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Social Workers' Knowledge Of Human Trafficking

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SOCIAL WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Work.

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Providence College
SWK 489 Theory Practice Seminar

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess social workers' knowledge of human trafficking. The hypothesis was that social workers needed to be further educated on this issue. A survey to assess social workers' knowledge of human trafficking was placed in the quarterly newsletter of the Rhode Island National Association of Social Workers. Fourteen surveys were returned revealing the actual level of knowledge of these participants. The study revealed that social workers have differing competencies pertaining to knowledge of human trafficking. It is recommended that it is necessary to increase knowledge and identification of human trafficking. Implications for policy are indicated.

Introduction

Currently, 200,000 American children work in the U.S. sex industry (Robb, 2006, p.23). Many are women lured into human trafficking recruited based on their search for opportunity for work in the U.S. Most of the victims of human trafficking are women and children which are the most vulnerable individuals in most societies.

> According to the United Nations, 10 million children and women are ensnared within the system of commercial sexual exploitation. Each year, more than one million children enter the global sex trade. An estimated 16,000 women and children are annually trafficked into the United States for sexual services. (Robb, 2006, p.23).

Human trafficking continues to exist because it is such a lucrative business. The value of the global trade in women as commodities for sex industries is estimated to be between seven and twelve billion dollars annually (Hughes, 2000, p.1). Once women are in the "promised land", they have to repay all of the money spent on them and they are not allowed to leave until the pimp or trafficker decides she has finished paying off her debt. To make sure they don't think about escaping, traffickers submit victims to violence and threats to loved ones, among other things. Since they are seen as prostitutes, they are discriminated against. Almost no services exist that address the needs of human trafficking victims. They are usually served under domestic violence agencies. Many of the service providers don’t realize how much harm has been done to these women and children. This is so because women refrain from sharing their situation with anyone due to the fear of the consequences that would come of that action.

This thesis/study will focus on human trafficking. Specifically, it will focus on social worker’s lack of knowledge in human trafficking. The study will attempt to understand the knowledge base of social workers regarding human trafficking.

Trafficking is an international issue which means that all countries should work together to address this problem.

Literature Review

Human trafficking is an international issue that has been around since at least the 1900's. Human trafficking is a human rights issue which makes it relevant to social work. There are two forms of human trafficking: labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Labor trafficking is when individuals are trafficked to other countries simply for employment. Sex trafficking is when employment takes the form of sexual exploitation.

Social workers are in the unique position to address domestic trafficking and to contribute and collaborate with other countries in combating human trafficking due to their specialized set of skills. Social workers will not be able to be helpful if they are not fully knowledgeable in the area of human trafficking.

Human trafficking victims are known to most individuals as sex workers. Social workers at the time tried to change sex workers, the fallen, by using casework and therapy (Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Since the beginning of the profession, social workers worked with sex workers but it was mostly evangelical during the 1800's; this approach to prostitution excluded the perspectives of the prostitutes and thus did not allow for the prostitutes to say that it was their choice to be prostitutes (Sloan & Wahab, 2000, p. 458). Charity organization societies thought differently. They believed that prostitutes were not able to make good decisions and made themselves more vulnerable to sexual advances (Sloan & Wahab, 2000, p. 458).

In the beginning, trafficking in human beings was referred to as white slave traffic which pertained to trafficking women from Europe to harems in the Middle East (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.7). This led to the Mann Act of 1910, passed by the U.S. Congress to protect white women from exploitation and slavery, which made it a felony to transport women and girls in interstate commerce for immoral purposes like prostitution (Sloan & Wahab, 2000, p.458). The following step for human trafficking was the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others; this convention, which is a bit outdated, defines trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or the forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having the control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or service, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.7).

Many of the victims of human trafficking are women and children which are among the most vulnerable individuals in society. There are many factors/reasons for this trend. Among the factors are poverty, economic situation, infrastructure, demand for prostitution or cheap labor, occurrence of bribery, enforceability of law, rate of unemployment, age, education, problematic family background, and previous experience with violence (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.8-9). The U.S. contributes to this demand for prostitution or cheap labor; its insatiable appetite for strip

clubs, pornography, prostitution and massage parlors is a contributing factor to the continuance of human trafficking (Robb, 2006, p. 23). Unemployment and poverty lead parents to sell their kid(s) just so they can be able to eat for another couple of months (Robb, 2006, p. 24). Human trafficking is still in existence today due to how lucrative it continues to be; the value is estimated to be between seven and twelve million dollars annually (Hughes, 2000, p.1). Due to the lucrative nature of human trafficking, collaboration between corrupt officials and the crime networks in charge of the trafficking rings occurs (Hughes, 2000). Globalization acts as a catalyser for human trafficking due to the facilitation of transporting victims from one country to the next (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005).

