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Providing Services to Trafficking Victims: Understanding Practices Across the Globe

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Trafficking in persons is estimated to generate about thirty billion dollars each year, making it one of the fastest growing illegal industries
(Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015).

Human trafficking is the "use of violence, threats, deception, debt bondage, and other manipulative tactics to force people to engage in commercial sex or to provide labor or services against their will" (Polaris Project, n.d.). It impacts every country in the world with victims representing all genders, age groups, and global regions. Trafficking in persons is estimated to generate about thirty billion dollars each year, making it one of the fastest growing illegal industries (Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015). Despite its far reaching effect and growing profitability, human trafficking only came to the forefront sixteen years ago when the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, also referred to as the Palermo Protocol. The Palermo Protocol created the first internationally accepted definition of human trafficking:
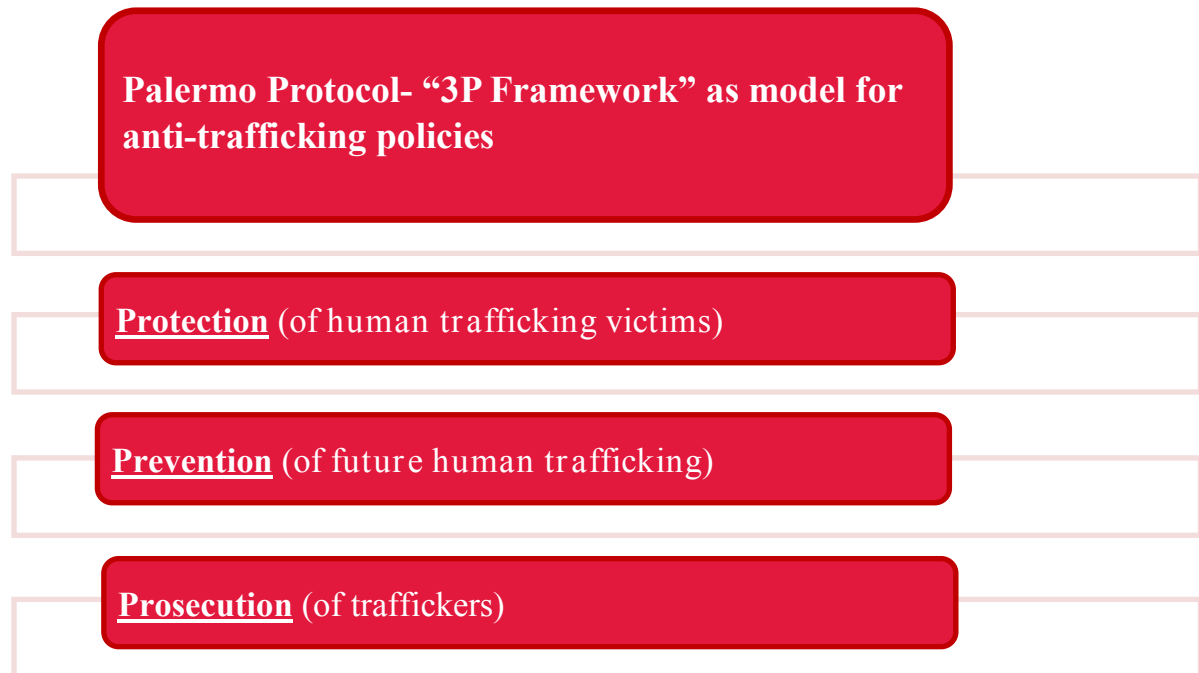
> "...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." (UN General Assembly, 2000, p. 2).

There is much general information on human trafficking including policies which address trafficking at the state, national, and global levels; however, not enough research exists to identify evidence-based practices to support victims of human trafficking. The bulk of the existing research is Western-centric and primarily focuses on the United States (U.S). There is also a heavy emphasis on child sex trafficking.

This research brief focuses on all types of human trafficking (i.e. sex and labor) in adult populations and attempts to synthesize the limited existing research.

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The Palermo Protocol uses what is called the "3P framework" to create a comprehensive anti-trafficking policy model (protection, prevention, and prosecution). The U.S. federal anti-trafficking law is modeled after this Palermo Protocol, and the U.S. Department of State considers the 3P framework to be a significant criterion in evaluating governments' efforts to combat trafficking in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report. Consequently, the 3P model is used as a uniform model across the globe and will thereby be used in this research brief to frame our discussion of current literature on best practices for service providers working with victims of human trafficking. Each of these sections below includes an overview of existing information, an outline of challenges encountered, and concludes with recommendations for best practices.

