ABSTRACT

WOOTEN, SALLIE DIANE. High School Counselors Experiences with the Training, Implementation and Follow up of a 9th Grade Human Trafficking Prevention Program: A Phenomenological Study. (Under the direction of Dr. Stanley Baker).

Professional school counselors are called to intervene when aware of issues that adversely impact students. During the 2016-2017 school year, a southeastern school district implemented a human trafficking prevention program to respond to a widespread and adverse phenomenon. This action was propelled into motion by North Carolina legislation. NC Senate Bill 279 outlines the requirements, roles, and responsibilities of professional counselors. North Carolina mandates that individual districts are responsible for the implementation of mandated legislation.

Human trafficking legislation challenged school leadership to provide interventions for students in seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. However, little guidance on best practices or evidence-based interventions existed at the time of this study. The sample district, based on NC Senate Bill 279, charged the student services department with the development and implementation of the prevention program. Thus, school counselors and other student service members became key players in the process.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of high school counselors working with the training, implementation, and follow up the ninth grade programming. Additionally, the study was designed to understand what factors lead to positive outcomes for students. Based on the findings, recommendations for counselor training improvements are suggested. The results suggested that further development of procedures and policies is necessary to increase the fidelity of the intervention. The current literature and theory were analyzed to support the implementation of systematic interventions further.

School counselors are challenged to respond to the human trafficking phenomenon proactively. However, the appropriate tools and supports must be in place to ensure the fidelity of the intervention program and follow up. Additionally, a holistic approach should be considered and include stakeholders beyond the walls of the school building. Law enforcement, community agencies, and legislation must work together to respond to this issue effectively.

Key words: human trafficking, school counselors, prevention programming

High School Counselors' Experiences with the Training, Implementation and Follow Up of the 9th Grade Human Trafficking Prevention Program: A Phenomenological Study

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends and colleagues who helped keep me grounded through the process.

BIOGRAPHY

Sallie Wooten earned her Bachelor of Science in Family and Child Sciences with a minor in Child Development from Florida State University in 2008. She then attended East Carolina University and earned her Master of Science in Counselor Education in 2010. Sallie began her career as an elementary school counselor that same year. In 2012, she moved to Cary, NC, and began working as a school counselor for Wake County Public School System. In 2014, she started the Counselor Education Ph.D. program at North Carolina State University. In 2017, she earned her National Board Certification in School Counseling. Above all else, she values the opportunity to work with all students, support educators and advocate for positive change in public education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Human trafficking is an adverse social issue that permeates the United States and countries around the world. Per the U.S. Department of State, approximately 77,823 human trafficking victims were identified in the United States alone in 2016 (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Human trafficking is a pervasive social justice issue that has become prevalent in the counseling literature during the 21st century. Examples include a review of human trafficking for mental health professionals by Yakushko (2009), a call for counselor awareness and action by Stotts and Ramey (2009), and an attempt to make counselors better informed by Litam (2017). Due to these recent efforts to bring about awareness, more counselors than ever realize that this is an issue that challenges the counseling profession. It should be noted that law enforcement is the primary party responsible for handling human trafficking cases. However, school counselors have a unique role in combating this issue through prevention education and intervention services.

Over the past decade, human trafficking has emerged at the forefront of many advocacy efforts. Professional counselors have a better understanding of the scope and magnitude of the issue. Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery (Logan, Walker, & Hunt, 2009). Sex trafficking is defined by the U.S. Department of State (2018) as: “a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” (p.5). This definition does not accurately depict the entirety of this oppressive and pervasive system. While sex trafficking is a particularly deplorable example of human trafficking, trafficking also manifests in the form of forced labor, defined by the U.S. Department of State (2018) as: “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provisions, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the

purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery"(p.5). Less prevalent in the United States are forms of trafficking such as unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers and bond labor.

As the scope of the problem has been more well-defined, legislative action evolved in an effort to dismantle the pervasive institution. Legislation has propelled several states into action. Thus, advocates have begun to piece together necessary components to combat human trafficking through education. One such method has been the implementation of school based prevention programs. Several states now mandate prevention efforts in schools through the use of curriculum based interventions (e.g., California, North Carolina, Virginia). The body of research on human trafficking would benefit from examining the efficacy of existing programs and exploring the perceptions of school counselors involved. To further explore the complexity of human trafficking prevention programs, frameworks and theories are discussed.

The necessity of evidence-based practices regarding human trafficking has been made evident. The United Nations has stated the human trafficking is the "third-largest criminal enterprise in the world." (Thompson & Haley, 2018, p. 299). Human trafficking impacts people of all ages. According to a global study of the United Nations published in 2016, 17,000 people were identified as being trafficked and of this number, 28% were children (Greenbaum, 2017). This number reflects worldwide numbers with a percentage within the United States. The statistics further emphasize the urgency for professional counselors to examine their role in eradicating this systematic abuse of human rights.

Theoretical Context

Throughout the 21st century systems theories have guided school counseling implementation of comprehensive intervention approaches (Mahon et el., 2014). The multilevel

nature of these models initiates the change process on a larger scale, with interventions and assessments incorporated at different levels. Historically, school counselors have worked on an individual level (Mahon et el., 2014). However, with the introduction of the American School Counselor Association's National Model (2012), the school counselor's role has shifted to a more systematic approach. This allows counselors to target populations in an intentional way. Given the exploratory nature of the research study it is important to have a strong theoretical foundation. The exploration of counselor experience will be guided by Ecological Systems Theory and Empowerment Theory. Additionally, considering components of the Multicultural Social Justice Counseling Competencies help to guide the research questions.

Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000) and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provide a better understanding of the manifestation of school based interventions and illustrates the multifaceted nature of the school counselor's role. One of the guiding principles of Empowerment Theory is creating sustainable practices to enact change. Ecological Systems Theory provides a framework of interrelated systems that exist in and beyond the school setting. Ultimately, this information informs understanding of the research questions. Application of theory to guide practice will be examined in Chapter two. Counselor training will be examined as the first level of a multilevel model of intervention. The training section will include an overview of counselor training, including knowledge of human trafficking and of program implementation. A policy and procedure section will include an overview of school and district policy regarding curriculum implementation and interactions with potential human trafficking victims and survivors. Finally, procedures to consider when initiating actions beyond the school walls will be considered.

Related Legislation

Efforts have been made by local and international entities to combat human trafficking. Currently, mandated reporting statutes exist in all 50 of the United States. These statutes impact professions that work directly with minors and require professionals to report any knowledge or suspicion of sexual abuse to local authorities (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017). All counselors are mandated reporters. Per Atkinson, Curnin, and Hanson's 2016 systematic review of U.S, state laws regarding human trafficking, all 50 states have passed legislation that distinguished trafficking as a felony offense. Thirteen states have laws that address education about trafficking and seven have mandated reporting laws in place.

Legislation is an important component in combating human trafficking. Both country-specific and global initiatives exist to combat human trafficking. In 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted The Palermo Protocol. This protocol was signed by 166 countries. Countries involved have laws in place to prevent and combat human trafficking and additionally help support survivors and cooperate with other countries (Atkinson, Curnin, & Hanson, 2016). In the United States, there is Public Law 113-183: Survivors Protection Act of 2000, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVSP), and then reauthorized in 2013. The William Wilberforce Reauthorization Act of 2008, classified trafficking as class one crime on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report. This act authorized appropriations from 2008 to 2011 for the TVSP in order to enhance measures to combat trafficking (United States Department of State, 2008). Additionally, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014, was initiated as a means of protecting at-risk youth (Thompson & Haley, 2018) In North Carolina, NC Senate Bill 279 was ratified in 2015 and mandates that all students in seventh through ninth grades receive instruction trafficking. NC Senate Bill 279 (2015)

outlines the requirements, roles, and responsibilities of professional counselors. North Carolina mandates that individual districts are responsible for the implementation of mandated legislation.

