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The Victims who Refused to be Rescued: Lived Experiences of Victims of Sex Trafficking



Abstract: - While many are at risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking, there are still "unrescued victims". This study seeks to answer why victims of sex trafficking refuse to leave the environment in which they have been and continue to be victimized. It utilized a phenomenological study to reveal the experiences of the victims of sex trafficking through interviews as further supported by a group discussion amongst pimps. The study found that participants' need for income and desires to improve their lifestyle influenced their decision to remain victims. Anent, the victims' pre-victimization life status is linked to their decision to stay/leave. The more destitute the victims, the more likely they are to remain in the sex industry. Furthermore, despite the abuses, victims' perceptions of their victimization have positively shifted over the years of captivity. The participants personally perceived themselves from forced victims to persons who maintain their victimization as profession. The economic-benefit, the deception of the pimps, and culture of the locale collectively play apart in this shift of perception. The study comes to an unusual conclusion about victimization in sex trafficking. Recognizing this phenomenon may prompt better interventions by authorities in developing more inclusive rescue, counseling, and victim-centered programs.

Keywords: Sex Trafficking, Stockholm Syndrome, Grooming, Human Trafficking

I. INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking, is a serious violation of human rights that involves ruthless practices such as abusing and deceiving vulnerable people, as well as the use of violence, threats, debt bondage, and coercion for various forms of exploitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, 2012; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, 2019). Sex trafficking has represented at least two-thirds of the profits of organized crime groups dedicated to trafficking. According to the International Labour Organization, 3.8 million people and 1 million children were victims of forced sexual exploitation worldwide in 2016 (Stop Violence Against Women, 2015 & Kelly, 2019).

Like in any other country, sex trafficking is a major issue in the Philippines. The majority of victims are poor, often allured with promises of a better life; however, upon arrival, they are forced to work in a brutal situation – opposite from what was promised (Abadisnky, 2013, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, 2020 & NORC, 2022). Moreover, the mainstream of the victims is immigrants, unemployed, females, children, homeless, orphans, sex and gender minorities, runaway youth, individuals from economically or politically unstable countries, individuals with limited resources, and, unfortunately, individuals with a history of abuse, trauma and related conflict (Sukach, Gonzales, & Pickens, 2018).

During sex exploitation, women are subjected to punishing and cruel, vigorous mental and physical abuse. Unfortunately, victims are also forced into seclusion, beating, rape, forced drug use, and unprotected sex to a large number of consumers. Unlike ordinary prostitution, exploited women in sex trafficking are brainwashed into having no freedom and autonomy through physical, sexual, and psychological power. The loss of freedom later developed feelings of powerlessness and helplessness in every aspect of their lives, making them dependent on their traffickers and pimps. (Thachuk, 2007; Newman, 2006; Sukach, Gonzales, & Pickens, 2018). What is even more inexcusable is that these abuses occur on a daily basis, and victims have become enslaved to their traffickers as a result of their experiences (Sukach, Gonzales, & Pickens, 2018).

Unfortunately, several victims persist in being victims. The majority of victims remain unreached for a variety of reasons, including traffickers' high level of security over the victims; most victims live in homes owned by their exploiters; the majority are constantly monitored and accompanied to and from work; and they are financially dependent on their exploiters. Furthermore, the threat of physical abuse, intimidation, and fear have imprisoned victims. Traffickers make their victims feel worthless, insignificant, and forgotten, eroding self-esteem, fostering a loss of identity, and allowing victims to blame themselves for their victimization. (Thachuk, 2007; Newman, 2006; Sukach, Gonzales, & Pickens, 2018).

The Philippines was rated as Tier 1 by the US Department of State (Department of Justice, 2018&2022). This indicates that the Philippine government has fully met the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking.

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Additionally, the government demonstrated serious and sustained efforts by convicting and punishing more traffickers; effectively coordinating identification, referral, and provision of services to more victims; increasing efforts to prevent the trafficking of Filipino migrant workers and to assist those who become victims of trafficking overseas; and implementing procedures to reduce the backlog of trafficking cases in the courts. However, the same Report contented that the Philippine agencies fail to improve services regarding the identification, availability, and quality of protection and assistance services for trafficking victims, particularly specialized shelter care, mental health services, access to employment training, and job placement. Hence, in the laxity of available services for victims of trafficking, some trafficking victims stay hidden and refuse help from the authority.