There are several methods of recruitment used to lure women and children into human trafficking situations. Among them are false advertisements or being told about nonexistent jobs, specifically in the U.S. which offer opportunities and they are also recruited through mail order bride agencies (Hughes, 2000). More common recruitment methods are through people the victim knows; more than 80 percent of trafficked women were recruited in this way (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.8). Pimps are known to roam the streets looking for runaways luring them with promises of food, money, clothes, and stardom (Robb, 2006, p.24). Once they get to their destination, they are stripped of their documents and forced into bondage.

There are many stereotypes about the characteristics of human trafficking victims; they include: Trafficking in human beings is identical to prostitution. Victims of trafficking in human beings are responsible for their situation themselves; they were stupid, bad or naïve before, trafficking concerns only people from lower class and low

level of education, trafficking is basically identical to irregular migration (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.8). Some, if not all, of these stereotypes are partly true for some victims but not all of them. These stereotypes are derived from the factors contributing to human trafficking which have been previously addressed.

Some of the things that these victims experience are physical violence, mental violence, sexual attack or rape, blackmail of family and isolation (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.13-14). Due to these experiences, they may experience characteristics like malnutrition, substance abuse, low academic attainment, low self-esteem and self-hate, among other things (Roby, p.145). This parallels signs to help identify human trafficking victims. They are the following: evidence of being controlled, evidence of inability to move or leave job, bruises or other signs of physical abuse, fear or depression, not speaking on own behalf and/or not speaking the local language, and having no passport or other forms of identification or documentation (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2005). These are the classic signs of the existence of human trafficking and are what will help social workers recognize when they are working with a victim of human trafficking. Many of these victims go unidentified due to lack of knowledge on the part of the authorities and social service providers.

> During bar raids or routine controls, the police do not usually arrest or interrogate women with valid documents so this group is not questioned and the police have no mechanisms to identify trafficked women among them; this group consists of 30 percent of all trafficked women and girls working in bars and brothels. Another group of women who are not recognized as victims are those that do not know what trafficking is, do not understand their own legal situation, and are convinced that they themselves are criminals (Limanowska, 2002, p.8).

There are many reasons why it is important for social workers to be knowledgeable about human trafficking. According to Robb, social workers cling to the

belief that humanity is becoming more enlightened; we need to open their eyes, some of them, to what is really going on (2006, p.22).One main reason, which is related to social work values, is that individuals' rights to autonomy, self-determination are being violated. Human trafficking is a human rights issue that should automatically include social workers in the solution. Human rights that social workers are responsible for protecting are: freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and autonomy, liberty, and security of the person (Butcher, 2003, p.1983).Under the standards of human rights for the treatment of trafficked persons, it states that the state should ensure quality social services for victims of human trafficking (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.12). Social workers will not be able to comply with this standard if they are not equipped with the adequate knowledge about human trafficking. They might fall prey to the myths about human trafficking already mentioned. It is because of this lack of knowledge about human trafficking that trafficked women get little sympathy from the social service agencies (Hughes, 2000). Another reason that social workers should gain the knowledge and get involved is because the traffic in persons for prostitution purposes is not compatible with the dignity and worth of the person, and endangers the welfare of the individual, the family, and the community (Hughes, 2000, p.13).

There are many reasons why social workers should be the ones to educate themselves and be part of the solution. One main reason is that the beliefs and principles of social workers are contrary to what contributes to human trafficking. Some of these principles are: Social workers respect wishes and opinions of clients, social workers do not make any decision about the client without their consent, social workers do not

disclose information about clients without their consent, clients are entitled to use or refuse an offered service, clients are entitled to change their decision to accept or reject the offered service, clients have a right of privacy and protection of personal data (Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Europe, 2005, p.13).