Distinguishing human trafficking victims can be a complex process. One obstacle is that victims are often prosecuted for criminal activity. To counteract such situations safe harbor laws have been established in several states. These laws aim to protect minors and recognize minors involved in prostitution as victims, not offenders. To promote a more victim-centered approach the American Bar Association (2013) distinguishes four main functions of safe harbor laws (a) decriminalizing prostitution for anyone under a specific age, (b) diverting victim minors from delinquency proceedings toward supportive services, (c) providing specialized services for minor victims, and (d) reclassifying prostituted minors as victims or sexually exploited children. Mehlman-Orozco (2015) examined states data on juvenile prostitution post safe harbor laws. The results indicated that post safe harbor laws juveniles are still arrested for the act of prostitution. The data also revealed a decrease in the number of minors convicted of the crime. However, further trauma is inflicted on victims through the arrest and detention process, perpetuating the cycle of victimization.

Strides have been made in implementing legislation to combat human trafficking. Despite the advancement of legal protections, research regarding the efficacy of interventions is limited. Additionally, adverse outcomes of law enforcement involvement should be considered further. Re-traumatization and lack of trust are just two negative outcomes identified in the current research. The findings indicate that more deliberate and sensitive measures must be taken by law enforcement agencies when handling cases with potential survivors of human trafficking.

Historical Context

The sample school district implemented a human trafficking prevention program

beginning in the 2016-2017 school year for grades seventh, eighth, and ninth. Per data provided by the school district after the first year of the program, the intervention led to one known arrest, which connected to several different cases. The curriculum objectives of this program were, as taught by grade level (i.e., grades 7, 8, and 9):

7. Recognize that sexual harassment may contribute to sexual abuse, sexual assault and sex trafficking and the feelings that result from these behaviors.

8. Identify the reasons that people engage in violent behaviors (bullying, hazing, dating violence, sexual assault, family violence, verbal abuse, sex trafficking) and resources for seeking help.

9. Explain how power and control in relationships can contribute to aggression, violence and sex trafficking.

Statement of Problem

Human trafficking has been well defined, and the body of counseling research related to the topic has increased substantially over the past decade. In association with combating human trafficking, the school counselor role is transitioning to an active participant in prevention programs. Given the systematic nature of education, counselors have the accessibility to students and families directly. With access to hundreds of students and families, school counselors can increase awareness, provide interventions, and help students and families connect with resources.

However, with this shift comes new questions that must be explored to ensure the efficacy of prevention programs and ensure counselors are provided with the training the role requires. Counselor knowledge must reflect the complexity of the issue. Several states now mandate that schools implement human trafficking education. While the specifics vary by state, some districts have implemented intervention programs that inform students of the scope of the

problem and various risk factors. Currently, there is limited research regarding the efficacy of the interventions available in the counseling research or outlined best practices for prevention programs. Additionally, the field would benefit from understanding how counselors experience the implementation of a human trafficking prevention program.

Purpose of the Research Questions

Several considerations led to the development of the research questions. The professional school counseling research lacks content related to the school counselor's role in combating human trafficking. Most of the existing literature focuses on defining the risk factors associated with sex trafficking. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand how school counselors experience their role in the existing human trafficking programs. The study is an attempt to identify themes that may influence best practices for the implementation of this type of prevention program including elements of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000).

The research questions were derived through the exploration of the complexity of human trafficking. As aligned with the qualitative perspective and phenomenological research approach, the research questions were intended to be vague. This research design allows for themes to be discovered from participant responses to a semi-structured interview method. Understanding the essence of the participants' experiences is a crucial component of the research design. The central research questions explored through this study were: What are the experiences of school counselors who implement the ninth grade human trafficking prevention program curriculum and follow-up? What factors lead to positive outcomes for students?

Definition of Key Terms

Below key terms used throughout the study are defined. Chapter two will provide further

detail regarding the terms listed and other terms related to the theories associated with the research questions.

Human trafficking. A form of modern day slavery. Marked by the use of coercive tactics to persuade or force an individual into a form of labor or entrapment (Logan, Walker & Hunt, 2009).

Sex trafficking. A commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age (U.S. Department of State, 2016, p.9).

Work trafficking. The use of violence, threats, lies, debt bondage, or other forms of coercion to force people to work against their will in many different industries (Polaris Project, 2020).

School counselor advocate. A professional school counselor that works to help all students reach their highest potential. School counselors work directly with students and systematically to intentionally eliminate barriers and create positive change.

Counselor training. Methods by which counselors obtain skills to optimally fulfill professional obligations. Training can be categorized by levels to offer a progression for skill acquisition. This may include pre-service, in-service and supervision (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

School prevention program. A curriculum implemented within the school setting with outcome objectives. Strategically targets a population to reduce adverse outcome.

Human trafficking intervention. A program or curriculum designed to decrease the recruitment and coercion of individuals through which the perpetuation of systematic human trafficking tactics can be disrupted.

Significance of Study

The findings of this study will assist school districts and school leadership in the evaluation of existing counselor training and in the evaluation process of current human trafficking prevention programs. Firsthand accounts from school counselors can be used by stakeholders who wish to evaluate program efficacy. Based on the results, improvements can be made in both the training process and implementation of the program. Findings may also be generalized to other counties and states, with similar demographics, to combat human trafficking through prevention programming. Improvements of such programs have the potential to positively impact students, disrupt injustice and increase the safety of all students.

Organization of Study

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the problem. Additionally, the significance of the study was described, and the research questions outlined. The second chapter will provide a detailed literature review of the concepts presented in the introduction and theories associated with the research study. The third chapter will discuss the methodology established to examine the research questions. The fourth chapter will describe the findings based on the data collection and analysis. The final chapter will discuss the conclusions, limitations and suggestions for additional research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on synthesizing the available empirical research associated with human trafficking and school related prevention programs and counselor training. This will serve as a foundation for the research study. Prior to delving into the current available research on the topic of human trafficking, human trafficking will be once again broadly defined. This literature review will extend beyond the research related to human trafficking to fill in gaps associated with the topic. Currently, there is no research dedicated to school counseling prevention programs targeting human trafficking. Due to the lack of empirical research, it is necessary to review the research available regarding counselor training and prevention programs in schools. Bridging the gaps in available research will narrow focus and provide the context necessary to understand the dimensions related to the research questions.

The literature review was conducted using a combination of keywords: human trafficking, school counseling, interventions, and counselor experiences. In several combinations, these keywords yielded zero results that addressed the research topic. The literature review consisted of database searches including EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest. Due to the lack of empirical research, this literature review will focus on seven main facets related to the research topic. The following literature review is organized into seven sections: (a) background, (b) school counselors as advocates, (c) counselor training, (d) school prevention programs, (d) risk factors and warning signs, (e) human trafficking interventions, (f) related legislation, and (g) theory to ground practice.

Brief Background

No country or continent is free from the infringement of human trafficking. Exploitation exists in two major forms; including sexual exploitation and forced labor. Human trafficking is

not a new phenomenon, instead an institution that has existed for centuries. The severity of the existing social issue is no longer a question. Instead, the question is what can be done to combat the issue. To examine this further, it is essential to provide a clear context and definitions. As stated previously, sex trafficking is defined by the U.S. Department of State (2016) as, "a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age." (p.9). The United Nations offers the following definition presented in article three of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in persons to describe human trafficking. As stated, human trafficking is 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (p.2). Other forms of trafficking do exist but are less pervasive than those previously described (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). The majority if the existing literature is focused on sex trafficking.