Sources: Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015; Polaris Project, n.d.; UN General Assembly, 2000; UNODC, 2014; U.S. Department of State, 2015; Yoo & Boyle, 2015

Palermo Protocol- "3P Framework" as model for anti-trafficking policies

Protection (of human trafficking victims)

Prevention (of future human trafficking)

Prosecution (of traffickers)

Protection

Protection refers to the varying policies and practices that exist to ensure that human trafficking victims are treated compassionately and receive trauma-informed and culturally relevant services. While the Palermo Protocol strives to create a comprehensive trafficking model, countries that have ratified the protocol are not legally mandated to provide services for victims of human trafficking. This policy gap creates a void in the research that identifies victims' needs created by being trafficked because services are not required to be offered to victims and evaluations of these services are not mandated. Within the research that exists, there is an emphasis on trauma-focused care for human trafficking victims. Trauma-focused care is unique in that it acknowledges the vulnerability of victims and the complex nature of the crime itself.

There are several principles that inform trauma-focused care. For one, practitioners should be non-judgmental during an intervention, which starts with avoiding assumptions about how trafficked individuals entered the work. Practitioners should also encourage victims to make choices at every possible opportunity as well as exhibit patience and empathy while interacting with human trafficking victims in order to avoid re-traumatization. Additionally, practitioners should demonstrate cultural sensitivity in terms of language and customs since many victims may have been moved across national borders. Service providers should be aware that most models of helping are based on Western modes of talk therapy and services; hence practitioners must be more flexible and open to victims' diverse needs and their cultural orientations. Misunderstandings can often result in exacerbating victims' sense of isolation and potentially re-victimization.

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Service providers should also be cognizant of the evolving needs of trafficking victims. For example, victims' exiting a trafficking situation may require services that meet their immediate needs, such as emergency shelter. Additional assistance that may be necessary in the short term includes accessing medical and dental services, reconnecting with families, and accepting mental health treatment. Over the long term, victims may benefit from resources such as assistance with housing, job and life skills training, continued safety and protection, and legal and immigration assistance. Victims may prioritize which services they prefer to access first, for example seeking medical attention and getting in touch with their families over receiving mental health treatment.

When assessing clients, practitioners should use trauma-informed practice techniques, ensuring that their clients' mental state is considered when determining treatment. Human trafficking victims often experience many different types of abuse that have a range of mental health consequences, including anxiety, depression, and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These disorders require individualized interventions and treatment plans, sustained mental health services, and collaboration with medical providers if pharmacotherapy is needed. Substance abuse is also prevalent within the population, which may develop while being trafficked or as a coping mechanism upon exiting and integrating back into society.

Research demonstrates that services for victims of human trafficking are often inadequate and inconsistent. One reason for this is that governments make victims' access to services contingent upon cooperation with law enforcement and participation in criminal proceedings, if needed. Human trafficking victims may be hesitant to comply with the criminal justice system for a range of reasons, including fear of being arrested or deported, concerns for their personal safety or the safety of their family, distrust of authority figures, or fear of being implicated for crimes that they were involved in during their trafficking experience.

> ***Human trafficking victims require individualized interventions and treatment plans, sustained mental health services, and collaboration with medical providers if pharmacotherapy is needed.***

Unfortunately, non-compliance may result in being deprived of access to government-based benefits, compensation, and visas. It is important to note, however, that many organizations may offer short and long-term services and support to human trafficking victims without requiring participation in criminal proceedings.

Another challenge includes the lack of evidence-based treatment models designed exclusively to assist victims of human trafficking. As a result, agencies often use services developed for victims of other types of trauma, such as domestic violence. However, human trafficking victims' needs may differ from those of domestic or interpersonal violence. For example, human trafficking victims may need extended housing assistance beyond what domestic violence or homeless shelters allow because they need more time transitioning from shelter to independent living. Thus, these models may not be adequately able to meet the needs of victims of trafficking.

Because of the varied nature of the services victims may require (i.e. physical and mental health care, law enforcement, housing, religious services, and public assistance), providers should be in communication with each other to ensure that broad categories of needs are accounted for and do not overlap. Indeed, with a lack of available funding for social services, agencies have a vested interest in working together to streamline services to avoid spending money on the same programs twice.

Given these challenges, in order to best serve human trafficking victims, comprehensive and culturally sensitive training is necessary. Service providers must account for the nuances of trauma and the complications a trafficking experience may bring, and agencies must understand how to collaborate and create holistic intervention plans to best serve their clients. Medical providers, staff in social service agencies, and law enforcement need more comprehensive training to identify signs of human trafficking and intervene while individuals are in their care. As the potential first point of contact with victims, proper training is particularly important for these professionals.