> Social work profession has the obligation and opportunity to be involved in policy, prevention, education. They should advocate for medical, financial, occupational, and counseling services for victims. Social workers can be involved in advocacy and practice ranging from economic capacity building, community development and education, to challenging abusive social mores and cultural traditions (Roby, p.145).

Also, social workers have the ideal training to work with the population of human trafficking victims. Working with trafficked women is a very difficult and long-term process that requires well-trained and committed staff, a good understanding of the issue and a well-developed work methodology and individual approach to each case (Limanowska, 2002). This is exactly what social workers recognize and keep in mind in their work with clients generally. Social workers need to increase their knowledge in sex trafficking and the global aspect of this issue. Social workers are usually employed in the small Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's) and therefore are dealing with the more humanitarian and human aspects of trafficking. They see clients with labor trafficking issues more so than sex trafficking and for this reason should improve their knowledge on sex trafficking and all of its aspects (Bertone, 2004). The last stage of the helping process with human trafficking victims is reintegration. Reintegration services involve psychological counseling to address the trauma and economic and social skills for economic support, which are a social worker's domain (Hook, Gjermeni, Haxhiymeri, et al, p.37). Social workers can also help to empower these individuals to take control of

their lives as well as having someone they can vent to (Hook, Gjermeni, & Haxhiymeri, n.d.).

Social workers seem to be involved with combating human trafficking through clinical work, but they do not seem to realize that these clients are human trafficking victims. They might also subscribe to the myths about human trafficking due to lack of knowledge. Once educated about this topic, they can be a changing force on this huge international issue. The social work mission and the focus on social justice require social workers to become part of this important campaign against human trafficking. Social workers are positioned to make major changes; they can educate themselves, be vigilant, and reach out to help victims (Robb, 2006, p. 25). Social workers can be the ones to mobilize people to fill in the gaps in the solutions for human trafficking. Their wide variety of skills makes them the ideal profession to combat this problem. First, the social workers have to gain the knowledge about human trafficking. This will also help social workers play the role as educators to make everyone else aware of this problem as well.

The extent of social workers' knowledge of human trafficking is not very clear. It does not seem to be an issue that has been studied at all in the literature before. The purpose of this study is to try to determine whether social workers in Rhode Island are knowledgeable about human trafficking.

Methodology

Since the issue being studied is social worker's lack of knowledge of human trafficking, the methodology consisted of getting as many social workers as possible involved in this study. It was a convenience sample, which utilized the Rhode Island

NASW list of social workers. The alternative option was putting the survey or questionnaire into the NASW RI newsletter. The RI NASW executive director was contacted and stated that there are approximately1200 members of the RI chapter of NASW. The survey was printed in the RI NASW quarterly newsletter (See Appendix C).

The survey was a 4 point Likert scale consisting of ten questions. Questions were derived from gathered information. The researcher made up the questions based on the basic information on human trafficking. It is an anonymous survey that was mailed back to the researcher. Demographics will be collected to include degree level, years of practice, area of practice, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Data Analysis

Procedures used to derive meaning from the surveys will include common themes. SPSS was used to analyze the data with frequency tables. The survey was a Likert scale consisting of 11 statements related to knowledge of human trafficking and one statement which required the respondents to state whether they have encountered a victim. It consists of 11 statements related to the basic facts of human trafficking and one statement which required the respondents to state whether they have encountered a victim.

Results

A survey to elicit understanding of social worker knowledge of human trafficking was placed in the RI Chapter NASW newsletter. Fourteen NASW members responded to the survey. The respondents' degree levels were varied (See Table 16). The majority of the respondents were females (See Table 11). All of the respondents were Caucasian. Years of experience ranged from 2 years to 48 years. The respondents were in micro and macro practice; most of them are in micro practice (See Table 12). Most of the respondents worked in non-profit organizations (See Table 14). This was a diverse sample of respondents when it pertains to all areas except for ethnicity and gender (See Appendix B). Four respondents did not respond.

It appears that the social workers who responded have some knowledge of human trafficking. Three (21 %) respondents were fully knowledgeable based on the fact that they answered every question correctly. Seven (50 %) of the participants are mostly knowledgeable based on that they answered at least eight out of the ten questions correctly. Four (29 %) of the respondents were somewhat knowledgeable based on the fact that they answered six or seven out of ten questions correctly. There was no common relationship found between the demographics of a respondent and the extent of their knowledge about human trafficking.

