

Sex Trafficking In Coffee County, TN

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by

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Abstract:

In “The Geography of Trafficking in Tennessee 2013,” the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation ranked Coffee County as having had 100+ reported cases of adult and minor sex trafficking. This small rural county was accompanied in Tier 1 by the three largest metropolitan areas of the state: Davidson, Shelby, and Knox counties. Stunned by the amount of reported sex trafficking cases in Coffee County, I decided to investigate these claims. In order to gauge the awareness of sex trafficking in the county, I conducted face-to-face interviews with individuals in the county whose occupations put them in direct contact with at risk individuals. The occupations from which I conducted interviews were the Department of Children’s Services and the local law enforcement. There was a discrepancy between these two organization concerning the presence of sex trafficking in Coffee County.

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Thesis Statement

The primary objective of this thesis is to gauge the awareness of sex trafficking in Coffee County through the eyes of individuals whose occupations put them in direct contact with at risk individuals for sex trafficking. The second objective will be to investigate potential reasons that are causing such a large number of sex trafficking cases in Coffee County. Due to the lack of available quantitative research concerning the topic, I sought to achieve these objectives through the use of a qualitative research approach, which focused on acquiring this data through face-to-face guided interviews. Finally, solely based upon the results of this research, this paper provides commentary over the issue of sex trafficking from the individuals who personally work with the victims from sex trafficking cases, detailing their opinions regarding the crime in Coffee County, Tennessee. This paper is designed to provide a voice for the individuals who composed the statistics found in both of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's sex trafficking reports.

### **Introduction**

Personally, human trafficking emerged as a major issue during the Passion Conference 2013 in Atlanta, Georgia. During that conference, it was announced that there was an estimated 27 million slaves in the world at that time, the most slaves at one time in recorded history. Astonished by the news that was just announced, the entire arena fell into a silence of disbelief. How could this be true? If there are more humans enslaved right now than at any other time in recorded

history, than why have I never heard this before? If this is true, then why is this issue not being covered by the mainstream media? Suddenly, I awoke from my disbelief and felt compelled to better understand the issue in order to make a difference. I decided it was time to change that statistic, and I felt that the change should begin with me.

The Passion Conference decided to give the 60,000 college students a way to help raise awareness to this issue of “modern day slavery.” That year in the Atlanta Dome, the *End It Movement* was created. The result was not just another individual organization to fight human trafficking; instead, the *End It Movement* wanted to raise awareness to the truth of human trafficking and through that awareness provide interested individuals the opportunity to partner with anti-trafficking organizations such as *Polaris Project*, the *A-21 Campaign*, and *Not For Sale*. The theme of the *End It Movement*, “Shine a Light on Slavery,” truly epitomized its desire to bring the evil of human trafficking to the surface of the public knowledge.

This past fall I read the TBI’s report, “The Geography of Trafficking in Tennessee 2013.” While I read the report, I discovered that the TBI had researched the amounts of sex trafficking in each county of Tennessee. At the conclusion of their research, it ranked each county into tiers based on the number of reported cases of sex trafficking. Suddenly, I was filled with the same feeling of disbelief that filled the Atlanta Dome two years prior, because as I read the list

of counties in Tier 1, which consisted of the counties with over 100 reported cases of minor sex trafficking, I found an unexpected county. Classified in the same group as the metropolitan areas of Tennessee: Davidson, Shelby, and Knox counties was the surprising name of a small rural area, Coffee County. I was especially astounded, because before transferring to Middle Tennessee State University, I essentially spent all of my time in Coffee County.

#### Literature Review

Slavery still exists today in the form of human trafficking. There are an estimated 27 million individuals being exploited in the world today (Bales, 2004, pg.8). Of that 27 million, a large portion is being sexually exploited. As of 2008, there were at least two million children being exploited in the international sex trade (Fong & Cardoso, 2010, p. 311). Unfortunately, The United States is a destination country for human trafficking. Each year, there are an estimated 17,500 to 50,000 women and children trafficked to the U.S. Of that possible amount of 50,000 women and children trafficked into the U.S., 35%, or 17,500, are children trafficked for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation (Hart, 2012).

For traffickers, the younger the age of an individual the more profitable, because the average age of a trafficked girl is 12 to 14 years old. Perhaps even more disturbing is the fact that on average, the age of a trafficked boy is even younger (Reid, 2010). Although there are large numbers of children who are sold into slavery, there is another route taken that unknowingly leads children into sex

slavery, leaving home for the purpose of not returning. According to End Slavery Tennessee, 33% of runaway children will be sexually exploited within the first 48 hours of their departure from home. In the long term, it is estimated that 90% of all runaway children in the United States of America will eventually be introduced into sexual slavery. The average life of a sex slave in the United States, whether the victim is an adult or a minor, will last on average for seven years, once introduced into the industry (End Slavery Tennessee, 2015).