Furthermore, in the same Report, the recommendations provided by US Department focused only on prosecution, post-rescue programs, and investigation; however, less mechanisms are provided to encourage the victims to escape and report (US Department State, 2018 & US Department of States, 2022). Therefore, the researcher indulges in traveling on this path to understand the victims and their experiences. As shown in figure 1, it seeks to explain why victims of sex trafficking refuse to leave the environment in which they have been victimized and continue to be victimized in relation to their pre-victimization stage background and exploitation stage experience. Recognizing this phenomenon may prompt better interventions by authorities in developing more inclusive rescue, counseling, and victim-centered programs.

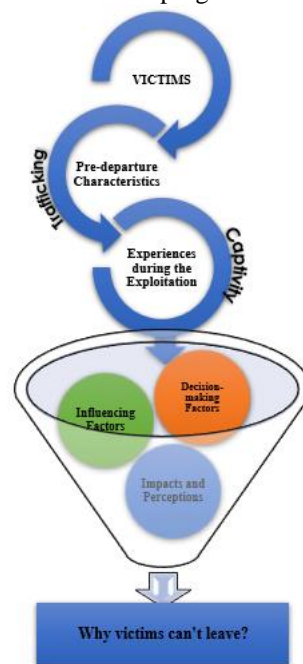


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

II. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Design*

The study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), to appreciate how the five participants perceive or talk about their experiences and how key informants make meaning about their experiences. Specifically, the research employed an interpretative phenomenological approach. An interpretative phenomenological approach aims to appreciate how a person perceives or talks about their experiences; how the key informants make meaning about their experiences. Hence, this research further utilized double hermeneutics or double interpretation process because the key informants and the researcher, with the greater role on the part of the researcher, are obligated to interpret their experiences and the key informants' world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

B. *Population and Locale*

In identifying potential participants, the research exploits the concept of purposive sampling. As inclusion criteria for the research, the participants shall possess the following qualifications: a) trafficking victims who

were sexually exploited to prostitution; b) women who are domestically trafficked; c) 18 years old and above to lessen concerns about ethical consideration regarding juvenile victims; d) women victims only and e) they must be in captivity or under the constructive custody of the traffickers or his/her agents during the course of the study. The following are excluded as participants: a) persons with physical and mental disabilities; b) victims who refused to take part in the study; c) those who belong to the indigenous communities; and d) those who are under the influence of drugs and alcohol during the interview.

Moreover, the study was conducted in Angeles City, Pampanga. Pampanga is known for its rich delicacies and culture; however, locals and "parokyano" mostly prefer the area for its red district and nightlife (Rojo, 2015). An interview guide based on the study by Screening for Human Trafficking: Guideline for administering the Trafficking Victims of the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera Institute of Justice, 2014) is utilized following an open-ended semi-structured format. After being checked and verified by a registered psychologist, additional questions have been included.

C. Treatment Of Data

The data is analyzed using thematic analysis with inductive hand coding to derive themes. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within the data—these themes capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, representing some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Sherwood & Silver, 1999, pp. 10-13)

D. Ethical Considerations

The consent of the participants was acquired through an informed consent form. The questions are also constructed with the assistance of a psychologist to ensure that the questions are not insulting, derogatory, or humiliating. Prior to the interview, the researcher introduced herself as a student-researcher with her identification card and a certification that the researcher is currently enrolled in research studies. The necessity of introducing the researcher as student-researcher is to provide assurance to the participants that there are no involved law enforcement agencies trying to entrap them.

Furthermore, to guarantee willingness of the participants; an oral consent read in a language the participants can understand was made in front of a third party, a psychologist. The purpose of the oral consent is to gain the trust of the key informants and assure them that they will not be implicated to any crimes. Also, the psychologist signed the document attesting that the key informant provided her consent for the conduct of the interview. Although this did not happen, it is still necessary to bear as a researcher that, if during the interview, any of the key informant shows indications of withdrawal to the interview or shows any behavioral reluctance; the interview will be stopped, and the psychologist shall immediately intervene.