Each year the United States Department of State produces the Trafficking in Person (TIP) Report. This report is an effort to monitor trafficking word wide. Within the TIP countries are ranked based on their efforts to combat trafficking. These rankings are proved in a tiered form. Tier one countries are described as countries that meet the full standards of Section 108 of Trafficking and Victims Report Act (TVRA), tier two countries currently do not meet all measures to eliminate trafficking, based on TVRA, but are making efforts to improve, tier two

watch list countries are the same as previously stated except the number trafficking incidents are increasing and limited evidence of increased efforts exits, tier three countries do not meet all measures, based on TVRA, and are not making substantiated efforts to improve. Additionally, there are several countries that are considered special cases. The report includes country narratives that detail the country's tier status, recommendations, prosecution, protection, prevention and trafficking people (United States Department of State, 2019).

According to Human Trafficking in Person Report (2019) produced by the United States Department of State, the United States remained a "Tier 1" country. The TIP reports ultimately found that the United States meet all requirements of the TRVA including sustained efforts to investigate and prosecute, provided services to a greater number of identified victims, continued funding for prevention and intervention efforts, and enhanced efforts of outreach and policy development. However, advocates urged for increased funding for more comprehensive services and greater access to equitable services.

In 2009, Stotts and Ramey presented a call for action in the counseling literature. The article entitled "Human Trafficking: A Call for Counselor Awareness and Action," presented the reader with information regarding human trafficking as a social problem and an issue that deserves the attention of counseling literature. Within this seminal article, human trafficking is clearly defined in all facets. The article outlines the emotional, physical, psychological damage inflicted on victims of this modern-day slavery system. The article suggests that counselors educate themselves about the problem and join organizations to combat human trafficking. The use of an affect stability, behavioral adjustments, cognitive mastery, developmental mastery, ecosystems healthy and intact (ABCDE), model is suggested as a framework for working with victims of trauma (Stotts & Ramey, 2009).

As apparent from the background information provided, legislation has been a catalyst to prevention efforts. As further legislation passes, a trickledown effect can be observed. In this case, prevention and intervention efforts are now mandated at the institutional level within schools. Since this work of Stotts and Ramey (2009), professional counselors and professionals in related fields have worked to increase the availability of empirical literature regarding to human trafficking. However, a gap remains in best practices for school based human trafficking prevention programming.

School Counselors as Advocates

The role of the school counselor has evolved during the 21st century. School counselors have transitioned to a multi-faceted and dynamic role within schools. Two major shifts have occurred during the last decade of the school counseling profession. This includes, but is not limited to, the role of social justice advocate and social change agent. Counselors are called to proactively address disparities in education settings. Ultimately, school counselors are called to be advocates for all students, but even more so for underrepresented and marginalized student populations. An article by Bemak and Chung (2008) highlights the implications of the shift to support a proactive approach to human trafficking within the profession. Additionally, Bemak and Chung (2008) set the stage for the type of training necessary for future school counselors. Advocacy is no longer a suggested component of the role. Instead, it is a primary function.

Bemak and Chung (2008), discuss the nice counselor syndrome (NCS) as a means to highlight necessary changes in the profession and explore resistance to change. The term NCS was created to describe counselors' desire to be seen as "nice" and examine how this may interfere with the work of a multicultural social justice advocacy. Bemak and Chung (2008), make the case that these individuals value peaceful relationships within their settings which

inhibits them from addressing the systematic and non-systematic problems that perpetuate injustices in schools. School counselors must be willing to challenge the status quo and challenge mindsets that perpetuate the marginalization of student populations. Several examples are given to describe how the counselor may unintentionally contribute to the marginalization of students. School counselors often help students cope with adverse situations through the use of coping strategies. However, in some cases, students are being taught to cope with situations that perpetuate the marginalized status. This reinforces the idea that the problem resides within the student and not the institution. Other examples include counselors taking on administrative and disciplinary roles. This role confusion can poorly affect student-counselor rapport and in turn, student outcomes. Counselors must be willing to challenge the status quo and to appropriately combat the perpetuation of social injustice in schools (Bemack & Chung, 2008). Counselors should facilitate conversations within there settings to drive change. Several recommendations are listed to move beyond the NCS. While the initial mention of the nice counselor syndrome was a related to school counselors dealing with the achievement gap within the United States, a similar concern can be made regarding counselors with any social justice issue in mind. To address injustices, all counselors must prioritize their role as advocates and be vigilant when working with any client.

Advocacy has been explored in depth in the counseling literature. Field and Baker (2004) offer this: “A school counselor advocates on behalf of an individual student, a student group, or about a student issue; incorporates multicultural competence; provides meaningful information and additional helping resources; and lends support, including appropriate interventions, beyond the four walls of an office” (p.57). School counselors are called to be advocates for all students. The role of an advocate is to support students to reach their academic potential and become

prosocial members of society. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recognizes three realms within which this may occur (ASCA, 2012). Counselors can advocate for students academically, socially/emotionally, and through career readiness. School counselors can accomplish this through the main functions of their role. This includes one-on-one counseling sessions, small group counseling, counseling classroom lessons, school-wide initiatives, and collaboration with stakeholders.

Professional counseling organizations have created advocacy competencies and standards that outline professional obligations. Ratts and Hutchins (2009), explored the American Counseling Association's (ACA) social justice advocacy competencies at the client/student level. The aim was to operationalize advocacy at this level. The authors suggested that the implications of this work is to create a paradigm shift. In that shift, counselors no longer work in a reactionary mode and are instead proactive. Specifically, counselors must be social-advocacy minded and work deliberately to change systems.

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCCs) were a revision by Ratts, Singh, Nassar-Mcmillan, Butler, and McCullough (2016) of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies originally developed by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992). These competencies operationalize what it means to be a multicultural counselor. The MSJCCs are a resource for counselors to understand the action steps necessary to work as agents of change. The model includes quadrants and domains. Quadrants serve as a means to view the intersectionality of power, privilege and oppression that exist within the counseling relationship. Domains represent levels that lead to multicultural and social justice competent counseling. These include: (a) counselor self-awareness, (b) client worldview, (c) counseling relationship, and (d) counseling and advocacy interventions. Additionally, there are attitudes, beliefs, knowledge,

skills and action that are embedded within the first three layers of the model. Within this model, school counselors are expected to act when there is a need that can detrimentally impact students. A model such as the MSJCCs is a necessary tool for counselor training and understanding the interacting dynamics within the counseling space. Additionally, this model gives stakeholders a tool to examine the work done at the institutional level, which constitutes the school setting.

Counselor Training

Limited research is available on preparing school counselor to work with survivors of human trafficking. However, there is a vast research and conceptual literature available on training school counselors to be advocates. Evaluating this literature may provide a foundation for more specified training that is, at this time, lightly covered in the professional literature. Models such as the MSJCCs are a relevant tool for counselor training programs and counselors in training.

The school counselor's role is now marked by advocacy and intervention efforts in the school setting and thus, training must reflect this. Bemak and Chung (2005) make several suggestions for counselor training that aim at shifting away from the traditional role to the modern advocacy-focused role of the school counselors. Specifically, their suggestions recommend pre-equipping counselors for working with urban poor communities. It seems as if a similar approach to training would be appropriate for counselors preparing to work with survivors of human trafficking. As outlined, level one training is described as pre-service training. Counselor education programs could include advocacy training, including what the role of an advocate consists of and how to overcome obstacles (i.e., resistance administration, staff within a school setting). Additional courses could be added, and curriculum revamped to include advocacy components. Level two is in-service training. This type of training focuses on special

issues and can include a multitude of objectives (i.e., skills development, conceptual ideas, and current projects). Finally, level three training is the supervision component. Counselors are observed by other counselors deemed experts in the field, often associated with their university (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Supervisors offer counselors feedback and opportunities to further develop counseling skills. Another opportunity within the supervision level could include co-counseling. The research surrounding counselor advocacy training may provide implications for counselors training to work with survivors of human trafficking.