When analyzing from a regional perspective, the Southeast becomes the primary focus in order to show interconnectedness between Tennessee and other states in the region. When deciding which state to compare to Tennessee, the state of Georgia was an obvious choice. The comparison is achievable due to the elevated rates of trafficking found in both states. Georgia has been ranked as the state with the largest sex trafficking numbers in the region, and this ranking is particularly due to the amount of trafficking found in Georgia's largest metropolitan city, Atlanta. The sex trade is a large problem in Atlanta; as it is ranked as one of the top 14 cities in the United States for this crime (Belt, 2014). The sex industry in Atlanta finds its main concentration in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and it is most prevalent among various ethnic populations.

The two primary areas of the Atlanta sex industry occurs in brothels and through the street and online venues. Atlanta brothels are comprised mostly of a particular ethnic group, illegal female Mexican immigrants. Enticed by the



promises of affection and economic support, these females can be groomed for trafficking over a period of time lasting several months before they are actually smuggled into America. Once they have been smuggled, they are then forced to work in these brothels; usually, each individual is required to provide sexual service to numerous Johns in a day. A common quota of \$500 daily, equates to a single victim servicing at least fifteen Johns a day. These brothels are highly organized and structured, operating in connection with brothels throughout the state and country. In fact, brothels actually switch the victims with different brothels within the network on a weekly basis in order to provide their Johns with a variety of different victims (Dank, 2014, p. 122-129).

Another prominent area of sex trafficking is through the street and online venues. This area of the sex industry relies mostly on connections, through organizational crime such as the drug trade or websites such as Craigslist and Backpage. Despite the fact that the victims of street and internet trafficking are women and children, there is also evidence of the presence of male victims used in the venue. Sex trafficking has strong links to other organized crime, such as gangs, weapons, and drug trade, throughout the Southeast, extending into Tennessee (Dank, 2014, p. 122-129).

As a focus on sex trafficking moves from the regional level to the state level, Tennessee becomes an intriguing case study. In 2011, 78 of Tennessee's 95 counties reported at least one case of human trafficking (Quin, Merritt, Garner, &

Robinson, 2011, p. 16). Although sex trafficking has appeared throughout the majority of counties in Tennessee, the TBI's 2013 follow up report indicated that there were four primary counties which held elevated amounts of sex trafficking; one in West Tennessee, two in Middle Tennessee, and one in East Tennessee. Tennessee's geographical location within the Southern United States provides a desirable means of transportation for traffickers. Because of the state's central location in the Southern United States, which allows it to directly touch eight other states: Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee has an elaborate interstate system that provides key direct routes between large population centers. For example, Tennessee provides interstates that run from Nashville to Atlanta, Indianapolis to Birmingham, and Dallas to Memphis. These various interstates allow for traffickers to enter and exit Tennessee extremely effectively as a connector from the Southwest to the Northeast and the Southeast to the Midwest. This has led to Tennessee becoming a prime location for transit trafficking (End Slavery Tennessee, 2015).

In an attempt to curb the rates of sex trafficking, in 2011, Tennessee changed its state legislation, allowing for the merge of both its prostitution and its child sex trafficking laws, which protect minors from ever being charged as the criminal. In order for this to operate effectively, this new legislation relies heavily on the participation of three groups: Law Enforcement, Department of Children

Services (DCS), and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Essentially the first responders, law enforcement is potentially the most important organization in detecting sex trafficking. The new child sex trafficking law entrusts the majority of identifying potentially exploited individuals to law enforcement, making law enforcement's detection and action critical for preventing sex trafficking. Upon detection, law enforcement is hindered under the new law, because an officer who encounters a potentially trafficked minor is only allowed to: First, submit a potential human trafficking report. Secondly, provide the minor with the National Human Trafficking Hotline. They are merely permitted to assist in these two ways, because there is a lack of protocol concerning the actions of the officer upon detection of a potential victim of sex trafficking. With no official statutory mechanisms, law enforcement are neither granted the authority to detain the victim nor connect the minor to a state agency or service organization. Without these critical following steps, victims are more likely to return to their trafficker than to call the hotline (Shared Hope International, 2015, p. 21-25).

Likewise, the Department of Children's Services (DCS) lacks proper jurisdiction to treat victims of sex trafficking, due to a fault in the language of the law. DCS is only allowed to treat victims who have been exploited by family members; this allows most trafficked minors to slip through untreated, despite having been reported to DCS. However, there has been a solution to this problem, in Tennessee. The population of victims that the DCS has been prevented from

treating has found rehabilitation through the informal protocols between the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), specifically Anti-Trafficking Organizations (Shared hope International, 2015, p. 21-25).

In 2012, in an effort to address the issue, Tennessee filed Public Chapter No. 963 (Senate Bill 2370) demanding the Department of Human Services in collaboration with five other state agencies to formulate legislation that would provide services to the population of sex trafficking victims that are outside the jurisdiction of the DCS. The six goals of Public Chapter 963 were to: 1) Improve identification of victims, 2) Identify community based services, 3) Help victims discover the available services, 4) Lead the creation of services, 5) Provide training to improve awareness of human trafficking, and 6) Assist with reconnecting victims to their families. The plan that was developed from Public Chapter 963, emphasizes making DCS the main contact point to receive reports of abuse for both trafficking and non-trafficking; however, it also emphasizes the importance of public-private partnerships with NGOs. Despite the recognized importance between public and private cooperation, legislation provided no financial provision for NGOs (Shared Hope International, 2015, p. 21-25).

