

Office of Human
Trafficking Prevention
of Howard County
Labor Trafficking
Project:

*Dispelling Myths &
Establishing
Collaborations*

Choice Research
Associates

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Introductions



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Today's Agenda

- Introductions
- Project Scope
- Existing Literature
- Qualitative Methodology
- Findings
- Concluding Remarks
- Questions?

PROJECT SCOPE

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Howard County and Maryland more broadly
- Labor trafficking specifically focused on the industries of domestic labor, agriculture, illicit massage businesses, and construction
- Prevalence and incidence of trafficking
- Effective interventions
- Data availability

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

- ◇ Semi-structured interviews with six (6) local experts / practitioners
 - ◇ Chief Executive Officers / Executive Directors
 - ◇ Organization Founders
 - ◇ Lawyers
 - ◇ Project Management Staff
 - ◇ Survivor Advocates/Leadership

Existing Research Literature

Human Trafficking: The Extent of the Problem

National Figures

- DHS (2024) - 1,300 human trafficking related investigations in 2023 resulting in over 2,300 arrests
- Polaris Project (2022) - 10,000 trafficking situations were reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2021

Local Figures

- DMV ranks 10th in US for reports of trafficking
- In 2023 alone, over 500 signals including 253 victims in MD (National Human Trafficking Hotline, n.d.)

What's Missing?

- True magnitude of trafficking is unknown
- Research suggests official statistics represent 6 – 18% of potential trafficking victims (Farrell et al., 2019; NIJ, 2020)
- Labor trafficking specific numbers even less is known

LIMITATIONS TO RESEARCH

The intersection of economics, politics (e.g., immigration laws), and existing power dynamics impact the visibility of and ability to, study these events.

- Underreporting
 - Dark figure of crime and victims' decisions not to report; Exacerbated for those with immigration concerns
 - Do not realize or recognize they are in fact being trafficked
- Data Collection Issues
 - Agencies operate under different definitions and events can involve multiple crime types
 - No single universal database
 - Lack of coordination between local, state, and federal efforts

LIMITATIONS TO RESEARCH CONT.

The intersection of economics, politics (e.g., immigration laws), and existing power dynamics impact the visibility of and ability to, study these events.

- Hidden Nature of Trafficking
 - Organized criminal activity with great efforts to hide crimes
 - Recruitment, transportation, and exploitation may cross many jurisdictions
 - Misunderstanding of cultural norms and/or lack of training

LABOR TRAFFICKING: LESS ATTENTION & LESS INFORMATION

- Less obvious and less sensational type of abuse
 - Physical injury is less common or obvious
 - Behaviors require more training to notice
 - Less media attention, less public awareness
- The public benefits from labor trafficking
 - US Dept. of Labor (2024) – 204 goods produced by child and forced labor
 - Products are cheaper to the consumer (5 – 40% per item) (ILO, 2019)

Yet, research suggests labor trafficking is more prevalent than sex trafficking overall (UNO, 2014) .

Qualitative Findings from Human Trafficking Experts

Dispelling Myths: Human Trafficking is Limited to Sex Trafficking

When it comes to labor trafficking, everyone benefits, and that's why it gets less focus, less concern, right? More of a blind eye to it, because you know, how did your food get to your plate, and who was involved in the process?

[A] lot of our labor trafficked people, they knew they were coming to this country to work. They wanted to work. They just didn't realize that they were being sold to someone who was going to exploit them, abuse them and not give them any money, right?

Across Maryland, there are cases of employees being treated in slave-like conditions where employers are “not paying them, denying medical, necessary medical treatments, those sorts of things.”

Dispelling Myths: Survivor / Victim Profile

- Legal and illegal immigrants
- US citizens
- Men and women
- Youth and adults
- Transient
- Upper class
- & more

[W]e're seeing a lot of Chinese and South American born people being exploited, and they're entering this country legally through temporary like student or work visas and [then] being sold...

[O]ne of the things in Howard County that is somewhat unique, also from what we've seen is we've had more male survivors of trafficking identified here, mainly around labor, but some around sex, because, again, it's just, it's something that folks don't talk about...it's probably more common that we realized in these communities.

...[They] were trafficked into Howard County from Baltimore County. It was twins. They were they are twins, and they came from extremely affluent neighborhood, extremely affluent family in northern Baltimore County, which is...like farms and people got lots of money up there, the Hereford zone. So... it does happen. We do see it.