In addition, to maintain the secrecy of the participants, the researcher asked what name they preferred to be called as their pseudonym. Likewise, the recorded interview and other pertinent documents were stored in a locked folder and the interview transcription shall be destroyed after the research.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter provides the collected data's presentation, analysis, and interpretation. It is divided into two categories: Pre-departure Characteristics and Reasons for Remaining as Victims of Sex Trafficking in relation to their Exploitation Experiences.

I. Pre-departure Characteristics

The participants' weaknesses had become an opportunity for their traffickers to exploit them. Similarly, they have been imprisoned in the sex trafficking sector due to the same vulnerabilities (Covenant House Report, 2020; Hartmann, 2021; Stöckl et al., 2021)

A. Maladaptive Family Structure

The family structure or environment may cause maladaptive changes on the part of the children; these changes can be prejudicial in the children's growth and maturation process. It causes rebellious behavior, poor emotional

regulation skills, poor decisional making, and causes them participate into riskier behaviors (Pradeep, 2008 & Nyquist & Luebbe, 2021).

All participants came from maladaptive families, specifically fragmented and marginalized families. Three of the four victims live in an incomplete home – either the mother or the father is absent. Because of the absence of their parent, the participants assumed the role of their father or mother, and the children started working (Yusofoglu & Kizmaz, 2016). Secondly, the family breakdown through the absence of the father impales guidance. A disruption of family ties is particularly salient because it results in a child running away, rebelling against and hating their parents, forcing them to provide for themselves, and seeking excitement from peers (Cancedda, De Micheli, Dimitrova; Slot, 2015; Foley, 2015).

Additionally, the participants grew up in a poor, low, quality financial family life. Not only were the victims forced to bear the role of their father and mother, but this unfavorable quality of life has also affected the victims' decisional roles and engagement with the sex industry as victims of sex trafficking. Because of these implications of maladaptive family structure, it upsurges the victims' vulnerability to traffickers. Because they were responsible in their houses for providing for their daily necessities, the victims were recruited through false offers and promises of jobs. The desperation for the source of income acquaints them to potential captors (Silverman, Decker, & Gupta, 2007; Cancedda et al., 2015; Economic Security for Survivors, 2017; Abdullahi, Deribe, & Kura, 2019).

When a family is deprived of the basic needs for survival, any members capable of engaging in any available means to provide the needs shall thrive (Abdullahi, Deribe, & Kura, 2019). Consequently, the lack of employment of the parents [and the children] paired with poverty highly reinforced possible sexual exploitation. It increases the chance of recruitment out of desperation to provide the basic needs of the family their parents cannot effectively provide (Cancedda et al., 2015; Economic Security for Survivors, 2017).

However, in an interesting case of two participants – the quality of their lives is the exact opposite of the other victims. This reflects that not only those marginalized form part of the victims of sex trafficking but also those who are part of the middle-class strata. However, in this case, the status of the victims has no direct relationship to their victimization. To understand victimization in sex trafficking – one needs to look at several factors which drive exploitation, such as the individuals' issues and characteristics of the victims. Here, the victims were already economically satisfied; hence, their everyday life is focused on different matters such as peer-socialization, adventures, educational matters, and other lifestyles, which in turn may contribute to their victimization and allow them to be introduced to prostitutes, ill-repute houses and other drivers to trafficking.

A.1 False Promises as a Recruitment Method

One of the participants said that her friends told her that she would earn Php 3000 per night and customer. However, during the actual encounter with the clients/customer, she was getting less – Php 500 in every sexual encounter. Moreover, another participant also explained that she was only encouraged to join the recruiter after being offered free food and shelter. At that time, she had no available means. Lastly, another said that she was only stimulated to travel to Pampanga with the recruiter because she was promised that she would be given a job (caretaker) with free food and shelter. The participants were exploited through false promises. Traffickers have devised numerous methods to lure their victims into the ring of the sexual industry. Usually, traffickers locate the most vulnerable in the investigation, financially needy victims, innocent youth who just ran away from their homes, and job seekers. When traffickers observe that one needs a job – they sell a dream, offering them a stable and high job, domestically or internationally (Bales & Lize, 2005 & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021).

B. Low Educational Attainment

One of the consistent characteristics present among the participants is that they failed to accomplish a high-school degree. In fact, one of the participants was introduced to the strings of sex trafficking after merely finishing fifth grade. When they got out of school, they started looking for employment, ran away, and engaged in thrilling activities that teenagers usually delve into.

