Social Determinants of Health with Sex Trafficking Survivors in the United States

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AGAINST SEX
TRAFFICKING

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Findings
- Recommendations

Objectives

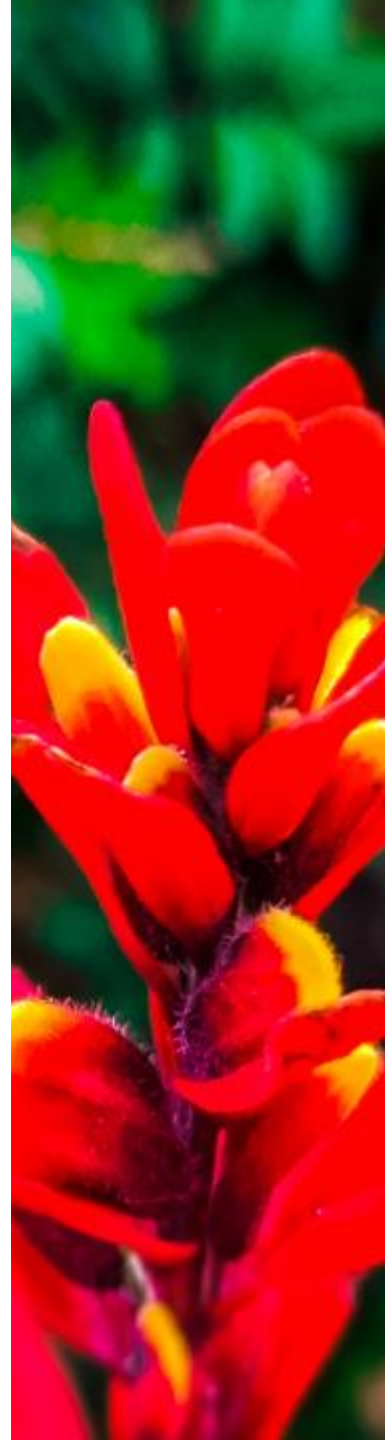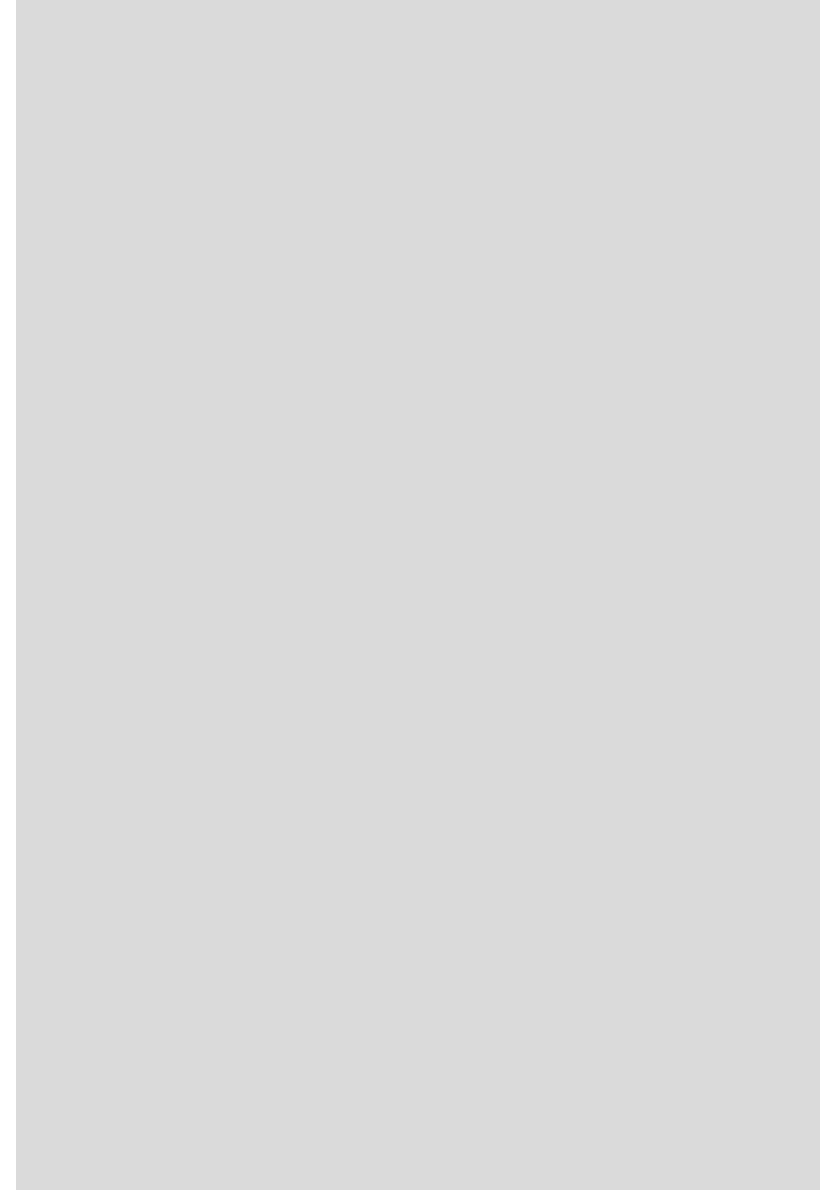Increase awareness of SDH for sex trafficking survivors.