According to the TBI's "The Geography of Trafficking in Tennessee 2013," Coffee County has over 100 reported cases of minor and adult human trafficking. With a total population of 52,344, Coffee County is the only rural

county in the state with over 100 cases of minor sex trafficking, interestingly enough, there are also four Department of Children Services Group Homes in the county. Demographics that point to the sex trafficking occurring in Coffee County include the large poverty rate among minors in the area and the high amount of methamphetamine usage in the area. (Quin, Tedford, Robinson, 2013, p.11).

The data collected by the TBI has been supplemented by a couple of recently reported cases in the Middle Tennessee area. In Manchester (Coffee County, TN), a male and female were arrested and later charged for “pimping out” the female’s daughter in exchange for crack cocaine. The female is believed to have participated in the sexual abuse against her own daughter. Additionally, the male has been charged with seven accounts of statutory rape against the daughter. The girl was thirteen and fourteen years old at the time of the exploitation. Both the male and female have been convicted and began their twenty year prison sentences on July 9, 2014 (WGNS Radio, 2014). Another case comes from neighboring Franklin County, where a male and female have been charged with “promotion of prostitution charges” and “trafficking for a commercial sex act and drug charges.” Authorities became suspicious when they saw an unusual numbers of individuals frequenting a Winchester “Days Inn” hotel (Wilson, 2014).

## Rationale

Based on the research presented by the TBI, Coffee County has an abnormally high amount of sex trafficking in its jurisdiction for a rural county (Quin, Tedford, Robinson, 2013, p.11). Because of this, one of the objectives of this thesis project was to investigate the possible reasons that are causing the high amount of cases in Coffee County. Because of the high amount of reported trafficking cases in the area, the second and primary objective of this thesis project was to gauge the awareness of sex trafficking from those whose occupation place them in direct contact with individuals who are at risk of sex trafficking. Due to the inadequate amount of quantitative research concerning the issue, I accomplished my objectives through a qualitative approach, which focused on acquiring information through guided interviews.

## **Methodology**

### Participants

Participants were interviewed in order to gauge their knowledge of and experience working with cases of sex trafficking. The desired list of participants came from a compilation of careers in Coffee County, such as law enforcement, social service providers, and anti-trafficking organizations. It was preferred that participants lived and worked in Coffee County. Although only a few participants were willing to participate in the study, their interviews provide insight into the

occurrence of sex trafficking in Coffee County and the possible reasons for the high amount of reported cases. Because of the qualitative format of the study and the successfulness of the interviews, it was unnecessary to interview individuals from similar field from surrounding counties, as previously thought; this provided the study with the unique opportunity to focus solely on the issue in Coffee County.

To begin, I chose participants specifically based on their likelihood of encountering individuals who are at a greater risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking in their career field. The specific career fields that I chose for the pool of participants included participants from: Law Enforcement, Education, DCS, Faith Based Organizations, and Non-profit Organizations.

Before contacting participants, I received IRB approval. Upon receiving the necessary IRB approval, I began the process of recruiting participants. My first contact was with law enforcement in Coffee County. Law Enforcement was actually the most helpful and willing to be interviewed regarding sex trafficking in the county. Interviewing law enforcement officers was crucial to my thesis, because of the unique position they have in the community. They interact with individuals committing violent crimes and trafficking drugs; these interactions provide law enforcement with an opportune position, sometimes unknowingly, to encounter traffickers, victims, and the Johns involved with sex trafficking. Additionally, these interviews were especially important because they provided

direct interaction with individuals from a department that consisted of respondents to the TBI's report "The Geography of Sex Trafficking 2013."

The participants from law enforcement who were interviewed were the Sheriff of Coffee County and the Chief of Police for the Tullahoma Police Department. The list of potential law enforcement participants were chosen due to their status in law enforcement in my area of research and also upon the recommendation of a current law enforcement officer whom I personally know through my home church in Tullahoma, TN. The first attempt at contact was made through a phone call to the Tullahoma City Police Chief. On the initial phone call, the Chief was informed on the design for my thesis, and he agreed to participate in an interview. Upon contacting the Chief later, he disclosed that he is a member of the Governor's Task Force on Human Trafficking.

In addition to the Police Chief of Tullahoma, I attempted to contact the Coffee County Sheriff. After several unsuccessful attempts of contacting him were made, I left my name, contact number, and a brief description of my thesis on his voicemail. When I finally succeeded in reaching an individual at the Sheriff's Department, it was not the Sheriff with whom I spoke; however, I had spoken to a captain at the department, and after further explanation of the purpose and design of my thesis, he arranged an interview with the Sheriff for me.

The most difficult group to contact was the Department of Children Services. Initially, I was informed that I would need to obtain permission from the



DCS State Office in Nashville before I could contact anyone from the Tullahoma DCS office. When I attempted to contact the main DCS office in Nashville, I left a voicemail for a DCS supervisor; I was later contacted by that DCS supervisor, and was asked that I provide further information concerning my project. After I had explained my project more thoroughly and assured her that I had received IRB approval, I was informed that I would need to complete an additional approval process through DCS before I would be allowed to interview caseworkers. Due to the time constraints of my project, this effort was not undertaken.