Sources: Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, 2011; Baker & Grover, 2013; Busch-Armendariz, Nsonwu & Heffron, 2011; Caliber, 2003; Caliber, 2007; Davies, 2007; Dovydaitis, 2010; Farrell, Owens, and McDevitt, 2014; Farrell & Pheffer, 2014; Freedom Network USA, 2012; Heffernan & Blythe, 2014; Hodge, 2015; President's I.T.F.T., 2015; Rand, 2015;

Training should include identifying of signs human trafficking, such as:
- **Victim appears unusually fearful of law enforcement**
- **Victim has few personal possessions (no money, no identification documents, etc.)**
- **A third party insists on answering questions and/or translating for victim**
- **Victim lacks knowledge about where they are staying or how long they have been there**

Prevention

Though the Palermo Protocol emphasizes prevention of human trafficking, the specific means of how to prevent it from occurring is not spelled out. Because legal definitions and cultural attitudes about what qualifies as human trafficking vary, countries' strategies for prevention differ. There are three main human trafficking prevention models used. The first model concentrates on prevention through law enforcement, criminalizing trafficking in an attempt to stop future incidences. Another common model frames prevention as enforcing migrants' rights, which includes protecting individuals from various types of labor exploitation. The third model focuses on basic human rights by framing trafficking as a violation of such rights.

Countries that use a law enforcement model consider trafficking to be an issue of national and international security. They tend to focus their prevention efforts on securing borders through severe national security measures. In this model, law enforcement agencies decide which victims will have access to benefits and services, primarily by linking these services into victim participation in the criminal investigation of their trafficker. Unfortunately, law enforcement officers often lack training and knowledge about human trafficking. Such law enforcement-based policies may negatively impact human trafficking victims by failing to appropriately identify human trafficking victims or revictimizing those they do identify.

For those countries or organizations that use the second model - emphasizing migrants' rights - their prevention efforts focus on labor trafficking. The focus that the migrants' rights perspective places on labor trafficking pulls attention away from human trafficking experiences that may include multiple types of trafficking. Additionally, this perspective emphasizes the need for movement across borders for an experience to be considered human trafficking and thus excludes stories about citizens who have been trafficked within their own communities.

On the other hand, prevention policies using the human rights perspective, the third model identified, tend to focus on the human rights of women and women's involvement in sex work and sex trafficking. This model was developed in the women's-rights-as–human-rights policy movement in the 1990s; this perspective purports that the human trafficking experiences of women are seen as human rights violations. The framework based on the human rights model shift focus away from men who have been trafficked and/or individuals who may have experienced labor trafficking.

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> *Prevention efforts have not yet found a coordinated approach to address all forms of human trafficking*

Each of these three models only examine the multi-faceted issue of preventing human trafficking from one perspective. These models exclude the participation of victims in prevention efforts. Prevention efforts have not yet found a coordinated approach to address all forms of human trafficking, nor do many prevention efforts include voices of human trafficking survivors in those prevention strategies.

Best practices within anti-trafficking prevention have not yet been identified, though research does discuss practices that have not worked well. Unfortunately, it is currently difficult to monitor anti-human trafficking models and to determine successful prevention mechanisms. Coordination of prevention strategies may yield more effective efforts.

Sources: Alvarez, M. B., & Alessi, E. J., 2012; Bruch, 2004; Farrell & Fahy, 2009; GAATW, 2007; Van Dijk, & Klerx-Van Mierlo, 2014

Prosecution

Identifying, arresting, and prosecuting traffickers are all aspects of the 'prosecution' arm of anti-trafficking policies. In this criminal justice framework, law enforcement and judiciary are the bridge between human trafficking victims and their access to services. Although victims of human trafficking need additional services, these needs are often subsumed under efforts to prosecute traffickers. Centering anti-trafficking efforts on criminal justice responses emphasizes criminal punishment as the main means of protection, prevention, and prosecution. This draws the attention and resources away from victims' services and intricately intertwines the arrests and convictions of traffickers with services for human trafficking victims. Victims' cooperation and testimony with law enforcement is typically needed during prosecution; this cooperation from victims greatly depends on the quality and consistency of services provided to them.

> *Trauma-focused care is unique in that it acknowledges the vulnerability of victims and the complex nature of the crime itself.*

Law enforcement officials, namely police patrol officers, are likely the first points of contact for victims of trafficking. However, research has shown that these individuals are not likely to have received training on how to best communicate and interact with human trafficking victims in ways that empower and encourage them to continue to cooperate with police.