Counselor training related to human trafficking. Counselors must understand procedures to follow if a student who may be impacted by trafficking is identified. Domoney, Howard, Abas, Broadbent, and Oram (2015) conducted a qualitative study about counselors' experiences working with survivors of human trafficking. Several themes were presented based on the qualitative inquiry. The themes revealed several obstacles to working with and identifying survivors of human trafficking. According to the researchers, many counselors expressed not feeling adequately prepared to provide the types of services survivors needed. These findings support considering an ecological and holistic approach to support services. Theory will be addressed at a later point in this section. Survivors of human trafficking have vast needs, and many cannot be met with counseling services alone. Within a school setting, these findings may further suggest that school stakeholders collaborate with human service agencies, and law enforcement. The question remains as to how to most effectively prepare counselors with the repository of skills and knowledge necessary to help survivors of human trafficking.

In order to combat human trafficking, steps must be taken by helping professionals within and across disciplines (Logan, Walker & Hunt, 2009). First and foremost, helping professionals must be informed of the scope of the issue and engage in informing the public. Additionally,

training for counselors and response protocol must be put in place. Training for professionals should be aimed at the needs of survivors, including the available legal protection, methods and means of how coercion transpires, information about traffickers, and cultural competence. Research findings suggests training should occur across disciplines (i.e., health care, law enforcement, and social agencies) and perhaps include a point person for each discipline. Once a survivor has been identified, support services and legal protection need to be available. This may include health care services, resources for reconnecting with the family, and legal aid (Logan, Walker & Hunt, 2009). The needs of each individual survivor and family will be unique. Case management is cited as one means to see that the individual is receiving appropriate services. A needs assessment may serve as a tool to screen survivors and establish aftercare management protocols (Muraya & Fry, 2015).

It was evident through reviewing the literature that trauma-informed counseling is widely suggested as an aftercare service when working with survivors of human trafficking. Goodman (2015) presented a case for combining approaches to work with clients who have been traumatized by trusted systems, referred to as betrayal trauma. This approach combines the ecological perspective and socio-historically grounded in trauma counseling. Together, the perspectives examine how trauma permeates systems and can be passed down generationally. The ecological approach examines how social injustice contributes to trauma. This approach would be useful to counselors as they work across disciplines to prevent human trafficking and aid survivors, as there is not one preferred intervention. A strengths-based approach is suggested to elicit post-traumatic growth and build resiliency (Goodman, 2015).

The research literature highlights that, despite increased knowledge of the institution of human trafficking and survivors of human trafficking (SoHTs), little advancement of empirically

supported prevention programming and treatment exists. Thompson and Haley (2018) discuss why this deficit exits and counselors remain ill-equipped to provide services to human trafficking survivors. First, counselors, need general knowledge of this pervasive problem. Counselors need to understand how and to whom traffickers attempt to present themselves. Traffickers are predominantly male, but not exclusively. Geographic location is an important factor in the trafficking process. Counselors must be aware of how location may impact trafficking. Two considerations counselor should be aware of are how major thruways and distance to ports increase incidence of trafficking. These examples highlight the vast and different components that may impact counselor training. The varying circumstances are one obstacle to the efficacy counselor training and development.

To focus on prevention, it is important to look closely at-risk factors. Participation in a commercial sex act is repeated throughout the literature as a risk factor. This includes prostitution, sexual massage parlors, strip dancing and survival sex (Thompson & Haley, 2018). This creates a challenge when working with law enforcement, although some states have enacted safe harbor laws, providing protection to survivors of human trafficking. Accordingly, involvement with the juvenile justice systems for sex related offenses is a major warning sign (Hartinger-Saunders, Trouteaud & Johnson, 2017). Counselors need knowledge of how the process of coercion referred to previously as the “grooming process” pervades. Thompson and Haley (2018) describe vulnerabilities, warning signs, and symptoms that traffickers prey upon. Common coercion tactics include promising a high paying job, stable home environment, escape from physical or sexual abuse, escape from homelessness, and offering a marriage contract.

Thompson and Haley (2018), suggest training aimed at increasing counselor self-efficacy and competence when working with survivors of human trafficking. Their suggestions are for a

counselors-in-training (CITs). Service learning is presented as consisting of four major dimensions. In the following order, counseling students would actively participate in a project, be given time and methods to reflect of their learning, get to apply their learning through real life experiences, and extend their learning outside of the classroom into the community. Levels of learning would differ based on individual progression in the training program. Beginning counselors would take a less direct approach; such as preparing an advocacy project or by exploring available resources for survivors within their communities. Thompson and Haley (2018) suggest that intermediate CITs be given the opportunity to apply their knowledge through experiences working with SoHts. This may transpire through implementation of intervention programs targeting the survivor's need for skill attainment necessary to reintegrate into society. Other examples may include manning hotline and crisis interventions. Finally, advanced CITs would have the opportunity to shadow therapists or participate as co-counselors. Many similarities exist between their suggested approach and the approach of Bemak and Chung (2005) described previously.

Even less empirical information is available that specifically addresses school counselor training. The aforementioned counselor training outline may provide implications for working with counselors in training and perhaps some components could extend to school counselors currently working in the field. However, school environments are complicated systems with multiple layers. The literature presented, in later sections, will focus on understanding the experiences of current school counselors, specifically, those implementing strategic human trafficking prevention programs. The aim is to highlight the how counselors experience the prevention programing. The findings will provide ideas for improving counselor training for those preparing to work directly with prevention programs. In addition, the recommendations

may extend to all counselors. In order to optimize the existence of advocates, this type of training would be necessary for all counselors.

School Prevention Programs

Schools are uniquely situated to be entities of prevention and social change. Schools provide access to millions of students and families each year. This provides school helping professionals with an uncommon advantage to disseminate information to the public. As stated by the Department of Education, in the fall of 2017, 50.7 million students attended public schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Each student is impacted by the layers of society they operate within. If schools were able to consistently provide prevention programming, the expanse of the impact could be enormous. While prevention programming is not a cure for this pervasive, global problem, it is a place to start. School prevention programs can empower families with knowledge of risk factors and available resources and dispel myths. This knowledge may promote constructive action by school stakeholders and families when warning signs are recognized.

According to Atkinson, Cumin and Hanson (2016), 17 states require healthcare training and 13 states have education laws related to trafficking. However, no sanctioned information is provided describing what the training or education details. These numbers indicate that the majority of school counselors are not required to receive any training regarding human trafficking. Currently, the majority of states do not require schools to address the topic in any manner. Considering the progress made in increasing awareness, it is reasonable to expect that the number of schools requiring prevention programming will increase.

Prevention programming is not a new phenomenon in schools. Historically, prevention programming has been incorporated in curriculums to prevent adverse outcomes in student

populations. This major education shift occurred at the beginning of the 21st century as schools transitioned to more preventative methods. Many school counselors adhere to the American School Counselor Associations (ASCA) recommendations for best practice. This includes the ASCA (2012) national model plan to implement a comprehensive school counseling program.

Wandersman, Morrissey, and Davino (1998) presented eight essential strategies for implementing prevention programs. The authors noted that many prevention programs are not well planned and instead are attempts at an in-house resolution for a problem. These eight strategies are referred to as Comprehensive Quality Programming (CQP) and are used to evaluate the necessity, efficacy, and effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs. CQP is aligned with Empowerment Evaluation philosophy; an approach that is designed to break down barriers and encourage participants in the environment to act in the change process. The eight steps are presented in below.

1. The needs assessment,
2. Prevention sciences literature review,
3. Program mapping,
4. Program planning,
5. Process evaluation,
6. Outcome and impact evaluation,
7. Lessons learned,
8. Program institutionalization

These suggested steps could be useful in the development of new programs and the evaluation of existing prevention programs.