However, several months later, I came to the realization that an interview with a DCS case worker was absolutely essential to my project, because DCS employees comprised a large majority of the respondents for TBI's two sex trafficking reports. Because of this realization, I revitalized my attempts to arrange an interview with a DCS caseworker. This time I began by contacting the regional office in Columbia, TN; I was informed that an interview was simply dependent upon the caseworker, and there was not any special IRB approval through DCS required. Ecstatic upon hearing this, I immediately contacted a DCS caseworker from Coffee County, and through several emails, we were able to arrange an interview.

## Procedures

The primary resources that were used for this thesis were four interviews with employees from the Department of Children Services, the Coffee County Sheriff's Department, the Tullahoma Police Department, and a native of Coffee County whose background in law enforcement provided her with a unique perspective of the organization. The interviews for this thesis were structured but allowed for some flexibility. The participants were subjected to a predetermined list of interview questions; however, the hope was that the questions would merely be a guide into deeper conversations. The length of the interviews varied from 10-30 minutes, dependent upon the participant. Participation was completely voluntary, and the participant had the ability to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. The information acquired from these interviews was collected through the transcriptions from support staff, who were identified by my thesis advisor. Upon obtaining the information from the interviewing process, the data was then analyzed through content analysis.

The first step in attempting to obtain willing participants in the education system, I chose to contact The Coffee County School Board of Education, the Director of Coffee County Schools, the Manchester City School Board, the Tullahoma City School Board of Education, as well as the Director of Tullahoma City Schools.

The decision to interview individuals whose occupations are in education was rooted in the fact that those professionals have direct contact with one of the most at risk groups, minors. Because of their daily interaction with minors, it is important that educators are informed of the prevalence of sex trafficking cases occurring within their county, of the potential warning signs of victims of sex trafficking, and of the necessary actions that should be taken after recognition of a possible victim of sex trafficking.

I had less success in contacting representatives of the school system via telephone. I decided to send an email detailing my thesis and asking for participation of teachers and principals from the three Boards of Education in Coffee County: Tullahoma City Schools (K-12), Manchester City Schools (K-5), and Coffee County Schools (6-12). I sent the email to every member of each school board, and the results from those emails had varied results. I never received a reply from any of the twelve total board members from the Manchester City School System nor the Coffee County School System. However, I did receive a reply from a representative from the Tullahoma School System. Upon further explanation of both the intent of my thesis and my desire to interview both principals and teachers because of their interaction with at risk individuals, he agreed to help me by sending the prospectus of my thesis to the principals of the schools. When he replied to my email, he informed me that he had sent the prospectus out to his principals, but they had not responded.

The individuals from faith based organizations that I intended to interview were the Director of Missions for the Duck River Baptist Organization, the head pastor at Rutledge Falls Baptist Church, the head pastor at First Baptist Church of Manchester, and the head pastor at First Baptist Church Tullahoma. Interview with ministers from faith based organizations would have been valuable because of the various community programs which their churches operate; these programs seek to foster mutually beneficial relationships between the church and the community. These programs often involve direct contact with individuals from low income communities who are at a greater risk of sex trafficking, such opportunities include: clothes closets, food pantries, and Wednesday night children bus programs. Also, involvement of faith based organizations would have been valuable because they could participate as an invaluable medium in which information concerning the issue of sex trafficking could be disseminated in order to raise awareness to the issue in the county.

When I contacted the Director of Missions for the Duck River Baptist Association, he stated that he had briefly heard, through a major Nashville news station, that Coffee County had elevated amounts of reported sex trafficking cases; however, that was over a year ago and he had not heard anything about the issue since. He declined an interview simply because he did not have any further knowledge about sex trafficking in Coffee County and believed that it would not benefit my study for him to be interviewed. Since he was not knowledgeable

about the occurrence of sex trafficking in the county, he told me that the pastors from the churches within the association would be just as ignorant of the issue, if not more; therefore, attempts to schedule interviews with the pastors were not pursued further. When asked if he would be willing to have the Duck River Baptist Association act as the medium for raising awareness to sex trafficking, he said that he would be willing to do so; however, he stated that he would not be able until there were quantitative statistics concerning the issue.

There were two non-profit organizations whom were contacted concerning acquiring potential participants for interviews. These two organizations were End Slavery TN and Coffee County Children's Advocacy Center. The first organization End Slavery TN, ESTN, which is an anti-trafficking organization, was chosen for several reasons. First, it has been the leading organization to address the issue of sex trafficking in Tennessee. It has accomplished this through: raising awareness of the issue of sex trafficking in the state, they play an important role with helping the Tennessee State Legislature to create laws which help to prevent sex trafficking in the state, they provide services for victims of sex trafficking, caring for them and helping them with the adjustment back into society, and most recently, they have begun a concerted effort to assist law enforcement with the prosecution of traffickers. ESTN was also chosen because of a connection with the leader for the Brentwood volunteer group, and also

because they are the only anti-trafficking organization that has a presence in Coffee County.

When contact was made with ESTN, I was informed that due to the high quantity of similar interview requests made to the organization, I would be unable to conduct an interview with an employee. Additionally, I was informed that normally the ESTN intern would be able to answer my questions; however, the intern had just left the organization, and the new intern, would be unable to answer my questions.