Without providing proper skills to officers, victims can become revictimized and cease their communication and cooperation with law enforcement, thereby hindering the investigation and prosecution process and limiting their access to services.

Officials in law enforcement also lack training on how to identify human trafficking victims. Victims of human trafficking are a diverse population; to be able to identify human trafficking victims who might not show obvious signs of trauma are difficult tasks that require experience and knowledge trafficking.

> When developing policy interventions, countries should adopt a prevention model that recognizes all forms of human trafficking, and also create suitable resources for current human trafficking victims in order to prevent previous victims from being vulnerable to exploitation again.

Since victims are unlikely to identify themselves as such, it is crucial that law enforcement be able to appropriately screen and identify victims. Unfortunately, a lack of training leads law enforcement to rely on personal experiences or faulty perceptions. For example, as human trafficking becomes more known, media attention towards minor sex trafficking has created a barrier of misinformation in officers being trained to properly identify trafficking in adult victims, as media representations of human trafficking focus mostly on incidents of sex trafficking involved youth. Additionally, law enforcement officials are less likely to pursue human trafficking investigations because they may seem overly complex, fragile, time consuming, and lengthy.

> *Victims' cooperation and testimony with law enforcement is typically needed during prosecution; this cooperation from victims greatly depends on the quality and consistency of*

Studies focusing on prosecution of traffickers show that most countries that use a criminal justice approach, based on the Palermo Protocol, focus on the number of successful prosecution of traffickers rather than on the number of victims assisted. Thus, this approach has not decreased the number of human trafficking victims identified.

So far, there have been no prosecution practices proven to be successful. Researchers have recommended policies to place less emphasis on the prosecution of traffickers and more effort on providing training to police officers and other professionals who are likely to come into contact with victims. All of the suggestions in the literature are similar; they underscore the importance of victim-centered approaches, especially in prosecution procedures.

Sources: Barrick et al., 2014; Caliber, 2007; Clawson et al., 2009; De Leon, 2010; Farrell, Owens & McDevitt, 2014; Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014; Haynes, 2014; Hyland, 2001; Iroanya, 2011; Kaye, Winterdyk & Quarterman, 2014; Keo, Bouhours, T., Broadhurst & Bouhours, B. , 2014; Rietig, 2015; Sadruddin, 2005; Verhoeven & van Gestel, 2011; Weitzer, 2014; Zillah, 2011

> *Whether organizations share information, services or resources, they should be working together to offer comprehensive services to human trafficking victims.*

Conclusion

It is vital to acknowledge the interrelatedness between prosecution, protection, and prevention efforts. Those responsible for working in each of these areas should be working together to intertwine anti-trafficking efforts. Adequately protecting victims will help in preventing future human trafficking as well as aiding in the prosecution of individuals and groups who are responsible for trafficking.

Existing literature on human trafficking is vast but repetitive. Many studies focus on sex trafficking, rather than labor trafficking; a majority of the information available focuses on trafficking of minors instead of the trafficking experiences of adults. Researchers repeatedly seek to explore the breadth and depth of the issue; many studies reach two of same conclusions: First, service providers, law enforcement, or anyone who comes into contact with victims of human trafficking should receive proper training on:

- What human trafficking might look like,
- How to identify victims,
- How to interact/communicate with victims (empowering rather than revictimizing),
- The complexity of trauma that human trafficking victims experience,
- The multitude of interrelated immediate, short term and long term services that victims may need, and
- How to tailor interventions to human trafficking victims from a variety of cultures.

Second, services offered to victims are the most successful when service providers, governments, law enforcement, and physical and mental health providers collaborate. Whether organizations share information, services or resources, they should be working together to offer comprehensive services to human trafficking victims. Any anti-trafficking intervention has to be holistic and collaborative across agencies and disciplines. The intention is to increase knowledge on trafficking victim identification and comprehensive service provision, as well as to prevent future incidents of human trafficking and prosecute traffickers.

Recommendations in the literature also emphasize the importance of victim-centered approaches in protection, prevention and prosecution efforts. Incorporating the voices of human trafficking survivors into each of the "3Ps" will improve victims' well-being, decrease future trafficking and facilitate more effective prosecution procedures. Overall, service providers and law enforcement should open to victims' diverse needs and cultural orientations. Service providers and law enforcement should remain nonjudgmental and flexible when working with victims; they must be aware of the complications of complex trauma. Collaboration between organizations, agencies, and government bodies is essential in order to ensure that all victims' needs are being met, prevention strategies can be coordinated, and prosecution efforts are victim-centered. Being able to provide comprehensive and holistic services to victims is centered on collaboration and victim-centered care.

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