The informational processing theory substantiates that, at some point, low educational attainment increases the likelihood of victimization. Accordingly, this theory focuses on how people make decisions and solve problems through processing, using, retrieving, and manipulating information (Siegel, 2011). About this, the participants

incorrectly utilized the information they had. Hence – there is faulty judgment and reasoning during the recruitment process. So, when they try to calculate the pros and cons of engaging and not engaging in the sex industry, because of the faulty processing of information, they pursue behaviors that they believe are beneficial and fulfilling to them and their acquainted family. It shall also be taken into account that the faulty informational processing of the victims is the result of complex factors, including their failure to have a better quality of education which might help them recognize better cognitive judgment and decisions, observations of family and peers, and the nurture factor.

C. The Search for Thrill

There are certain characteristics of some of the victims that escalate their proneness to types of people connected to sex trafficking. One of these is their naivety and eagerness for the thrill. Some of the participants chose to stow away with their friends, go with their friends to different unfamiliar places, including the locale of the study, and roam around the clubs to party. Teenagers are easily targeted victims of traffickers because of their normal maturation process. Teenagers wanting to express and enjoy their youthfulness tend to take risks and engage in thrilling activities as they feel misunderstood by their parents, which proliferates their susceptibility to traffickers' recruitment process (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment, 2019).

In relation to this, the participants have been introduced to their exploiter through their peers. For instance, P1's case, she stated that *“Meron po akong kaibigan na niyaya po akong pumunta sa bar na puno ng foreigner”* (My friends invited me to a bar flocked with foreigners) and *“Ang expecting ko doon is iinom kami hanggang inooffer ako ng aking mga kabigan na meron kilalang foreigner na inooffer ng ganun ganun nga. Malaki po kasi iyong offer e”* (I expected that we are only there to drink with my friends, however, they started to offer me). P2's also provided that she and her friends asked her to go to clubs, party, and explore somewhere else until they were recruited to Pampanga. Inducement factors from peers may not necessarily and immediately lead to the sex trafficking industry; however, it is a potential ingredient of victimization. Without the encouragement of their peers, the victims may not have been in a position whereby they could be easily recruited or persuaded to join the recruiter. Besides, peer pressure can sway individuals' decision-making; numerous studies have proven that peer pressure is one of the factors associated with the initiation of victims to the sex ring and prostitution (Shrek and Fisher, 2012 & Moore, Hirway, Barron, Goldberg, & Houck, 2017).

II. Reasons for Remaining as Victims of Sex Trafficking in connection to their Exploitation Experiences

A. Economically Dependent to their Exploiter

The majority of the participants came from marginalized families. They came from houses whereby the parents earned below the minimum wage. As a result, not only were the victims forced to bear the role of their father and mother, but this unfavorable quality of life has also affected the victims' decisional roles and engagement with the sex industry as victims of sex trafficking. It increases the chance of recruitment out of desperation to provide the basic needs of the family their parents cannot effectively provide (Cancedda et al., 2015, Economic Security for Survivors, 2017, Abdullahi, Deribe, & Kura, 2014).

Because of this background, not only the marginalized participants but all confessed that despite their experiences as victims, they remain and see their status as a "job" from which they profit rather than the crime for which they are considered victims. Their concern about poverty and not finding legal employment to gain financial support is a commonly expressed reason for the subsequent recruitment and consequential continuous victimization. Studies show that some victims believe they are "better off" living and working in exploitative conditions than in their previous home situations (Ionnou and Oostinga 2015). This theme can further corroborated by the following statements, P3 stated that, *“Wala, kung hindi po ako magtrabaho po, hindi po kami makakaraos”* (If I will not work, I cannot live) stated in her interview, P4 stated that, *“Dahil sa kahirapan din finansiyal, kailangan ng pera. Walang trabaho si papa, nahinto”*; then P1 said that *“Wala, mahirap po, kahit na anong pang-aadjust – wala talaga.”* (Life is really hard, despite all the effort – we cannot really adjust); *“Tsaka mababa iyong sahod hindi katulad ng nakukuha ko dito. Mas nakakatulong ako tapos may mga kapatid ako tapos may anak ako.”* (The income you get for every night is greater than what I can get to a normal job. I can be more helpful to my siblings and to my children); meanwhile P5 mentioned that, *“Minsan, nakakatulong po ako kasi. Iyon lang po kasi iyong choice para makaraos kami”* (Sometimes, it aids my family. This is only the choice in order to help my family); and lastly, P2 revealed, *“Finansiyal po tsaka noong nakulong si papa”* (We need money more especially when my dad was jailed.); *“Kasi doon ako kumukuha ng panggastos ng araw-araw”* (It is where I get the money used to by our daily needs).