The second organization was Coffee County Children's Advocacy Center (CCCAC), a non-profit organization whose mission is to serve children who have suffered from abuse through prevention, education, and intervention. The CCCAC was selected because of its familiarity with cases concerning abuse of children. The individual selected to be interviewed from the CCCAC was the Executive Director of the organization. Following several attempts to schedule an interview with the Executive Director, an interview was unable to be conducted due to various reasons. Because of this, I was told that my questions would be answered through email; upon sending a questionnaire to the Executive Director, there was never a reply which provided answers to those questions.

## Apparatus

The necessary equipment used in order to record and then represent the obtained information was a voice recorder and administration support to transcribe. Included in the apparatus was the predetermined list of questions from which the participants were interviewed. Dr. Darby provided me with an interview role playing scenario. During this time, not only did I have the opportunity to practice asking the questions from the list, but this activity also presented the chance to review and edit the determined questions based on relevance. One of the revisions that were made included, identifying questions that were only relevant from an “if yes, then” scenario. Also, there were two questions in the Community Based Knowledge section in which two sentences appeared to be redundant; however, instead of deleting one of the sentences, they were combined in order to form a defined question. The major revision to the questionnaire was the addition of the emphasis placed on awareness. This was achieved through simple wording changes, such as “Do you know... to Are you aware...” Another outcome of this revision was the order in which the questions in order to gauge the individual’s awareness of sex trafficking; the questions would be ordered in such a way that the participant would be asked their formative opinion of sex trafficking and at the end of the interview the individuals would be asked their summative opinion of sex trafficking.

## **Results**

### Interviews

The first interview conducted was with the Sheriff of Coffee County. He has been with the department for thirty-two years, working his way through the ranks. Through his occupation as Sheriff, he has interactions with women, youth, and minorities at risk of sex trafficking; in fact, during his time with the Coffee County Sheriff Department, there was a seven year period in which he worked as an investigator for all of the child's abuse sex crimes in Coffee County. The sheriff has also received professional training on how to handle a suspected case of sex trafficking. He received this training through the Donelson Police Academy's Child's Sex Abuse and Drug Trafficking Program.

The Coffee County Sheriff's Department's protocol begins by receiving confirmation from individuals that they have been a victim of sex trafficking. If the individual is a minor, the officer must then contact departments that can help the victim such as the Department of Children's Services and Coffee County's Assistant District Attorney who is on the Child Protective Intervention Team. After both sources have been notified, the team meets in order to decide the best course of action that would benefit the minor. However, in a sex trafficking case involving an adult, there seems to be no precise protocol of how to handle the situation. There is not an entity that they contact directly. Instead the police department investigates and attempts to help the adult victim to the best of their



abilities with the limited resources that are at their disposal. He mentions that a different team is comprised in order to investigate a potential case of adult trafficking, but reiterates that the police department's first priority is to protect the adult victim as well. He said that the cases that are worked often involve social media outlets. Adult victims are allowed access to a homeless shelter, which will provide the victim with necessities, such as shelter, food, and protection.

The Sheriff has lived in Coffee County for fifty-seven years, and has worked for the sheriff's department for thirty-two years. He defines sex trafficking as, "Putting someone in a position to be prostituted out... whether it be by force or by coercion." He continues on to say, "That most instances involve outlets, such as Backpage or Craigslist, except for a few instances in one of the cities in which a family member was prostituting out a minor child." (Later during the second interview the police chief confirms that there was only one case in which this occurred in Tullahoma). However, he finishes by saying, "that those instances are very few and far between in this county." He did not directly answer question 10, "Do you think that sex trafficking is a serious issue in Coffee County?" by saying that one case is one too many; however, he did also say that he disagrees with the numbers presented in the TBI's survey. After rephrasing the question to him as, "Is sex trafficking prominent in the area?" He responded with, "I do not know. The majority of cases that we see are advertisements and people are brought to this area." When asked how he felt about the TBI ranking Coffee

County among the three metropolitan areas of the state in regards to sex trafficking, he responded: “They need to start sharing those victims’ names so that we can get them help, and the Police Chiefs feel the same way that we do; we are not seeing those numbers... There has to be better reporting so we can help those people if these numbers are true.”

The second interview that was conducted was with the Police Chief of Tullahoma, one of the two major towns in Coffee County. Given his prior knowledge of sex trafficking, especially his position on the Governor’s Anti-Trafficking Board, the police chief had a better understanding of the definition between sex trafficking and prostitution. He mentioned specifically that the main difference between the two crimes is that sex trafficking involves a victim who is forced to perform the sexual act through means of coercion or threat. He provided signs for detecting victims of sex trafficking as: not having any personal identification, not having spending money, nor having the ability to come and go as they please. He referred to human trafficking, of which sex trafficking is an offshoot, as an “enterprise” and quoted the TBI as stating that human trafficking is the most lucrative criminal enterprise second to gun running. He then verified his previous statement by saying that human trafficking is even more lucrative than drugs. Afterwards, he continued to support this claim by explaining how a drug can only be used once, but a victim of human trafficking and guns can be

used numerous times. He further explained that human trafficking has a broader context than just sex trafficking, citing forced labor and indentured servants.

