near north Denver, is Interstate 70 (I-70) a transcontinental east- west moving highway that stretches from Utah to Maryland (J. Smithwick, personal communication, August 25, 2011). These 2 major highways are responsible for transporting thousands of people a day and are frequently used by truck drivers to move materials from one side of the United States to another. However, traffickers use the easily accessible junction of I-25 and I-70 as well; officials affirm that "...Colorado is situated along a key domestic sex trafficking route, (Homeless and Runaway Youth in Colorado, 2011, para. 4)"

The convenience of reaching other major cities via the Colorado Highways' intersection is not the only factor making it easier to traffic individuals across state lines. Denver



International Airport (DIA) is the tenth largest airport in the world; therefore Denver is a common place for brief stops when traveling across the country (J. Smithwick, personal communication, August 25, 2011).

More recently, Denver Colorado has been the host for large national sporting events and conventions which visibly bring considerable numbers of travelers and vacationers to this area. In 2008 the Democratic National Convention was held in Denver at the Pepsi Center and INVESCO Field, with this came an estimated 50,000 people (Democratic National Convention, 2008). Also located at Denver's Pepsi Center was the 2005 NBA All-Star Game played on February 20, 2005. Both events brought thousands of people to the Mile High City, generating tremendous revenue for the state, however sporting events and conventions such as these create an increase in the commercial sex industry (J. Smithwick, personal communication, August 25, 2011). Pimps and traffickers know higher numbers of out of town visitors, looking to indulge while away from home equates to a greater need for prostitutes and/or sex workers in the area. As a result, victims will be temporarily transported into the area to meet the increased demand (J. Smithwick, personal communication, August 25, 2011).

Research obtained from experts at the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking, Prax(us) and the Safe Streets Task Force disclose that sex trafficking is closely associated with sexual exploitation through prostitution in and around the Denver Metro area. The organizations whose goals are to assist the victims of this crime deem homeless youth living on the streets the most vulnerable population likely to be exposed to trafficking. While this is true, police detectives emphasize most youth living on the streets have chosen to be there. (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011).

Chronic runaways usually leave home because of an unpleasant incidents occurring within the home. Many times such incidents involve sexual assault by a family member therefore children perceive life on the streets to be better than their current situation (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011).

Within 48 hours of leaving home one in three homeless youths will be recruited by a pimp (Prax(us), 2011). Pimps who have been pimping young girls in the Denver area for a significant amount of time know the prime places to look for new recruits. Homeless youth shelters, bus stops, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall in downtown Denver and in close proximities to agencies serving Colorado's vulnerable young female population are all popular spots for pimps to spend time. Youth minorities are most at risk for victimization; however pimps and Johns alike tend to favor young white girls (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011).

Often when runaways leave home, they have nowhere to go and are without knowledge of the skills necessary to survive on their own. Pimps use this to their advantage seducing young women into believing they care for them, offering them a false sense of security until time, determined by the pimp, for the girl to repay their fictitious acts of kindness. The relationship thus forth will always be defined and controlled by the pimp for his economic gain. Since he typically appropriates all of the money this girl makes she has no option but to become financially dependent on him (Prax(us), 2011).

When working to expose prostitution of children cases, officers of the Safe Streets Task Force have found many of these girls to be advertising themselves on line (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011). Backpage.com is an online, free classifieds website with links to major cities in every state. Typical classified advertisements sections are provided for

the buying and selling of material goods; conversely Backpage.com offers an easily accessible extensive section for adult services. Pimps will post fictitious information regarding girls as young as 12 years of age under the escort services section. When a John responds to the advertisement the pimp will then take further control of the situation by allocating where she goes, whom she sees, and what she does (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011).

Currently Denver is in the process of developing a full time task force, which will be responsible for handling juvenile prostitution cases within the designated area (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011). Intended to work in conjunction with the already established Rocky Mountain Safe Streets Task Force, the hope is by adding extra officers equip to spot and assist victims of sexual trafficking or exploitation the frequency of such incidents will decrease. Areas with the greatest awareness efforts have proactive and trained law enforcement officials who successfully investigate and resolve the most number of cases. An example of this being in Lee County, Florida, where there was a 75 percent increase in the number of cases investigated within one year. After the combination of intensive training of professionals and community education, a proactive human trafficking unit became operational (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

Prostitution and human trafficking cases are usually hard to prosecute, in an average year only 50 percent of all cases the Safe Streets Task Force came in contact with will be taken to trial (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011). When a study was conducted comparing Denver to metropolitan cities with analogous populations and similar geographical attributes, results showed that Denver has the highest number of chronic runaways out of any

area involved in the research (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011). This outcome again demonstrates why sex trafficking is a predominate entity in Colorado.