Results of the survey included that mostly women and children that are trafficked for sexual purposes, most of the respondents agreed (See Table 1). The second survey statement stated that nearly every country is involved in trafficking activities. The majority of the respondents agreed with this statement (See Table 2). The third survey statement said that human trafficking victims are subjected to physical, emotional, and

verbal abuse. Most of the respondents strongly agreed (See Table 3). The fourth survey statement said that human trafficking falls under organized crime. Most of these social workers agreed (See Table 4). The fifth survey statement said human trafficking is similar to domestic violence in many ways. Nearly all of the respondents agreed (See Table 5). The sixth survey statement said that sex trafficking and prostitution are the same. For the most part, all of the respondents disagreed (See Table 6). The seventh survey statement said that human trafficking is profitable. A good number of the respondents disagreed with this statement (See Table 7). The eighth survey statement said that women and children remain in trafficking situations because they are unfamiliar with the country they are in. Once again, most of the respondents agreed (See Table 8). The ninth survey statement said that women who are recruited by traffickers are fully informed of what they are going to be doing once they get to their destination. Nearly every one of the respondents strongly disagreed (See Table 9). The tenth survey statement said that there are no laws to protect human trafficking victims. There were mixed answers to this statement; some respondents did not respond at all (See Table 10). The last statement asked whether the participant had encountered human trafficking victims. This question led to mixed responses. Nine (64 %) of the 14 participants answered no, 3(21.4 %) of the 14 did not answer, one said not sure and one said yes.

Limitations

There are severe limitations to my study. One is the small response rate of 14 which makes the study statistically insignificant. The hypothesis was that social workers did not have any knowledge or insufficient knowledge of human trafficking. Based on my sample alone, it seems my hypothesis was refuted. Most of the participants had some knowledge of human trafficking. At the same time, only three of the 14 participants were fully knowledgeable about human trafficking. Some respondents not responding to certain questions or demographic sections was a limitation. Also, the last statement which asks whether respondents had encountered human trafficking victims could have been worded better; it is not clear what is meant by encountered. Lastly, what mostly limited the study was that participants had to tear out the survey and spend money on sending it to the researcher; this might have deterred many potential respondents from completing the process.

Implications

Among the implications of this study is that social workers are likely to come across human trafficking victims while in the field. The results of the study, though not generalizable, indicate that social workers are not as knowledgeable as they should be about this certain population. Although the sample was made up of a diverse set of areas of practice, overall the results indicated that the knowledge about this issue is not consistent. For social work, this implies that either social workers are not as knowledgeable as they should be or more literature in the social work field should be dedicated to discussing human trafficking.

Recommendations

Among the recommendations for social work practice and policy is the most important one which is to make it an official policy that social workers be required to attend a workshop addressing human trafficking. It could even be made a continuing education credit. This also should be done because human trafficking victims might appear to be just like any other individual who is not being trafficked; this way social workers would be more alert and know what signs to look out for. It is important that social workers be knowledgeable about the potential population they may work with. Knowledge of human trafficking can be used to further social work advocacy skills to shrink loopholes that prevent states like Rhode Island from prosecuting traffickers who have trafficked women servicing men in legal businesses such as spas. Social workers can contribute to lobbying for certain policies that have as their aim to ameliorate human trafficking. Lastly, it is recommended that there be a qualitative study to assess social workers' knowledge of human trafficking in a more in depth manner.

It was the study hypothesis that the social workers who would be knowledgeable would be from certain areas of practice such as domestic violence, addiction and possibly mental health. As it turned out, all of the participants practiced in varied settings from schools to hospitals, although a very small sample. There were no participants who practiced in domestic violence agencies. Also, the number of years in practice did not seem to matter; this is illustrated in the fact that the fully knowledgeable participants in the study had 48 years, 2 years and 10 years of experience. This was surprising. One aspect that was discussed in the literature review was that social workers do not always

recognize human trafficking victims. This was seen in the sample with one of the participants saying she didn't know if she had encountered a trafficking victim. The one person who said she did encounter a human trafficking victim was one of the more knowledgeable ones. Some of the questions seemed to be misunderstood or difficult to decipher which might have skewed the results. Based on these results, the study concluded that social workers need to be trained further and more widely on the issue of human trafficking. The researcher concluded this because of the knowledge base was not made clear in an explicit way in the study. Results would have been more reliable with a larger sample of participants. The main strength is the diversity of the areas of practice as well as the fact that it represents the social work to be mostly a female profession.