He then said that between the publications of the two TBI reports, the TBI added sex trafficking and forced labor to the annual crime reports. He then states that because of these two additional sources, the contradiction between law enforcement reports which indicate 0 cases and other reports that indicate there are 100+ cases are clearly evident. He blamed poor communication between law enforcement and other organizations for this obvious contradiction in statistics, and stated that his role of being on the advisory committee is focused on improving communication between law enforcement, DCS, and non-profit organizations. When speaking about the information that law enforcement needs in order to prosecute sex trafficking in the county, he said that law enforcement does not necessarily need information concerning the victims but the criminals. “We do not want to know names... we want to know details of the bad guy; we want to catch the bad guy.” The Tullahoma Police Chief indicated that often the organizations who work with victims of sex trafficking, such as DCS, are so protective of the case’s information that they will not provide law enforcement with the necessary information needed to investigate and arrest the trafficker.

He indicated that the main reason for miscommunication between the organizations is the lack of protocol that specifies how the communication should occur; he said that it is because of this miscommunication of sex trafficking cases

that prevents law enforcement from being able to investigate. When asked about the survey, which was the way in which the statistics for the TBI's report was collected, the police chief said, "I do not ever remember getting a survey, yet at the time we are recorded as replying to the survey." He then added, "We (Tullahoma Police) are a small department and those types of things usually come to my desk; someone else does not fill that kind of stuff out. So I am not sure where the data came from." Further confirming his belief that there are not any cases of sex trafficking in Coffee County, the police chief said that if someone were to ask him if he believed there was a trafficking problem that he would say, "No, there is not." He also confidently stated that if another study was enacted Coffee County would not be listed among the counties with sex trafficking cases, especially not being represented as having 100+ cases. He further verified his belief by stating that since the publication of the TBI report, there have been FBI/TBI agents and NGO's that have searched for areas within Coffee County that could facilitate sex trafficking; he assured me that none of these individuals have found any such areas. Despite his firm belief that sex trafficking is not occurring in Coffee County, he states that he is still in favor of increasing sex trafficking education among law enforcement, in order to prepare them in how to handle a possible case of sex trafficking.

The third interview that was conducted was with a lifelong resident of Coffee County; who has had sixteen years of experience working for the MTSU

police department and will soon begin working for the Department of Children Services in Coffee County. This individual was unaware of the existence of the “TBI’s The Geography of Sex Trafficking in TN 2013”; however, she did mention that she had heard that Coffee County was reported to have large numbers of individuals in sex trafficking, and stated that, “It is horrifying to think that in that small quiet little area; I am interested in finding out too.” When asked her definition of sex trafficking, she provided an adequate definition highlighting key topics such as: the use of coercion or harm and sexual act that is provided in exchange for substance or protection.

While discussing the finding of the report, she asked, “Do they know where they (reported cases) are from?” This question highlights another important unanswered aspect of the report; are these reported cases domestic or transit cases of sex trafficking? While discussing the TBI’s inability to provide the exact number of reported sex trafficking cases in Coffee County, she discloses her opinion that a lot of what the TBI does is to merely “satisfy the federal number crunchers;” she has formed this opinion based on her own experience of being the TYBERS Coordinator for the MTSU police department, in which she has had to go through all of police reports for the university for sixteen years and report her findings to the TBI. She stated that she believes that the TBI did not receive their information from the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TYBRS) database, which does not have a category for law enforcement to report sex

trafficking. She then informs me that there is a national system called NYBRS, into which all of the states' reports are funneled. These are used by the federal government to disseminate funds back to law enforcement at the state level. Because of this position, she asserts that she has been able to "see behind the curtain" and insists that "the TBI caters to federal dollars in the statistics that they capture and the way they portray the numbers for statistics that they want." However, she reassures that she would not suggest that they falsified information, but she cites that if an individual knows data bases, there are different methods to have the database provide different numbers based on different criteria. She then said that she would be interested to find out exactly where the TBI has received the reported sex trafficking cases and from where they are being reported.

The fourth interview was especially important because of the individual's occupation; she is a family social worker for the Department of Children's Services in Coffee County, TN. She has lived just fifteen minutes outside of Coffee County in a small town called Estill Springs for almost thirty years. She had an extensive sixteen career in law enforcement before joining DCS, and she has now been with the organization for a total of four years. She spent her first two years as an investigator before transferring to social services in order to work with foster care children. She described her definition of sex trafficking as, "When they recruit kids and start prostituting them out at a young age." Despite this definition not being very detailed, this is a good definition for sex trafficking

because the State of Tennessee passed legislation that states any prostitution cases which involve minors are in fact cases of sex trafficking.