B. Desire Satisfactionism in Sex Industry

Again, the victims came from impoverished families – hence, they were unprivileged and unable to enjoy their childhood and teenage years. However, two of the participants came from the middle class. Here, the victims were already economically satisfied; hence, their everyday life is focused on different matters such as peer-pressured socialization (Burke, 2005, Shreck and Fisher 2012, & Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022), adventures, educational matters, and other lifestyles which in turn may contribute to their victimization and allow them to be introduced to prostitutes, ill-repute houses and other drivers to trafficking. In fact, they were recruited through their peers and strangers they met who invited them to work, tour, and run away to different places, including the present locale of the study. This does not directly inject the victims into the sex industry. However, it somewhat led them closer, making them vulnerable and easy targets in the eyes of the traffickers. In a way, they want to express and enjoy their youthfulness, take risks, and engage in thrilling activities as they feel misunderstood by their parents, which proliferates their susceptibility to traffickers' recruitment process (Njoku et al., 2022).

As a result of their poverty and lifestyle, they did not hesitate to agree when their recruiter promised them that they would receive all of their wants and needs for free. One of the transcripts summarized how false promises increase victimization, "*Wala, iyon na nga e. narinig mo lang iyong libre. Ni nga trabaho, hindi ko alam. Doon mo lang malalaman*" (*It does not matter, so long as you heard that everything is free, you go for it. Even if I do not know the job being offered*). Desire satisfactionism states that getting what human desires make our lives go well (Heathwood, 2006). In connection with trafficking, victims stay because their desires and economic needs are fulfilled, which further generates participants' (victims') satisfaction and happiness. The projection of what will happen to them after they get out causes fear among the victim. They fear that they cannot achieve their desires and acquire money to sustain their needs and wants (Weitzer, 2011).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs discussed that there are needs and wants of human beings that should be partially and completely satisfied to fulfill other hierarchical levels of needs. However, what motivates a person in striving to achieve his needs is when these are unmet or not reasonably satisfied. In this situation, the victims struggled to meet their physiological and emotional needs during the victimization. Hence, when they were offered means to fulfill the strain – the traffickers received a positive response from the participants. This entails that what drives victimization is the need and desperation to gain what motivates them as human beings; they become more exploitable and accessible targets as bearers of motivations the traffickers can conveniently provide, which they fail to provide (McLeod, 2007 & Twis, 2019). Eventually, when these are assured in the sex industry, a false perception is created that sex trafficking satisfies these needs.

C. The Power of Grooming

The two themes seem to illustrate that the reasons why victims of sex trafficking stay as victims are due to them choosing to be participants in their exploitation. However, undoubtedly, these phenomena can be explained by the grooming process whereby victims are recruited and used, and they are persuaded that they have the capacity to choose to be participants in their own exploitation. In the first process, the trafficker identifies the victim's needs and/or weaknesses. In reality, the participants in these cases were persuaded by the traffickers that they might change their way of life and experience the wants and aspirations they lacked. After the victim's necessities are met, the victim trusts the trafficker to look after them. At this point, the trafficker may also try to convince the victim that participating in sexual conduct with them is beneficial and rewarding. Once the victim has been lured into exploitation through the relationship-building process, the grooming process has reached its conclusion (FAIR Girls, 2020 & Polaris Project, 2021). After they have been conditioned, the victims will be subjected to several forms of violence:

C.1 Control

After working with their exploiters for a period of time, three of the five participants stated that they had some control over what they wanted to do and how the customers should treat them but were obligated to inform their exploiters of their whereabouts. What is missing from this sense of comfort that has gone unnoticed by victims is a sense of psychological monitoring of the victims. It is silent monitoring that prevents traffickers from physically abusing victims for control or reduces the amount spent on purchasing or constructing lock rooms for women. The victims are unaware that this is the most cost-effective but effective strategy used by traffickers to remind them that they are always being watched by mandating them to report their whereabouts (Withers, 2016). The victims may possess an alternate mind that their traffickers are no longer their captors but their protectors. Hence, they refuse to report the crime and the offenders to the authorities.