Kam, Greenberg and Walls (2003), conducted a quasi-experimental design to assess the efficacy of an intervention program targeting an at-risk population. An intervention program was conducted to target delinquency, using the PATHS curriculum within the school setting. The findings suggested that there are two major factors that contribute to the efficacy of the interventions in the urban school setting. The first was principal support and the second was quality of teacher implementation at the classroom level. This supports the notion that prevention efforts must take a holistic approach. They cannot be the effort of only the school counselors, rather all school stakeholders are needed.

The current literature on prevention programming supports the need to assess existing school-based intervention programs within schools target human trafficking. Also, the literature highlights the importance of well planned prevention programs that address factors that lead to successful student outcomes. The research goal of the present study will focus on counselor experiences when working existing prevention programs. The findings will be analyzed to assess the strengths of current programs and offer suggestions for improvement, particularly with regards to counselors training.

Risk Factors and Warning Signs

It is imperative the school counselor and other school stakeholders are cognizant of risk factors and warning signs related to human trafficking. This knowledge will increase the likelihood that school counselors report to law enforcement and child protective services (CPS) when legitimate concerns arise. Specific risk factors from McClain and Garrity (2010) included vulnerable populations. Specifically, adolescent girls or adolescents experiencing poverty, isolation, drug addiction, violence in homes, failure in schools, criminal history and/or childhood sexual abuse. Thompson and Haley (2018), echo the previously mentioned risk factors and add

individuals who do not identify as heterosexual, persons with disabilities, and those who do not possess legal immigration status. Additionally, vulnerable populations include individuals who work in the sex industry.

There are many warning signs or symptoms associated with survivors of human trafficking (SoHT). Thompson and Haley (2018) discuss the importance of counselors to be informed of warning signs to intervene. Presented in the article are the following warning signs: inconsistency in reporting historical information, homelessness, being a victim of childhood abuse, history of instability related to immigration, disruptions with mental and medical health services, and frequently seeking medical attention related to sexual health. The authors are clear that these warning signs do not guarantee the client is a SoHT; however, these symptoms should register with the counselor that it is a possibility.

Human Trafficking Interventions

There is limited research that provides practitioners with suggested evidence-based interventions to support survivors of human trafficking. Sibnath, Muhkherjee, and Mathews (2011) sought to address the efficacy of an intervention implemented with survivors. The exploratory nature of this research provided valuable implications for further research endeavors. The nature of this research design allowed the researchers to gain insights into aggression in sexually abused girls. They preliminarily examined interventions that may be useful for practitioners working with survivors of human trafficking. The results indicated that of the 120 sexually abused girls, 58.3% perceived counseling as helpful while 41.7% did not perceive it as beneficial. These findings suggest that more research on effective counseling interventions would be helpful in supporting survivors of human trafficking.

Mandated reporting laws further compound practitioners work with survivors. Hartinger-Saunders, Trouteaud, Johnson (2017) conducted a study to explore several aspects of the mandated reporting process in relation to domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST). Their questions included how often mandated reporters had observed DMST risk factors, how well they understood the law in their state, how likely as mandated reporters they were to report DMST, what kinds of attitudes and beliefs they possessed regarding DMST, whether as mandated reporters they received specific training, if they perceived reporting as effective, and how their perceptions of reporting influenced their likelihood to report. The results of the survey research indicated that less than 10% received training, 25% believed that trafficking did not occur in their communities, and 21% believed that trafficking survivors came solely from other countries. These results highlight the limited awareness of professionals working with minors and supported the necessary training of all mandated reporters, not solely counselors.

The results of the aforementioned studies have several implications for interventions. Both studies emphasized the importance of prevention approaches in eradicating human trafficking. This again supports the efforts of schools to implement prevention programs and intervene to prevent students from victimization. Knowledge of human trafficking must extend beyond counselors to all stakeholders. The implications support a holistic approach to the problem. This is not a problem that can be addressed in one single environment, but that needs to be targeted from a perspective that recognizes the impact of embedded social systems.

Theory

Empowerment theory. Empowerment Theory was first introduced by Paulo Freire (1970) and described as an intervention design geared towards enacting social change. In his

original work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) presented vital constructs such as oppressor and oppressed. Freire (1970) postulated that that empowerment was not uni-directional, Rather, it was a mutual process. Furthermore, his original work was grounded in the work of John Dewey. Dewey is known for his work in education, recognizing that education is a mutual exchange that goes beyond educators bestowing information upon students. Instead, students are actively involved in the process. Similarly, Empowerment Theory draws attention to the active nature of the empowerment process. The theory highlights processes and outcomes of empowerment. Later, Zimmerman (1995) added to Friere's work by addressing empowerment at different levels, including individual, organization, and community empowerment. Empowerment Theory appears to have potential for assisting professional school counselors in combating human trafficking, particularly via guidance for achieving systematic school programming.

The underlying premise of an empowerment approach is a mindset shift in how individuals approach problems. There is a focus on helping professionals become collaborators, instead of experts, and on the targeted population's role is as participants, rather than clients. The main assumptions and premises of the Empowerment Theory are that actions, activities, and structures exist that are empowering. The outcome of such processes is empowerment. Empowering processes can occur at different levels: individually, organizationally, and through communities (Zimmerman, 2000).

The theory's two major constructs are empowering processes and outcomes. These occur at three levels: individual, organizational, and community. The levels of analysis are interrelated. Much of the existing research focuses on psychological empowerment; however, no level is

intended to be more important than the other. Empowering processes differ from empowering outcomes, which are reactions or consequences of the empowering processes.

Psychological empowerment is the most well-defined construct within the levels of analysis. Psychological empowerment includes intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components (Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment at the individual level is the construct of psychological empowerment and can be assessed by a person's perception of control (intrapersonal), ability to act or problem solve (behavioral), and critical awareness (interactional) (Zimmerman, 1995). Individual processes include learning decision-making skills, managing resources, and working with others. Individual outcomes include a sense of control, participation, and critical awareness. Critical awareness is described within the interactional component and is described as the knowledge of one's sociopolitical environment (Zimmerman, 2000).

The organizational construct of Empowerment Theory consists of processes and outcomes. The processes associated with this level are opportunities to participate in decision making, shared responsibilities, and shared leadership. Outcomes are described as the ability to effectively compete for resources, network with organizations, and influence policy (Zimmerman, 2000).

Empowerment at the community level leads to empowering communities consisting of empowered processes and empowered outcomes. Facets of empowering communities are that they have access to resources, open government structure, and uphold tolerance for diversity. Empowered communities consist of organizational coalitions, pluralistic leadership, and residents have participation skills (Zimmerman, 2000).

Ultimately, there is not one universal definition of empowerment. Zimmerman (1995) stated that this would be theoretically inconsistent. In any given context or level of analysis,

empowered processes and outcomes are dependent on the environment. Therefore, the definition would shift to fit the population.

Empowerment Theory is highly generalizable because of the open-construct design. The concepts are meant to be molded to the populations and context of the participant groups. As described, there are both empowerment processes and empowered outcomes, which can be defined in regard to any population at the individual, organizational, and community contexts. This is useful for integration. Due to the lack of specificity of constructs, the possibilities for implementation are vast. Professionals can use the main assumptions of the theory to target a populations and their population's specific needs.

Empowerment Theory offers a paradigm for targeting social injustice through empowering processes. Empowerment Theory focuses on developing interventions for the purpose of creating social change. The theory recognizes that many problems exist because of unequal access to resources. The language of Empowerment Theory differs from many existing theories and promotes social justice concepts. Clients are participants, with an active role, curating their own perception of control at each level. The open-constructs allow for participants' perception and worldviews to be guideposts for the empowerment process. The theory calls for participants to be actively involved in the intervention development process. Helping professionals, or collaborators, are no longer experts as they recognize the central role of the participants. Collaborators are responsible for learning about the contexts of populations they are working with and together implementing the processes that result in empowerment outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). The basic premises and constructs described, promote social justice by empowering participants through action and perception of power. Individuals or populations of

participants can examine their contexts and decide for themselves what change is needed and how change should occur.