Integrate new research findings regarding the SDH with sex trafficking survivors.

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

Introduction

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.

- 6.3 million people are estimated to be trapped in forced sexual exploitation globally on any given day.

- 1 in 6 runaways reported are probable victims of sex trafficking.

- The age of onset has been reported as young as under the age of 8, with most individuals around 15–17 years of age when trafficking began.

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

Social Determinants of Health

❖ The World Health Organization (WHO, n.d.) defined social determinants of health (SDH) as conditions in which people are born, grow, live, and work that directly impact well-being.

❖ SDH include economic stability, education, neighborhood and built environments, social and community context, and health and health care.

❖ A systematic review of the SDOH conducted by Perry and McEwing (2013) in Southeast Asia, found that severe physical and mental health ramifications exist for individuals being trafficked, however, similar research in the United States remains lacking.
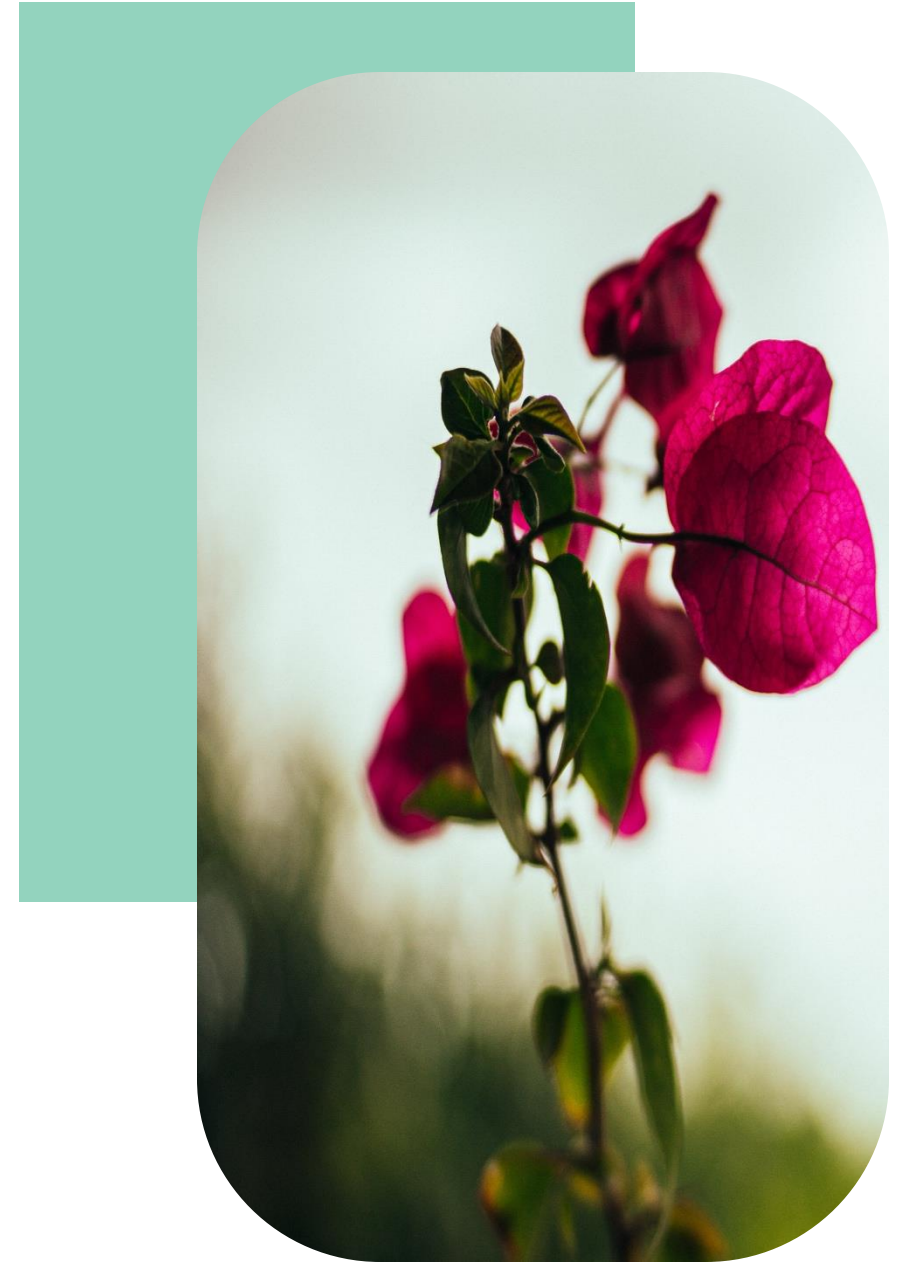
Social Determinants of Health
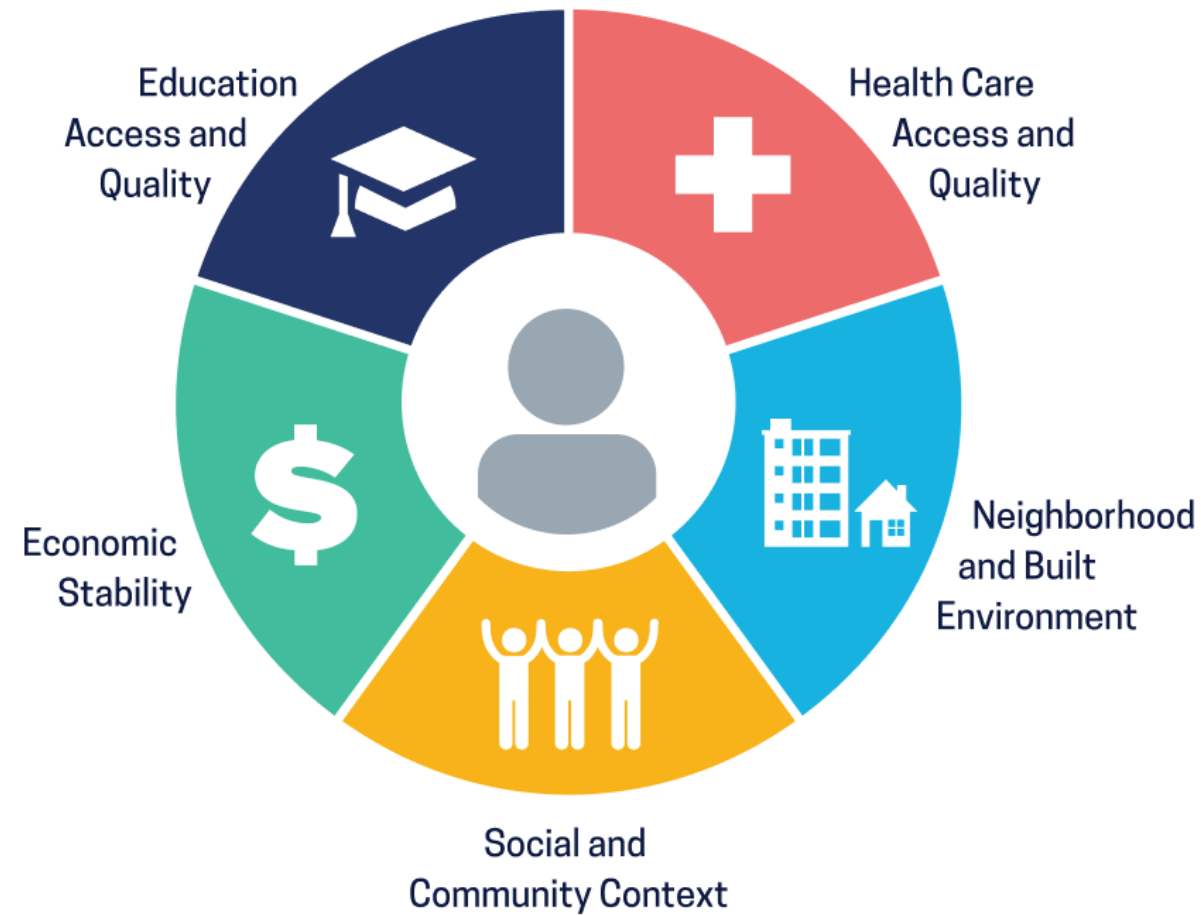
Methodology