C.2 Objectification

Furthermore, the participants have been forced to perform sexual acts against their will and desires by their clients and exploiters. The participants are treated as mere objects which are capable of gratifying the sexual desires of their customers. However, after years of working for their exploiter, they have agreed to accept and perform these acts, believing they are normal sex activities. The Sexual Objectification Theory postulates that women are not treated as a person since men see more of their body parts and are viewed as physical objects of male sexual desire (Szymanski et al., 2010). As a result, the victims lose their self-esteem and feel unworthy of better treatment, and inferior to others, and their only value is their ability to provide sexual services (Sukach et al., 2018). This could explain why, during the interview, most victims describe their experiences as if they were nothing. It wasn't because they wanted them, but because they were treated the same way over and over, it became second nature to them.

C.3 Other forms of abuses

The victims endured several abuses from their exploiters and clients. The exploiters would verbally abuse them whenever they failed to provide enough compensation when demanded and refuse some clients. At some point, the exploiter would remind the participants that they should repay them as part of their *"utang-na-loob"* (debt of one to another or owing of morally recognizing to return or give back). Moreover, P1 provided that she was always threatened by her exploiter, *"Putang ina mo, papatayin kita"* (Son of a bitch, I will kill you). These were the words she usually heard every time she tried to escape from the "casa," which she would believe because the bodyguards that monitor carry with them a gun. Moreover, these threats are directed at the victims, their family members, and their relatives. These threats are also coupled with physical abuses, P1 recounted, *"Sinabunutan, tinatadyakan. Sinabunutan, sinasaktan kapag hindi sumusunod sa utos"* (She grabs my hair, kicks me. She hurts me every time I will not follow her order).

To conclude, although the victims are not traditionally controlled inside rooms, buildings, and chains, the following verbal harassments or threats are means to inculcate that the pimp and the client are in control over the victims through instilling fear, guilt, insult, and criticisms and intimidation (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015 & Tammy et al., 2022). Physical abuse is one of the means traffickers use to control their victims. However, in the scenario, the physical abuse is not as grave as what has been reported by statistics, research, and news. Here, victims were punished accordingly and leniently, which has been vocally explained to them, eventually instilling that they were at fault for the abuses. There are two potential reasons why traffickers sway away from the usual cruel punishments. First, to avoid being caught by the authorities. Hence, if authorities, healthcare providers, and clients discover – traffickers and "managers" may be arrested and raise the issue of possible trafficking in the area rather than mere prostitution (Schrader, 2016).

Consequently, the physical abuse might not be as grave as it seems, but enough to inculcate to the victims that they are still in control. Besides, there are numerous ways of control, such as emotional and psychological abuses, which do not necessarily need bruises to prove their occurrence. Second, it is a form of feigned care from the traffickers. There are instances whereby victims tend to resist if they are punished sternly and repeatedly, or there are victims who are emotionally dependent and gullible continuously. To control these types of victims, traffickers impose punishment but at the same time inform them of the reason for the imposition.

As a result, in the end, victims admit punishments believing it was their own doing – may it be not following the rules provided by the traffickers. In addition, since traffickers avoid brutal and physically evident forms of punishments – this creates a perception of protection and care from the trafficking. In the case at hand, the participants said that whatever their managers did was for their sake and protection and their fault for not following the orders of their exploiters. Here, traffickers target the weakest link of the victims – the need for emotional security. Many traffickers' strategies alter one's perception of reality through manipulation, compulsion, and deception, increasing one's emotional or physical fears and producing uncertainty. To reach this condition in their victims, traffickers employ a variety of strategies, forcing victims to no longer trust their own instincts, feelings, and ideas, instead relying on the trafficker to decide their sense of reality, one is known as gaslighting (Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014; Williamson, 2009 & Canfield, 2020). In Canter's Victim Role model of offending style, in the present study, the traffickers utilized the Victim as Person Role as the offending style. The victims were treated as humans. However, the control approach is coercive and manipulative but added with a form of empathy. The same study points out how traffickers used this form of the offending model. It is not necessary for victims and their offenders to develop a relationship, but meaningful and significant empathy for the victims creates a difference in the victims' perception of their perpetrators. Hence, they are manipulated to believe that the traffickers could care (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015).