One of the strengths of Empowerment Theory is the longevity and sustainability of intervention approaches founded in the theory. In regard to social change, the helping professional's main role is to assist in the mindset change of a population. The theory offers a way to view problems and find solutions. Helping professional are not just bandaging problems. Instead, they are equipping participants with a skill set. School counselors are called to help students learn to advocate for themselves, navigate resources, and gain the power they need to reach their full potential. Through Empowerment Theory school counselors can contextualize the processes needed to produce empowered outcomes for their student populations.

To combat human trafficking, schools have begun to implement intervention initiatives based on the legislative mandates. Empowerment Theory provides a framework which may be useful to school counselors in efforts to create social change for empower targeted populations of individuals, specifically, students. Professional school counselors can work to enhance the outcomes of students by implementing empowering processes. Further research on empowered outcomes of these initiatives could strengthen the body of research surrounding Empowerment Theory.

School counselors who follow the American School Counselor National Model (ASCA, 2012) are well positioned to ground their intervention strategies in Empowerment Theory. First and foremost, school counselors meet with school stakeholders to assess the needs of the school and create yearly programming goals. As Zimmerman (date?) suggests, the population and environment need to be assessed to define the constructs and analyze empowerment outcomes at the psychological, organization, and community empowerment levels. School counselors can

decide what processes will occur and how outcomes will be measured in conjunction with stakeholders. Currently, school counselors have program goals measured by outcome data that are based on the needs of their student population.

School counselors may find this approach useful because of the interrelatedness of the different levels of analysis. School counselors are challenged to promote positive change at each of these levels. Empowerment Theory offers suggestions for conceptualizing these processes and outcomes for unique student populations.

Ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory highlights the overlapping social systems that mitigate an individual's reality. The aim of the theory is to investigate environmental impacts on development. Ecological systems theory acknowledges five levels of interactions microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. The theory provides valuable considerations for operations working within systems. As mentioned previously, the 20th century has experienced a shift in the role of the school counselor. School counselors have been called to follow models such as the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2012) National Model in implementing a systematic approach to school counseling curriculum. This positions school counselors to implement programming from a broad perspective, which encapsulates all students. Respectively, school counselors can distribute information and provide interventions to every student. This is a unique feature of the school counseling role.

Ecological Systems Theory supports a school counseling model that investigates the environment with the intention of targeting student adversity. Previous school support methods focused primarily on treating individual students after problems had occurred. This approach is similar to the treatment-focused medical model (Burns, Warmbold-Barnn & Zaslofsky, 2015).

While there may be validity in this approach, it is simply not sustainable. The ASCA (2012) recommended counselor to student ratio is 250:1. However, this is rarely the reality school counselors experience. The ASCA acknowledges that ratios are much higher. In the 2014-2015 school year, the national average was 481: 1 (ASCA, 2012). In my current position, I am the only counselor in a school of 500 students (https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/careers-roles). These realities suggest that school counselors must adjust per the demands of the job role. Instead of an exclusively or largely problem reaction approach, prevention methods must be at the core of the counseling program.

Bronfenbrenner's (1995) Ecological Systems Theory supports an intervention approach that investigates environmental factors. In my experience as a school counselor, within the public-school systems, interventions are designed and implemented to meet students in their current state. Predisposition factors have little impact on the actual work of the school counselor. Students are evaluated by how quickly they respond to interventions. Currently, many schools are experiencing a vast number of students that are not meeting grade level standards. To intervene on behalf of each student, as the medical model would suggest, would present obstacles such as time and resources. However, by adopting an ecological approach, school counselors and school stakeholders can examine the environmental factors which contribute to poor student outcomes (Burns, Warmbold-Barnn & Zaslofsky, 2015). For example, based on behavior referrals and teacher reports, school counselors may conclude that emotional regulation development is needed for their student population. To address this need, the school counselor may decide to implement a classroom counseling curriculum unit on emotional regulation and enhancing students' coping skills. This intervention targets a larger student population, rather than meeting with each student displaying a problematic emotional behavior. By engaging in this

type of intervention, the school counselor has intervened and provided prevention education for students not displaying negative emotional behaviors. Additionally, school counselors are positioned to conduct staff development and promote appropriate responses to students during times of emotional distress. In a similar manner, education, prevention and intervention surrounding human trafficking could occur in the school setting.

The aim of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1979) was to investigate environmental impacts on development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) recognized the importance of observing the subject in the natural environment. Accordingly, he acknowledged that the two are interrelated. Bronfenbrenner realized that development varies by location, time and public policy (Salkind, 2006). The Ecological Model of Human Development postulates two main premises for development. In the first, development occurs through interactions of an individual and the immediate environment, through proximal processes. For the second, proximal processes occur in environments immediate to the individual and those further removed (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The individual is not a passive recipient and is rather an active participant in the proximal processes. To summarize the promise of the Ecological Systems Model is to say that development continues to occur as a person perceives and reacts to the environment (Salkind, 2006). Bronfenbrenner (1994) credits Lewin's theory of psychological fields as the first "nested structure." As the name suggests, the concept depicts an environmental structure that gradually builds upon itself to include wider dynamics of interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner (1994) used the term "nested" to describe the interrelated environments of his theory. Ecological Systems Theory introduces five main multi-tiered environmental systems.

Ecological Systems Theory acknowledges five levels of interactions: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. The systems discussed in this

section will be described through examples of a student at the core of the system. Microsystems describe the most direct level of interaction or immediate interactions. Examples of microsystem level of interaction include schools, friends, and family. Mesosystems comprise two or more connections involving the individual. For example, connecting schools and families. Exosystems comprise of two or more systems, one of which does not directly connect with the individual. For example, the influence of a parent's job on the family. Macrosystems are the overarching systems that exist within a context. They can be described as the overt and covert cultural realities. Finally, the last level is the chronosystem. The chronosystem examines the socio-historical factors that occur over the life course (Stantrock, 2011).

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theory recognizes that social systems and public policy impact human development by establishing the conditions of their lives (Salkind, 2006). Although not explicitly stated, social justice implications can be examined at any level of the interrelated systems. It is important to consider how environments impact marginalized clients. Certainly, oppressive systems and policies have negative impacts on a person's development. Additionally, systems often perpetuate the cycle of marginalization and oppression. Social justice implications could be constructed to assist practitioners in helping clients explore adverse environmental factors. Practitioners may work with clients to evaluate negative interactions that exist within each nested environment. A counselor familiar with both Ecological Systems Theory and Empowerment Theory may combine the models to develop empowering processing to address social injustice at any level.

The theory's main premises would support social justice empowerment concept. Individuals are actively engaged in their environments and, therefore, the processes that occur are multidirectional. This would indicate that, while an environment can impact an individual,

simultaneously, an individual can impact the environment. This suggests that intervention programs implemented at the micro level have the potential to influence outer layers of the ecosystems. I will discuss this with specific suggestions for human trafficking interventions will be presented in the next section.

Prevention implementation based on Ecological Systems Theory. Ecological systems theory provides a structure to consider how nested environments impact intervention program planning. As discussed previously, new legislation mandates that schools provide education surrounding human trafficking. However, little direction is given. School stakeholders must determine how to design interventions and test programs that will combat the issue holistically and with fidelity. A planning process from an Ecological Systems approach is suggested. A brief outline and potential action steps based on each level of the Bronfenbrenner's (1994) system is presented below.