Grounded Theory

- Construct a theory that emerges organically from the data while preserving the rich worldview of participants (Charmaz, 2014).

- **Purpose of our study:** To explore how social determinants of health manifest in the experiences of survivors of sex trafficking from the perspectives of survivors and counselors who have worked with them.

Research Timeline

RECRUITING

- CESNET
- Social Media
- Snowball Sampling

COLLECTING DATA

- Zoom Interviews
- 30-145 Minutes
- Demographics
- 16 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

Survivors

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
Jennifer	32	Female	White
Jes	42	Female	White
Mia	41	Female	White
Monica	32	Female	White
Niki	40	Female	Black

Counselors

Participant	Age	Sex	Race-Ethnicity
Kimberly	48	Female	White
John	38	Male	White
Stacy	33	Female	White
Alejandra	54	Female	Hispanic
Fen	39	Female	Asian
Cassandra	33	Female	White
Tiffany	27	Female	White
Amanda	29	Female	White
Ana	61	Female	Hispanic
Cristina	45	Female	White

*Denotes counselor

Findings

Social and Community Factors

Individual Factors

01 Economic Stability
- Employment
- Criminal History
- Financial Neglect

02 Education
- ST Related
- Formal

03 Health & Health Care
- Substances
- Mental
- Emotional
- Trusting Providers
- Physical
- Risky Behaviors

04 Neighborhood & Built Environments
- Previous Sexual Trauma
- Safe Shelter
- Access to Resources

05 Religion
- Helpful
- Harmful

06 Social & Community Context
- Sex Work Stigma
- Family
- Relationships
- General
- Romantic
- Vulnerable Populations

Major Themes

- Economic Stability
- Education
- Health and Health Care
- Neighborhood & Build Environment
- Religion
- Social and Community Context

Crystal: *"The hardest thing is your credit is ruined."*

Jennifer: *"I have this gap of unemployment and it's like, well, what were you doing when you're trying to apply for another job?"*