When asked if she had professional training over the recognition of sex trafficking and how to handle it, she responded, "Not technically." However, she continued by saying that she had received a couple of hours of training through the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's course on sex trafficking. Included in that training was how to recognize sex trafficking and what to expect if in fact it was a case of sex trafficking. When asked about some of the signs to look for in a possible case of sex trafficking, she explained through a case that she is currently working in which a twelve year old girl is "sexting," sending and receiving sexually explicit photographs, with a nineteen year old male. Although this is not a case of sex trafficking at the moment, she described how it could easily become sex trafficking because traffickers begin to groom their victims in a similar fashion. Once there is a verified case of sex trafficking, a DCS caseworker will contact the sex trafficking division of the TBI. However, in the aforementioned underage "sexting" case, there has not been any evidence to suggest that any sex trafficking has occurred yet, so the DCS caseworker is in contact with local law enforcement. She says that when she is handling a sex trafficking case, she "cuts out the middle man, local law enforcement, and contacts TBI directly because she knows that is where the case would end up eventually anyway. Finally, once TBI has been contacted after a verified case of sex trafficking, the next step in the

process is contacting End Slavery Tennessee in which the victim will be placed in a “lockdown” rehabilitation center in Nashville, and ESTN will meet with the victim several times a week in order to establish a relationship with the victim in order to foster optimal possible rehabilitation.

When I had informed the case worker that both the Coffee County Sheriff's Department and the Tullahoma City Police Department said that there had only been one verified case of sex trafficking in Coffee County, the case worker began to laugh, and suggested that perhaps the law enforcement had told me that because of their ignorance of the situation in the county. The ignorance not being any fault of their own because the DCS directly contacts and works with the TBI, and local law enforcement is only involved in the case at the discretion of the TBI. On the other hand, she suggested that perhaps law enforcement has more information concerning the case but just did not want to give me all of their information. She then began to tell me about how all the cases in the area seem to be linked. Apparently, the individuals who have been trafficked in the area are also being used to recruit other victims as well. Also, the use of social media, such as Backpage, was once again cited as a primary avenue in which victims are trafficked. She discussed a significant correlation between the drug trade and sex trafficking in the area; she specifically mentioned that the victims are forcefully addicted to drugs in order to become dependent upon the trafficker. Not only has social media outlets been used for sex trafficking purposes in Coffee County but



also, there is the presence of transit trafficking because there have been specific cases in which the trafficker will take the victim to other cities and states to be trafficked.

When asked if she believed sex trafficking was a serious issue in Coffee County, TN, she declared, “Yeah, definitely, because there is a lot more of it going on than people realize; I mean unfortunately Coffee County is one of the biggest areas outside of Nashville (for sex trafficking).” She also added that sex trafficking has become one of the largest crimes, second to the presence of methamphetamines, in Coffee County. Despite her reassuring me that sex trafficking is a serious issue in Coffee County, she was unable to provide me with statistics that could verify this assumption. The inability to acquire statistics over sex trafficking in the area has been present throughout the entire thesis process. Continuing with the interview, the caseworker assured me that most of the cases are domestic trafficking, individuals recruiting victims from the same community, and then trafficking within that same community.

Suspected sex trafficking victims are transported by DCS through cooperation with the TBI to the Coffee County Children’s Advocacy Center which performs forensic interviews with the victims. Although the TBI will begin to question the victims, she said that CCCAC is the beginning of the interview process because the forensic interviews are more detailed. This is the time in which the victim is questioned concerning what has occurred, asked about the

traffickers' names, etc. Also, the CCCAC provides services such as forensic medical exams to collect evidence and possible placements for the rehabilitation of the victims.

Despite the elevated amount of sex trafficking reported by the TBI, there are no awareness programs in Coffee County for either students or community members. The caseworker expressed her desire to see an awareness program brought into the school system to warn students of the dangers of sex trafficking. She also referenced a community awareness project that had taken place in Nashville, and how she would like to see a similar awareness project brought to Coffee County. This identifies an excellent question; if an area has been identified as having an elevated amount of sex trafficking, why has there not been any efforts made to raise awareness in that area?

#### Discussion

Both the Coffee County Sheriff and the Tullahoma Police Chief assured me that they are unaware of any incidents of sex trafficking occurring within Coffee County, with the exception of one confirmed case of sex trafficking. Local law enforcement's disbelief of Coffee County's Tier 1 ranking in the TBI's 2013 report is founded in the large discrepancy between the two sides' opinions of the occurrence of sex trafficking in the area. However, there was an even greater sense of frustration from the officers caused by the apparent lack of communication between the two organizations in Coffee County. This frustration

is due to law enforcement's desire to prosecute traffickers and protect citizens from being victimized; unfortunately, this act of justice has been largely neglected. The publication of the two TBI reports has led to the addition of two vital categories to the annual state crime reports: sex trafficking and forced labor.

The lack of awareness demonstrated by local law enforcement was described as "ignorance" by the DCS caseworker. She assured me that sex trafficking is a serious issue and explained its complexity in Coffee County. To begin, the local traffickers identify potential victims within the county, specifically minors in the school system. Once identified, these individuals are groomed/recruited in order to bring them into the structured criminal system. After the completion of the recruitment phase, the victims are then trafficked both domestically and to other cities/states. Another crucial question is the discrepancy between TBI and local law enforcement. This question was potentially answered by the DCS caseworker as she stated that DCS directly contacts TBI when dealing with a suspected case of sex trafficking. This would help to provide a creditable explanation for this large discrepancy.