The microsystem is defined by direct interactions experienced by developing individuals. To examine how the microsystem may guide programming, it is suggested that stakeholders address components of curriculum development that directly affect students. What content and how it will be delivered to students is central to ascertain to meet legislation initiatives. Stakeholders need to determine when and where content delivery would occur and what needs to be available to facilitate delivery (e.g., technology required; resources). Also, the parties responsible for program delivery should be determined. Current familiar programs enlist the help of student service team members to implement the curriculum. This process occurs through classroom counseling lessons. Finally, program planners may examine pre-existing relationships among students, staff, student services, and administrators. Measures to develop rapport and trust can have a positive impact on communication. One of the most important facets of a school

counselors work is establishing and maintaining rapport and building relationships. Pre-existing, positive, relationships encourage students and staff members to seek support of additional staff members when problems arise.

The mesosystem consists of interactions that occur between two or more settings containing the individuals. There are clear examples of this type of exchange that impact school programs and student outcomes, such as parent and school communications. These interactions have implications for how schools approach human trafficking interventions. Stakeholders should consider what prior information parents need regarding intervention programs. Parent feedback has potential to impact programs and outcomes. Intervention outcomes can be improved through established strong connections between students' homes and their schools. Strong relationships allow schools and parents to be united in regards to the information provided. Many parents may be unaware of the impacts of human trafficking. In my current role, I am often surprised that many parents and teachers do not think that human trafficking is an issue that impacts our student population. To combat lack of knowledge or misinformation, schools may consider developing information programs for parents as a component of the intervention program. School stakeholders may want to consider what pertinent information to provide to parents and how this exchange will take place.

Exosystems will have a pertinent supporting role in the intervention process. Stakeholders should consider what agencies need to be involved in the process and how. To illustrate the point, a hypothetical school counselor implements the human trafficking curriculum designed for seventh-grade students. At the end of the unit, a post-evaluation is given. Through this process, an at-risk student is identified. The school counselor follows up with the student through a one-on-one counseling session and learns that the student is involved in a potentially

dangerous situation. Previous preparatory training needs to provide clear steps for the school counselor to follow, including best practice for reporting cases. Concerns may include when to notify parents versus law enforcement agencies, or both. It is important to understand how agencies are involved. In many instances, there are not clear guidelines. Issues of confidentiality and non-beneficence are problematic. For instance, students of a certain age can decline reporting sexual abuse. A further analysis of exosystems would allow counselors to make appropriate contacts and connect families to resources when necessary.

Throughout the process, stakeholders should account for attributes of the mesosystem. Factors to consider may include what underlying cultural beliefs impact the program outcomes, or what policies or laws may influence the curriculum. In many states legislation is beginning to address human trafficking and the school's role and responsibility (Source[s], date[s]?). As discussed in the introduction, currently, the legislation in North Carolina has outlined curriculum objectives for seventh, eighth and ninth grades.

As can be seen in this brief outline, Bronfenbrenner's (1995) Ecological Systems Theory can guide program planning. Through the process of evaluating the student's interactions with environments, school-based personnel can provide prevention programs that have the potential for changing societal norms. Vigilance at each level of a student's environmental interactions provides safeguards, and potential risk factors can be targeted. The theory also postulates the interrelatedness of the nested environments. Given this phenomenon, impacts at any level of the structure have the potential to influence all others.

Theory synthesis. Legislation and professional standards are mandating school counselors into action. As addressed in the introduction section, there is limited empirical information to inform best practice and intervention implementation. The current literature

regarding the school counselor's role in combating human trafficking exists only in the form of calls to action. Professional school counselors need to be equipped with knowledge of strategies and best practices to engage in successful advocacy and educator roles. Findings from the evaluation process will be synthesized next. This process will include conclusions related to best practices for interventions. Lastly, implications for practice will be discussed and recommendations for future research, including the present study, will be presented.

Together, Empowerment Theory and Ecological Systems Theory can ground human trafficking prevention programs in a common theoretical foundation. Ecological Systems Theory allows stakeholders to evaluate environmental factors and Empowerment Theory provides preliminary action steps that can be tailored to diverse student populations. A strong foundation will ensure fidelity of programs.

As presented, Ecological Systems Theory offers school counselors a framework for planning intervention programs. The brief outline constructed above illustrates possible initial steps counselors and stakeholders may consider. By embedding this approach in the planning process, stakeholders can organize action steps in each system that directly and indirectly influence student development. This can produce the effective implementation of human trafficking prevention and awareness programs. This is a logical approach in which to ground programming because many school counseling frameworks are currently embedded in Ecological Systems Theory. Perhaps most importantly, the collaboration suggested by the recommended framework presents a holistic approach. By connecting schools, families, communities and organizations, no one entity is approaching the problem in isolation. The nested entities must work together and understand each other's role in the process. By combining resources, the incidence of human trafficking can be attacked from multiple angles.

Zimmerman's (1995) Empowerment Theory has implications for activating change agents. Empowering processes can be easily embedded in school counseling program initiatives. The theory offers key considerations for counselor interactions within each level of analysis presented above. School counselors are positioned to impact individuals, communities, and organizations. As student advocates, school counselors should strive to increase psychological empowerment for every student and help to promote empowered communities and organizations. This strength-based approach can help to foster a set of invaluable lifelong skills. Students exposed to empowering processes and outcomes, at any level, have the potential to become agents of change; individuals who are adept at addressing issues of disparity or injustice in any form.

Human trafficking prevention programs should target individual empowerment processes and strive to create and collaborate with empowered communities and organizations. Individually, counselors can address sociopolitical factors. Counseling initiatives can encourage students to think about how sociopolitical factors impact them and how to advocate for themselves and others. As presented in the literature review, this approach helps to promote self-esteem and bolster positive developmental outcomes. Possible outcomes may include students who exhibit safe decision-making skills. Additionally, school stakeholders can collaborate with parents and agencies to ensure empowered communities target human trafficking prevention. Wide nets of safeguards help to increase student safety and make it more challenging for potential predators. Counselor collaboration can impact the community and organizational levels of empowerment in purposeful ways.

Summary and Rationale for Current Study

A call for action has been presented, and preventative programs are appearing in school

districts across the country. Unfortunately, the literature lacks suggestions for systematic approaches in schools that address the many layers of this problem; including, but not limited to, educating students and families, screening, advocating for victims, and understanding implications for appropriate counselor training. Much of the literature related to human trafficking is in reference to sex trafficking. There is limited literature available about other forms of trafficking such as labor trafficking and how counselors can combat those issues. Additionally, the school counseling profession would benefit from literature on how to implement a comprehensive preventative program that addresses the vast and damaging effects of human trafficking. School counselors will benefit from prevention training designed to provide interventions and help survivors connect with aftercare services. It is necessary to explore the experiences of counselors with current prevention programming. Implications from such research may translate to more comprehensive training, efficacy surrounding current programming and the continued support intervention programs.

Chapter 3: Method

Research Design

In this chapter a detailed explanation of the methods used to conduct the research study are provided. This includes a description of the participants, including the population and sample. Next, in the instrumentation section details the open-ended interview technique, outlining the interview protocol for both rounds of interviews. The research questions are provided along with sources used to validate the question. A statement of positionality is provided. The procedures followed are outlined, including data collection and analysis methods. Finally, the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study are described.

A qualitative approach was the most appropriate to build on the body of empirical research. The literature review clearly identified the gaps in the current research. The intention of this research study was to fill in some of the gaps by understanding an existing phenomenon. Specifically, the purpose of this research was to understand how school counselors experienced their role in the ninth grade human trafficking prevention program implementation. The overarching goal was to better understand the strengths and limitations of existing programs through the lens of school counselors and to understand what factors lead to positive outcomes for students. Therefore, a phenomenological approach to the study design was followed.