Dispelling Myths: Survivor / Victim Profile Continued

- Atypical or unexpected industries
 - School personnel (teachers)
 - Medical staff (nurses, health aides)
 - Carnival workers
 - Restaurant staff
 - Construction workers
 - & more

We had a case where they brought over people who were trained...nurses, licensed nurses, and they came over and had to work in a kind of a nursing home type of thing. But it wasn't a licensed nursing home. And again, they were put to work for many hours doing, you know, things that they didn't sign up to do, really menial labor when they came here to be a professional nurse.

...[A] lot of times in the Philippines, for example, they will advertise for teachers, and they'll hire people who are actually qualified, who have credentials to be educators back in their country and advertise and give them a contract to come to the United States to teach at a private school. And they will come over here and then find that there is no teaching job, really, and they're just kind of farmed out to do domestic labor and things that they didn't sign up to do. But once they're here, they don't really have a choice. And they're also in that situation, a lot of times, we find that they're kind of indentured servitude and they aren't paid because they're supposed to pay back the huge agency fees, or they've even borrowed money from people back home, and then they need to pay back the people back home for that...

Dispelling Myths: Trafficking Does NOT Happen Here

- Victim Blaming
- Lack of Data
- Wealth/Prestige

[P]eople think they have a general knowledge about trafficking and what it looks like and the shape it takes. I don't think people are truly aware of how often it's happening right in your community.

I think the other thing that happens specifically in Howard County is you see...the demographic that makes up Howard, which is mainly kind of these suburbanites that are like upper middle class to upper class. They're the ones that are out at the mall, they're the ones that are out at Whole Foods, right? And I think that we completely ignore in this county, the folks that are behind the counter, so to speak, that, and I think that is, in my opinion, probably the most untapped, identified group of trafficking survivors. Are the folks that seem to be somewhat invisible and counties of high influence... trafficking is not just a young girl being sold into prostitution on the streets...it can look a lot of different ways...

Dispelling Myths: Survivors All Want & Need the Same Things

- Needs range from survivor to survivor
- Spectrum from:
 - “getting out of the life” to pursuing charges against their trafficker
 - Short-term services to long-term sustainability
- Housing is a high priority, but also one of the hardest to come by
- Important to prevent re-traumatization and provide autonomy

..they're empowered to make decisions for themselves, and we support them in that, including serving individuals when they're continuing to engage in sex work or even going back to an abusive situation, if we're talking about labor trafficking...the first step, you've got to get somebody out of that crisis mode to be able to really effectually think about what's next.

Establishing Collaborations

- Training is crucial
 - E.g., patrol officers responding to domestic violence calls
- Partnerships create an environment for success
 - County Executives, Mayor's Office, County Office on Community Affairs, Law enforcement agencies, Shelters, Community based organizations, County health and human services agencies, and more

Developing a robust continuum of care has worked effectively in nearby Prince George's County:

“[T]heir continuum of care, really made an intentional effort to develop out human trafficking resources within that. So, everything from housing to service provision and the continuum of care through the county has really kind of led that up - built the relationships with the different NGOs and with the different whoever was getting money to run these programs and really pulling everybody together to develop out what's missing. Where can we plug in the pieces that are needed for the human trafficking population?”

Recommendations

1. Enhanced training for criminal justice professionals, inspectors, school personnel, and human trafficking education for students.
2. Development of robust language services to include adequate interpretation services and translation of written materials based on local needs (i.e., languages are most common in and around Howard County), particularly for employee rights materials and victim services materials.
3. Establishment of community awareness campaigns to bust myths and provide resources.
4. Development of a continuum of care with the local health department, community affairs agency, and other relevant practitioners and policymakers in Howard County.
5. Development of performance measures and data collection tools to more accurately assess the prevalence and incidence of trafficking, as well as monitor intervention efforts.

Limitations



Lack of available data, especially
with Howard County focus



Lack of research on local efforts
and interventions



Small sample of experts for
interviews

Concluding Remarks

[J]ust because it's not readily in in your face, like, you know, the gun industry or the drug industry. It's more powerful than both of those actually, and it's more lucrative than both of those combined now.

- Anyone can be a survivor of human trafficking
- Human trafficking, including labor trafficking, is happening in the local jurisdictions of the DMV
- Next steps should focus on collaboration, as well as implementation of performance metrics and data collection tools



Questions?

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