This poor communication between the two organizations has allowed for two separate realities of the issue in the same small town. On one side, there is local law enforcement who is oblivious to the crime occurring around them. They are unequipped to identify potential sex trafficking victims due to the lack of education provided. This unawareness has made them ineffective in addressing

the issue, preventing them from investigating and prosecuting the traffickers. Whereas on the other side, there is DCS who is better equipped to identify potential victims of sex trafficking. This has not only made them aware to the occurrence of sex trafficking in the area, but it has also made them effective in addressing the issue through protection and rehabilitation of the victims.

### Conclusion

The naiveté of the citizens of Coffee County on the issue of sex trafficking in their county is reminiscent of my own naiveté to the global issue of sex trafficking before the Passion Conference in 2013. The idea that this could never happen here is precisely one of the reasons that enables the crime to flourish unnoticed in a small rural area; however, this mentality only assists some already established geographical factors that make Coffee County naturally attractive to this crime. First, Coffee County has direct access to Interstate 24; even more compelling is the fact that the county is located almost directly between Nashville and Atlanta, with Atlanta being one of the largest centers for sex trafficking in the United States. Secondly, there are various truck stops and motels that line the interstate surrounding Coffee County. Thirdly, Coffee County has an elevated amount of methamphetamines usage. Finally, there are six DCS offices within a 50 mile radius of each other.

One of the most discouraging discoveries of my research was the discrepancy between the data that the TBI had published and the lack of data that

the local law enforcement reported. The plausible answer to this problem was provided through the interview with the DCS caseworker who told me that they work directly with TBI; the local law enforcement is only involved at the discretion of the TBI. This serious miscommunication between the two groups begins to explain the large discrepancy in reported cases. In order to effectively fight sex trafficking in Coffee County, there absolutely has to be an improvement in communication between the three main groups: DCS, TBI, and Local Law Enforcement. The local law enforcement has to be included and involved in the identification and investigation of sex trafficking cases in the county.

Another crucial improvement that needs to be made to effectively fight sex trafficking in Coffee County is the prioritization of the increase of awareness, both general awareness to the issue in the county and education for recognition of possible sex trafficking victims for both local law enforcement and DCS. I found both of these issues to be fundamental; since the county is inadequate in both areas. What is probably most surprising of all is the fact that the TBI has publicized a report indicating Coffee County has 100+ cases of sex trafficking in adults and minors, yet they have not made any effort to raise awareness to this issue in Coffee County and have not provided adequate awareness programs to law enforcement, DCS, and schools. Also, the TBI has not provided any community programs to raise awareness of this issue to the general public. The citizens remain uninformed of this issue, and the employees of the two groups,

law enforcement, and DCS remain poorly trained on how to handle sex trafficking cases.

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## **Appendices**

### Definition of Terms

These definitions are listed in order to inform the reader on term that they may have previously and are important to understanding the research.

- Grooming- Generally, grooming is a phased, gradual process used by perpetrators to sexually exploit children and young people. It can take place over varying periods of time – from a few days to several years. It can also take different forms, and be more or less violent. Although the process of grooming someone may come in stages, each case is unique in its development (Human Trafficking Search, 2015).
- Forced Labor- “Also referred to as labor trafficking, encompasses the range of activities—recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining—involved when a person uses force or physical threats, psychological coercion, abuse of the legal process, deception, or other



coercive means to compel someone to work. Once a person's labor is exploited by such means, the person's previous consent or effort to obtain employment with the trafficker becomes irrelevant. Migrants are particularly vulnerable to this form of human trafficking, but individuals also may be forced into labor in their own countries. Female victims of forced or bonded labor, especially women and girls in domestic servitude, are often sexually exploited as well" (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

- John- An individual who pays for or trades something of value for sexual acts (In Public Safety, 2014)
- Qualitative Research- Research that intends to explore issues, understand phenomena and answer questions through analyzing unstructured data (Explorable, 2015)
- Quantitative Research- Research that provides a measure of what people believe from more of a numerical and statistical point of view, this approach is more logical and data led (Explorable, 2015)
- Sex Trafficking
  1. Adult- "When an adult is coerced, forced, or deceived into prostitution—or maintained in prostitution through one of these means after initially consenting—that person is a victim of trafficking. Under such circumstances, perpetrators involved in recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for that purpose are

responsible for trafficking crimes. Sex trafficking also may occur within debt bondage, as women and girls are forced to continue in prostitution through the use of unlawful “debt” purportedly incurred through their transportation, recruitment, or even their crude “sale”—which exploiters insist they must pay off before they can be free. A person’s initial consent to participate in prostitution is not legally determinative: if one is thereafter held in service through psychological manipulation or physical force, he or she is a trafficking victim and should receive benefits outlined in the Palermo Protocol and applicable domestic laws” (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

2. Minor- “When a child (under 18 years of age) is induced to perform a commercial sex act, proving force, fraud, or coercion against their pimp is not necessary for the offense to be characterized as human trafficking. There are no exceptions to this rule: no cultural or socioeconomic rationalizations should prevent the rescue of children from sexual servitude. The use of children in the commercial sex trade is prohibited both under U.S. law and by statute in most countries around the world. Sex trafficking has devastating consequences for minors, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy,

malnutrition, social ostracism, and even death” (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

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