It can be gleaned from the previous themes that the victims stayed with their exploiters because they received financial benefits, they enjoyed little improvement in their lifestyles, and the exploiters have not gravely harmed them. Considering that the victims were held over a long period of time, in fact, the participants were 16, 18, 17,

and 20's when they were victimized and were mid-20, 30' and 40 during the interview, and have suffered several forms of abuse; the normalization of participants of their victimization based on the previous themes can be undoubtedly explained. After enduring severe levels of trauma for a long time, victims of physical abuse and psychological manipulation demonstrate resilience strategies and defense mechanisms that normalize abuse in their minds. Women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation experience extreme physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, putting them at high risk for long-term mental illnesses that may have a profound impact on their ability to function in social situations as well as for short-term physical ailments (Wright et al., 2017 & NJ Human Trafficking Task Force, 2016).

D. Development of Stockholm Syndrome

Stockholm syndrome is the state whereby the victims develop an emotional attachment or bond to their captors due to complex interaction of abusive control, exploitation of power imbalances, and intermittent positive and negative behavior (Raghavan & Doychak, 2019). The first prerequisite of Stockholm Syndrome is a perceived threat to survival and the idea that a captor will bring such a threat to completion. In the earlier transcript, the victim strongly believes that her exploiter will kill her and her relatives. The second precondition is the showing of love or kindness to the victim by the captor. Most of the victims confessed that although they have experienced harm during their life in the industry, they have benefited from the exploiters, mostly from the financial aid and opportunities given by their exploiters. The third precondition is isolation. P2 recounted that, "*Hindi ko naman natry na lumabas kasi nakapadlock, bawal iyong lumabas.*" (I did not try to go out since it was locked, you are restricted to go out). She further stated, "*Hindi ngay, may bantay. Tsaka nakapadlock*" (No, somebody is checking us out). In P1's case, together with her friends, they were locked inside a room guarded by a bodyguard. They can only get out at night, whereby customers flock to the "casa". In most cases, victims are isolated from the outside world – to their families, relatives, and friends and prevented from having friends and talking to others. If communication is curtailed through isolation – the victims find less physical and emotional support, aid, and source of knowledge for reporting, creating a sense of depersonalization and demoralization. Lastly, the final precondition is the perceived inability to cope. The exploiters have manipulated the participants to believe their role is the means to improve their way of life. This is further corroborated by the statements of P3 where she stated that, "Wala, kung hindi po ako magtrabaho po, hindi po kami makakaraos" (If I will not work, I cannot provide stated in her interview, P4 stated that, "Dahil sa kahirapan din finansiyal, kailangan ng pera. Walang trabaho si papa, nahinto"; then P1 stated "Wala, mahirap po, kahit na anong pang-aadjust – wala talaga." (Life is really hard, despite all the effort – we cannot really adjust). Lastly, P5 stated, "Tsaka mababa iyong sahod hindi katulad ng nakukuha ko dito. Mas nakakatulong ako tapos may mga kapatid ako tapos may anak ako." (The income you get for every night is greater than what I can get to a normal job. I can be more helpful to my siblings and to my children) (Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006 & Karan & Hansen, 2018).

IV. CONCLUSION

The participants' activities, lifestyles, attitudes, and family backgrounds are not the only determining factors of their potential recruitment and engagement in the sex trafficking industry. These factors increase the participants' susceptibility by shaping them as vulnerable targets, introducing them to offenders, and influencing their decisional facet of leaving the exploitative industry.

In addition, these factors also somehow affected the victims' tolerance and decision-making in staying as victims of sex trafficking. The reason for their failure to get out is somewhat grounded and rooted in their previous life before their trafficking. Despite the unfortunate experiences during the trafficking period, these failed to impact the victims' perception and decision-making of getting out or reporting their cases to the authorities since the victims' motivation in staying is expressively conceived on the beneficial and positive effects of the sex industry to the victim. However, this seemingly positive response from the participants is not only the unfortunate life-long effects of sex trafficking but also the result of incessant psychological, physical, and verbal.

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