Betty: *"Those who have ever been caught and prosecuted for prostitution—you have that on your record, potentially forever. How do you get a job? How do you live after that?"*

Economic Stability
(n = 20)

Financial Neglect (n = 16)

Employment (n = 13)

Criminal History (n = 8)

Jennifer: *"Like informing their client of the red flags and like, this is what trafficking is. Because when I was in it, I didn't even realize that's what it was."*

Gretchen: *"Getting them their education is so important."*

Education
(*n* = 18)

Sex Trafficking Related to Education
(*n* = 17)

Formal Education (*n* = 5)

Annabel: *"I've got both ankles both uh so there's a lot of scarring I just had to get more MRIs... I'm going to have to have another procedure on Wednesday. I have a lot of ligament scarring everywhere um and inflammation."*

Annabel: *"I hated seeking medical help because it felt like every surgery I had was like another piece of my body I was surrendering to him."*

Crystal: *"[ST] almost destroyed me in both ways like that confidence piece, you feel like who's ever going to want me now, I'm ruined. Um the anxiety and the depression ..."*

Cassie: *"Uhm, I ended up, uhm having a drug addiction as a way of coping."*

Health and Health Care
(n = 19)

Emotional (*n* = 15)

Trusting Providers (*n* = 12)

Physical (*n* = 8)

Mental (*n* = 16)

Substances (*n* = 13)

Betty: *"I started smoking marijuana, I started selling marijuana... I was kicked out of the house... that is what ended up making me vulnerable because that's when I found myself homeless."*

John*: *"Like were you assaulted, abused, and things like that. But understanding that when it's a pattern and it's happened more than once."*

Betty: *"I continued to do all of that and um was sleeping on couches, or sometimes sleeping in my car in parking lots..."*

Jennifer: *"You can also say, like you need to get out of this... but if someone doesn't have a way out or anywhere to go, then, why would they leave."*

Neighborhood and Built Environments
(*N* = 20)

Risky Behaviors (*n* = 7)

Previous Sexual Trauma (*n* = 7)

Safe Shelter (*n* = 18)

Access to Resources (*n* = 19)

Cassie: *"After I got out of that life I became atheist, I lost all faith. Uh, I was actually very angry with the Lord,"* illustrating the profound spiritual disillusionment and grief many survivors face."*

Kimberly*: *"One of the women that I counseled was married to her trafficker and he would use Bible verses… telling her God hates divorce and you're not allowed to leave me."*

Religion
(n = 15)

Harmful (*n* = 13)

Helpful (*n* = 4)

Betty: *"But I think the hardest thing after being trafficked, or just being um in the prostitution world in general, is dating. Because you can't possibly be in an intimate relationship with someone and not tell them that you went through that."*

Cassie: *"So vulnerability, uhm, would be like environmental factors, so if they're being neglected and/or abused in the home, uhm, that's a huge red flag and a factor."*

Mia: *"So, I was, so my traffickers were Brian, who was the man I knew as my father, Richard, who is the man I knew as my paternal grandfather…"*

Betty: *"I still have yet to be in a relationship ever again uh and it's been 10 years… I don't date, I don't really bond with men, I don't um care to frankly."*

Social and Community Contexts
(*N = 20*)

Sex Work Stigma (*n* = 5)

Vulnerable Populations (*n* = 15)

Relationships (*n* = 20)
- General (*n* = 18)
- Family (*n* = 16)
- Romantic (*n* = 2)

Recommendations

- Adopt a Trauma-Informed Approach
- Validate and Normalize Trust Issues
- Be Culturally Responsive and Contextually Competent
- Address Internalized Stigma and Shame
- Support Identity and Meaning-Making
- Screen for Co-occurring Disorders and Provide Referrals
- Understand and Address Structural Barriers
- Establish Safe, Non-Judgmental Spaces
- Educate About Healthy Relationships and Boundaries
- Involve Peer Support When Possible

Thank you!

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