Over the past year in Denver Colorado detectives employed with Safe Streets Task force have recovered eighteen underage girls who were involved in some aspect of prostitution. Out of these eighteen youths one is receiving treatment at the Children of the Night facility in Los Angeles, California (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011). Children of the Night is "...the most comprehensive social service program for American children who have been forced into prostitution" (Children of the Night, 2006, para. 1). This program is for teaching trafficked or exploited youth ways to appropriately re-enter society and independently live while recovering from the physical and mental abuse they were subject to while being a prostitute.

Programs similar to Children of the Night are available to those who have been lured or forced into domestic child sex slavery in the form of child prostitution in the United States. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) works in conjunction with the FBI and the U.S. Department of Justice to launch the Innocence Lost Initiative. This program has proved successful in developing task forces designed to address child prostitution. The mission of this group, as stated on NCMEC's website is

To bring together government and non-government agencies to exchange information on on-going initiatives and aspirations in an effort to foster collaboration, align resources, and make a greater impact combating the commercial sexual trafficking of children in the United States (Innocence Lost Working Group, 2011, para. 1).

Responsible for training hundreds of law enforcement officials on the topic on child prostitution, this organization's knowledge provides task forces across the United States with valuable information about the scope of this problem.

### **Discussion**

After assessing the previous information it became clear there is a need for an effective, coordinated approach to prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This means establishing systems of social protection and initiating stronger labor laws. A major barrier that will be difficult to overcome, but that is imperative in effectively combating human trafficking, is one of worldwide proportions. Attempting to transform the mindset of various cultures from opposing countries, and formulating a consensus as to what constitutes human trafficking, is essential to decrease the amount of people involved in the industry. Authorities in Southeast Asia have a different interpretation of human trafficking and the laws surrounding this subject than do officials in the United States and Denver, Colorado. By establishing an agreed upon set of regulations with a clear explanation of what exploitations human trafficking encompasses, the world may be able to unite as a single entity and imprison those who use sex trafficking as a way to make a living.

In an attempt to halt human trafficking and exploitation in the United States, one must begin by stopping the problem of homeless youths around the nation. There is an immense need for community-based resources for victimized homeless and runaway youth. The scope of the issue is largely unknown by most of America, therefore an insufficient number of specialized services are in place and equip to handle their needs or provide ample treatment (Moriarty, 2009).

Resources for victims of human trafficking located in Denver, Colorado in addition to the Prax(us) organization include the Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance (COVA). Within COVA a specialized department has been created specifically to handle cases which involve

trafficking victims. The Colorado Network to End Human Trafficking (CoNEHT) “assures the appropriate and accurate identification of human trafficking victims in Colorado through awareness and information activities, as well as through the development and implementation of statewide human trafficking training initiatives” (Colorado Network to End Human Trafficking, 2011, para. 2). CoNEHT also provides a thorough, statewide network competent in meeting the needs of human trafficking victims. Their resources include “...case management, interpretation, food, clothing, shelter, emergency medical assessment and treatment, legal/immigration assistance, mental health treatment, dental care, and transportation” (Colorado Network to End Human Trafficking, 2011, para. 3).

Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory effectively explains the natural phenomena and the behaviors demonstrated by victims of human trafficking. As previously stated in Denver, Colorado the group most likely to fall victim to sexual exploitation is the homeless and runaway youth population. The major type of strain being felt by this demographic is the basic needs to survive without money, a place to call home or parental support. When assessing the ways in which individuals may adapt to strain, it is clear that many exploited youth are without any other means of survival.

Results were obtained despite limitations to this project which included time constraints and the ambiguity surrounding the topic itself. The information presented within has shown the methods in which traffickers use to enslave and control their victims while analyzing the criminological theories that are used to explain why this is such a predominate part of criminality. The horrific tortures women and youths experience while imprisoned in the sexual human trafficking industry demonstrate the need for tougher consequences for traffickers and

pimps alike. Their behavior is a violation of all human rights; therefore, the penalties for their sins should always outweigh any and all benefits they may receive.



