

Preparing for the Emerging Issue of Human Trafficking

Michael Wolf-Branigin

Kristin Jensen

Michael Allen Smith

ABSTRACT. The United Nations defines 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 of 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, 2006). Affecting hundreds of thousands of victims in the US, it emerged as a federal priority, with the Department of Justice (DOJ). We defined capacity building as establishing understanding and enabling skills to assist excluded individuals participate more effectively in their communities (Henderson & Thomas, 2004; Payne, 2005). We adopted the five-component definition of capacity building developed by Glickman and Servon (1998) that analyzes the organization's resource, internal, programmatic, network and political capacities. Using a qualitative approach, we determined whether enhanced organizational capacity in addressing this vulnerable population occurred.

Michael Wolf-Branigin, PhD, Associate Professor, and Kristin Jensen, BA, MSW Student, are affiliated with Social Work Department, George Mason University, MS-1F7, 3330 Washington Blvd, Suite 150, Arlington, VA 22201

Michael Allen Smith is affiliated with Divisional Social Services Consultant, The Salvation Army, USA Western Territory, 180 E. Ocean Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90802

Address correspondence to Michael Wolf-Branigin to the address above (E-mail: mwolfbra@gmu.edu).

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INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking, only in the past decade, has received significant national attention and support. To address this issue, The Salvation Army beginning in 2003 began developing their national capacity strategically in order to identify and serve these victims. Recent efforts attempted to marshal their social services, focus their efforts to provide emergency shelter, and forge partnerships in addressing the needs of human trafficking victims. Since its founding in the mid 1860s, The Salvation Army, a faith-based organization build on fundamental Christian principles and dedicated to providing practical services to vulnerable populations has concerned itself with issues such as human exploitation, addiction, and criminality (Booth, 1885).

The U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Acts (TVPA) of 2000 and 2005 provided legislation to address the victims of human trafficking (House Resolution 972, 2005), by targeting prevention, protection of trafficking victims, and prosecution of traffickers. With an estimated 17,500 individuals trafficked into the U.S. annually, about 1,000 received formal certification in the six years following enactment the TVPA (HHS announces, 2006). Today, the gap between the estimated need and service utilization by victims indicate that significant barriers still exist for victims seeking and maintaining involvement in services. The Department of Justice (DOJ) documented increases in human trafficking investigations and prosecutions since 2001 in three areas: 1) sex trafficking, 2) sex trafficking of minors, and 3) labor trafficking. Since 2001, federal prosecutors charged 189 defendants with sex trafficking and resulted in 109 sex trafficking convictions. From 2003 to 2005, 50 individuals received indictments for child sex trafficking, with 29 convictions. The primary regions from which people are being trafficked include Central America, Eastern Europe, and Asia. These persons are then trafficked to North America, Western Europe, and Southeast Asia (United Nations, 2006).

METHOD

Using a complexity evaluation framework, we defined several components including identifying the agent (consumer of services), the different

choices the agent can make, dynamics within the environment, the availability of feedback mechanisms to assist in decision-making, an underlying structure with self-organizing activities of agents, and the resulting emergent behavior (Wolf-Branigin, 2006). The project was agent-based because the focus was on the person, heterogeneous because of the apparent ability to participate, and dynamic because clients initially appeared to have the ability to make a decision to participate. Feedback for organizational decision-making includes information provided on accessing and using the services, while the victim choosing to continue in assisting in the prosecution of the traffickers represents self-organization (Hudson, 2000).

The evaluation design used an *emergent design process* by 1) framing the situation according to the components of complexity theory, 2) reviewing transcripts of questionnaires conducted with members of The Salvation Army's Anti-Trafficking Council ($n = 11$), and 3) documenting emerging preferences and attitudes of these council members. A two-phase evaluation process was undertaken. The first phase reviewed program documents including progress reports, training evaluations, materials developed, and questionnaires. The second phase included the synthesis of the above information to develop a new set of questions (14 open-ended items) to probe their insights.

The first evaluation question, "Did the Council Members acquire skills for dealing with victims on an individual level?" used a pretest/posttest design for participants involved in human trafficking training. The second question, "Was the National Council effective at implementing the project?" reviewed conformance to the objectives outlined in the Department of Justice contract. The third question, "What influences affected the project's implementation?" used information gathered from interviews with The Salvation Army's Anti-Trafficking Council.

RESULTS

During the initial phase of organizational capacity development, 48 persons who had been trafficked onto the US received services, with 23 remaining active. In developing their organizational capacity, four themes emerged from the Anti-trafficking Council members. These themes included; 1) the meeting structure, 2) the council's purpose, 3) interest at local levels, and 4) funding opportunities. Due to the initial development of strong program theory and implementation plans, the Council's purpose

and function was well understood with members being oriented to the scope and purposes of the body. Developing and maintaining local interest on developing anti-trafficking capacity was problematic among several personnel. Many respondents indicated that they encounter competing social issues that they needed to address at their local level. Responses from the second phase of evaluation, introduced two additional themes 1) time restrictions and 2) importance of inter-organizational collaboration. A majority of respondents indicated that other full-time duties limited their role on the Council and in anti-trafficking efforts in general.

We further assessed a random sample of 22 individuals who attended and completed the Human Trafficking Training program by using a pretest/posttest design with a nine-item multiple choice and true/false test. Results indicate a mean score of 4.05 (SD = 1.669) on the pretest and a mean score of 5.60 (SD = 1.429) on the posttest. A paired samples t-test resulted in an alpha of .000; the effect size was .1353 (Rosenthal, 1991). Both the level of significance and effect size indicate that the awareness-level training provided a strong impact. While a formal service network was not established, the organization demonstrated that services could be coordinated and prepared given short notice (less than 48 hours). The project coordinated aims as it created *service protocols* that provide an essential groundwork as personnel from the organization address issues such as emotional attachment, victim trauma, safety, and ethical removal of potential victims from their trafficking settings.

Implications for Social Work Practice

As social service organizations consider and develop efforts to address human trafficking, careful planning and protocols to extract victims and fully restore their lives remains vital. The initial results suggest the need to focus on how individual who have been trafficked and how they obtained services. Future efforts need to focus on understanding the substantial barriers interfering with victims seeking and sustaining their involvement. Additional studies need to grasp a better understanding of the barriers, threats and processes that these individuals encounter as current efforts to addressing human trafficking use a top-down approach.

Sustainability of the project rests on principles of participatory action research with future attempts needing to include victims in the strategizing of services. A knowledge base of evolving promising practices will further enhance the ability of The Salvation Army and other non-governmental organizations in responding to the needs of victims of trafficking.

Additionally, methods that encourage victims to self-organize at their grass roots level in order to assure a sufficient level of knowledge to deal with the multiple barriers they encounter need further consideration so that these victims may reach the emergent behavior of seeking and completing anti-trafficking initiatives. Network capacity may be the component on which effectiveness of future efforts rest as personnel from various organizations will need to interact increasingly with other human service organizations. The political capacity for providing anti-trafficking services retains potential for playing a prominent national role.

The major limitation of this research involved the limited access to the persons who were trafficked because few people received certification for services. Personnel involved in future efforts need a greater understanding of how victims access services given the limited number of persons seeking access (N = 48). Because advocates remain far removed from the potential clients, implementation will remain difficult. Assuring the continued organizational growth depends on developing and monitoring sustainability measures with funding sources. Applying a social network analysis method may solidify the gains made and more precisely identify the victims' interdependencies and relationships (Westley et al., 2006).

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