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Appendix A
Responses to Survey Questions

Table 1

Womanandchildren

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	26.7	26.7	26.7
	Agree	9	60.0	60.0	86.7
	Disagree	2	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

Everycountry

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	26.7	26.7	26.7
	Agree	9	60.0	60.0	86.7
	Disagree	1	6.7	6.7	93.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

Abuse

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	12	80.0	80.0	80.0
	Agree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

Organizecrime

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	3	20.0	21.4	21.4
	Agree	8	53.3	57.1	78.6
	Disagree	3	20.0	21.4	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 5

Traffickinganddomestic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	26.7	28.6	28.6
	Agree	6	40.0	42.9	71.4
	Disagree	4	26.7	28.6	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 6

traffickingandprostitution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	12	80.0	80.0	80.0
	Strongly Disagree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 7

traffickingprofitable

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	5	33.3	35.7	35.7
	Agree	8	53.3	57.1	92.9
	Strongly Disagree	1	6.7	7.1	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 8

remainbecausecountry

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	3	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Agree	8	53.3	53.3	73.3
	Disagree	4	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 9

informwhatwillhappen

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	3	20.0	20.0	26.7
	Strongly Disagree	11	73.3	73.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 10

nolaws

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	6	40.0	46.2	46.2
	Disagree	7	46.7	53.8	100.0
	Total	13	86.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	13.3		
Total		15	100.0		

Demographics
Appendix B

Table 11

Sex

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	1	6.7	7.1	7.1
	Female	13	86.7	92.9	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 12

Practicetype

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Macro	4	26.7	33.3	33.3
	Micro	8	53.3	66.7	100.0
	Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	20.0		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 13

Practicesetting

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Nursing home/office	1	6.7	10.0	10.0
	Hospital	1	6.7	10.0	20.0
	School	2	13.3	20.0	40.0
	Outpatient Clinic	1	6.7	10.0	50.0
	office	4	26.7	40.0	90.0
	Community mentalhealth and substance abuse agency	1	6.7	10.0	100.0
	Total	10	66.7	100.0	
Missing	System	5	33.3		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 14

Practicesettingtype

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non-profit	6	40.0	50.0	50.0
	Private	6	40.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	20.0		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 15

Practicearea

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Child/Welfare	1	6.7	10.0	10.0
	Community Geriatric	1	6.7	10.0	20.0
	Maneged Care	1	6.7	10.0	30.0
	Child/Families	3	20.0	30.0	60.0
	Community mental health	1	6.7	10.0	70.0
	Trauma/addiction	1	6.7	10.0	80.0
	Addiction/mental health	1	6.7	10.0	90.0
	Dministration/manegement	1	6.7	10.0	100.0
	Total	10	66.7	100.0	
Missing	System	5	33.3		
Total		15	100.0		

Table 16

Degree

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	LCSW	1	6.7	7.1	7.1
	MSW	12	80.0	85.7	92.9
	PhD	1	6.7	7.1	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

Appendix C

This survey request is being made by a BSW Student at Providence College for her thesis.

Circle your choice or fill in where necessary.

Male or Female	Years of Practice: _____	Practice Area: _____
Micro or Macro Practice	Race/Ethnicity: _____	Work setting: _____
Private or Non-profit	Degree level: _____	I have encountered victims of human trafficking. Yes or No

Please use the following 1 – 4 scale for each question: 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Disagree 4 = Strongly Disagree

1. It is mostly women and children that are trafficked for sexual purposes. _____
2. Nearly every country is involved in trafficking activities. _____
3. Human trafficking victims are subjected to physical, emotional and verbal abuse. _____
4. Human trafficking falls under organized crime. _____
5. Human trafficking is similar to domestic violence in many ways. _____
6. Sex trafficking and prostitution are the same. _____
7. Human trafficking is profitable. _____
8. Women and children will remain in trafficking situations because they are unfamiliar with the country they are in. _____
9. Women who are recruited by traffickers are fully informed of what they are going to be doing once they get to their destination. _____
10. There are no laws to protect human trafficking victims. _____

Please complete survey and mail to:
Tiffany Polanco
75 Aleppo Street
Providence, RI 02909