### **Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to provide clarity about sexual exploitation and human trafficking within the United States, while focusing on specific methods, vulnerable populations and offender tactics used in and around the Denver Metropolitan area. Results were obtained through open ended, qualitative interview questions given to selected officials who have a knowledge and /or background of the crime of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Specific programs used by law enforcement agencies within Denver to manage situations involving trafficking or exploitation still need to be implemented. Due to the public's increased interest towards the sex industry cases of exploitation are increasingly being exposed. The research depicted within allows residents of Denver, Colorado the ability to familiarize themselves with organizations in the area equip to handle victim's needs along with the precautionary measures necessary to take to avoid victimization.

The sex industry is advertised in a variety of ways, examples being print media such as English language newspapers and periodicals, non-English community newspapers, periodicals, pornographic magazines, sex guides, and billboards. Further means of public notice are electronic and include television and internet advertisements. Promotion for the sex business can be found virtually everywhere ranging from business cards and flyers to matchbooks and word of mouth (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). As demonstrated, the media is capable of reaching nearly every sector of the world, therefore it should be used to increase social awareness about human trafficking and the impacts it has on everyone it touches. Websites such as Backpage.com may want to re-consider allowing an adult section to advise escort services on their web page. Rather than promoting prostitution as a legitimate method for women to achieve financial stability, or escape an undesirable life at home, the truth about this crime needs to be made public. The

visibility of billboards and public service announcements throughout cities in the United States on the harsh reality of using drugs, specifically methamphetamines, is a prime example of the power the media has to reach thousands within a society.

This type of organized crime has proven to be an enormous problem with international implications thus it is essential to consider the ways in which to combat this growing problem. To reduce the number of people who fall victim to the human trafficking trade, programs need to be initiated for individuals who are at the greatest risk of victimization. In this case, children, juveniles as well as runaways and homeless youth living in poverty or on the streets need to be educated on the dangers of being propositioned by strangers. The importance of reporting such incidents, realizing there are other options available to assist them in their survival could prove vital to recovery.

Cities around the U.S. could significantly decrease the high numbers of homeless youth by initiating street and community based outreach programs educating the public about the importance of intervention prior to victimization. Moriarty (2009) states that the National Alliance to End Homelessness suggests establishing mental health services designed to improve family functioning which sequentially may lower the number of children living on the streets, therefore reducing the number of persons subject to trafficking through sexual exploitation. Intensive case management services, respite shelter tied to family reunification services and additional housing options are all recommended (Moriarty, 2009).

Women who may consider entering the commercial sex business through stripping, escort services or pornography, must be made aware of the dangers this lifestyle may bring. Education and public service announcements should be centered on the sex industry including the means by

which traffickers obtain their victims. Every effort should be made to provide women with other employment opportunities open to them, discouraging any involvement in the sex industry.

Additional resources need to be made available to victims of human trafficking as many have little knowledge of basic life skills. Job training, education opportunities, legal and economic services need to be accessible in order for this group of people to survive. Financial support is needed to fund witness protection programs, health care and temporary shelter for victims (Prax(us), 2011; Raymond & Hughes, 2001).

A future suggestion provided by the Safe Streets Task Force is to compile a list of chronic runaways in the area. This list will provide officers with a general knowledge about the group of girls most likely to be victims of coerced prostitution and/ or sex trafficking (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011). When the girls return home or are apprehended by police, law officials recommend conducting a comprehensive assessment to assist in understanding the reasons these individuals ran away from home initially. Treatment therefore can be imposed before the young women are caught in a crime or have a chance to fall victim to a pimp (R. Hansen, personal communication, September 29, 2011).

The United States continues to progressively expose cases of sex trafficking and prostitution due to the implementation of advanced police training along with new methods available to assist the victims. Currently "...the problem is complex and constantly changing, and everyone must play a role in creating a solution as organic and adaptive as the issue itself" (Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking, 2011) If communities unite and implement new, sophisticated methods to assist the victims, a significant reduction in all elements of human trafficking may be possible.

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## Appendix A

## Interview Questions

- Is this area (Colorado) an incubator for human trafficking? If so why do you believe this to be true?
- Who is at the greatest risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking?
- Is homelessness a factor?
- Why are specific numbers of victims hard to ascertain?
- Describe local sex industries and their involvement in sex trafficking and prostitution
- Describe linkages between international and domestic trafficking and sex industries
- Describe regional differences in sex trafficking and sex industries in the United States
- Describe the social consequences of sex trafficking in terms of violence, crime, health and other human costs
- How has trafficking changed or adapted in the past few years?
- What is the scope of this problem?
- What are the methods used to recruit victims?
- How were they moved around while in the sex industry?
- How they were initiated into the roles and activities they had to carry out?
- Recommendations for policies on trafficking and prostitution.