Participants

Population. The study was focused on school counselors who had worked directly with the implementation process of the human trafficking prevention program, at the ninth grade level, in the same county. All participants in this research study were from the same urban school district in the southeastern United States. While the school district is described as urban, it is important to note that the district is large, and the population varies dramatically across the

district. This is partially due to the size of the district. The district is described as large, within the top 15% in the country. On average, there were 160,429 students in daily attendance during the 2018-2019 school year. According to information provided by the district, there are 36 middle schools, 29 high schools, and 5 alternative schools. Within the district, there are 111 middle school counselors and 132 high school counselors. These statistics were obtained directly from the school district's website. All six participants worked at the high school level during the duration of the study. Each participant was involved in some aspect the ninth grade human trafficking prevention program (i.e., curriculum implementation and/or follow up interviews). Within the county, the human trafficking program is implemented through curriculum units in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades.

Sample. For a phenomenological research study, the suggested number of participants is between three to 10 subjects (Dukes, 1984). The sample consisted of six participants. Convenience sampling methods were employed to recruit participants. In the interest of creating a purposeful sample, the recruiting goal was to have at least six participants from several different high schools. The sample was stratified, based on district demographics, in order to achieve maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2013). Participants were from high schools that represent the distinct and different demographics observable within the school district which participated in the research study. The goal was to obtain participants that worked in rural, suburban, and urban high schools. Additionally, the attempt was made to recruit participants who identified from different races and genders to ensure that the sample is representative of the population. Table 1.0 provides a brief demographic overview of the final participant group.

Participant recruitment. The first step in the recruitment process was to acquire approval of the study from the school district. The next step was to receive approval from North

Carolina State University's (NCSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB). This allowed the researcher to contact school counselors directly. An email was sent to a pool of potential participants. Email addresses were obtained through school websites and the school counselor listserv. The initial email contained information about the research study and eligibility requirements with the option to complete a short interest survey. After two weeks, a follow up email was sent. Individuals who indicate they are interested in participating in the study were sent an email containing a consent form and survey to obtain background and demographic information. To participate, the participants must have met the following criteria at the onset of the study: a current school counselor and must have been involved with the implementation of the human trafficking during the 2017-2018 school year with ninth grade students. The participants were asked to confirm their responses on the background and demographic survey. The survey contained the following questions to better understand the sample: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) ethnicity, (d) grade levels worked with, (e) years of experience, and (f) assigned school demographics. A consent form was provided to obtain approval to conduct and record the two interviews and collect two journal reflections responses. Finally, all participants were asked to identify and time and location for the two one-hour interviews. All participants were informed that they would receive a $10 gift card at the completion of the interview.

Summary of participants. The results of this phenomenological study were based on 12 face-to-face interviews of six participants. Additionally, all, but one participant completed the two journal reflections. All participants worked in the high school setting in a large southeastern school district. All participants had participated in the human trafficking intervention program that was implemented as part of the ninth grade curriculum.

All participants identified as female, five of the participants identified as white, and one participant identified as African American. The age range of participants spanned from 25 to 43 with the median age of 36. Years of experience ranged from one to 13 with the median number of seven. Based on school locations participants included one from the southern portion of the district, two from the southeastern portion of the district, one from the south-central portion of the district, one from the western portion of the district and one participant from the northeastern portion of the district. A summary of participant demographics is listed below in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0

Overview of demographic data of participants

Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Gender	Ethnicity	Age
KB	3	Female	White	25
Tarheel19	7	Female	White	31
Sarah	5	Female	African American	34
Monique	1	Female	White	49
SLN	12	Female	White	36
SD	13	Female	White	42

Instrumentation

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to understand the experiences of high school counselors who have implemented the human trafficking prevention program. The central research questions explored through this study is what are the experiences of high school counselors with the training, implementation of the 9th grade human trafficking prevention program.

Interview protocol. The interview protocol questions were designed to target the three components of the research question: training, implementation and follow up. The additional journal reflections provided a broader context to understand the counselors' experiences and provided a different medium for data collection.

To fully explore the experiences of the school counselor and build on the body of research Table 2.0 below outlines the first round of interview questions and the sources to validate the interview questions. Moustakas (1994) suggests five to seven research questions for an open-ended interview. The sources used to validate the research questions included existing empirical reach studies and theoretical frameworks.

Table 2.0

Development of interview questions round one interviews and related theory and concepts

Interview Question	Source
Describe yourself as a school counselor (years of experience, grade levels worked with, counseling approach, role perception, major responsibilities).	Empowerment Theory emphasizes the importance of understanding an individual's perception of self. Psychological empowerment includes an intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral components. Counselors must challenge the status quo and combat the perpetuation of social injustice in schools (Bemack & Chung, 2008). School counselors are called to be advocates for all students. The role of an advocate is to support students to reach their academic potential and become prosocial members of society (Field & Baker, 2004). This question will provide insight into the participant's experiences as an agent of change and student advocate.
Describe your school and student population (unique needs, adversities, strengths).	Ecological Systems Theory supports a school counseling model that investigates the environment with the intention of targeting student adversity. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theory recognizes that

Table 2.0 (continued).

	social systems and public policy, impact human development by establishing the conditions of their lives (Salkind, 2006). These questions provide information regarding students and environment from the school counselor's perspective. This information will allow the researcher to further understand the environments the intervention program took place in.
Describe your reaction to learning that you would be involved in the human trafficking prevention program.	Logan, Walker and Hunt (2009) suggest that the first step in combating human trafficking is that helping professionals must be informed of the scope of the issue and aid in informing the public. Responses will provide an understanding of counselor experiences in regards to their prior knowledge of the topic, how human trafficking permeates society, and how students can be negatively impacted.
Describe your experience with any training you received prior to implementing the prevention program curriculum and follow up.	Stotts and Ramsey (2009) suggested that counselors educate themselves about the topic of human trafficking. However, specific methods of training school stakeholders are lacking in the empirical research. Thompson and Haley (2018), suggest training aimed at increasing counselor self-efficacy and competence when working with survivors of human trafficking. This question may identify specific methods school leadership employ to train staff.
Describe your experience with the implementation of the human trafficking program.	Atkinson, Cumin and Hanson (2016), conducted a review of U.S. state laws regarding human trafficking, all 50 states have passed legislation that distinguished trafficking as a felony offense. Thirteen states have laws that address education about trafficking and seven have mandated reporting laws in place. These statistics validate understanding counselor experience. Counselor experiences with current programs provide feedback that will be meaningful for future program planning.

Table 2.0 (continued).

Describe your experience with any follow-up you engaged in based on the post-survey data collected.	Logan, Walker and Hunt (2009) reported that the needs of each individual survivor and family will be unique. This suggests that cross-discipline collaboration is necessary when handling cases. Counselor responses may help identify the collaboration necessary to support students and families.
Describe any positive or negative feedback you have regarding the program and follow-up services.	Ratts and Hutchins (2009), explored the American Counseling Association's (ACA) social justice advocacy competencies at the client/student level. The aim was to operationalize advocacy at this level. The authors suggest that the implication of this work is to create a paradigm shift. In that shift, counselors no longer work in a reactionary circumstance mode and are instead proactive. Specifically, counselors must be "social-advocacy minded" and work deliberately to change systems. Providing counselors with the opportunity to offer feedback allows their voices to be heard. Counselors who participate in this research study are participating in an advocacy effort.

Below Table 3.0 contains the interview questions used during the second round of interviews. These questions were created based on significant statements from the first round of interviews. From the first round of data analysis categories and emerging themes were identified. These emerging themes and significant statement guided the second round of interview questions. Questions were designed to delve deeper into the first round interview questions, ask additional questions and reach the point of saturation.

Table 3.0

Development of interview questions round two interviews and related significant statements and emerging themes

Interview Question	Significant Statement
Have any major changes occurred to the training, implementation or follow up of human trafficking curriculum since we last spoke?	I think it was because it wasn't just information that was given to the high school students. It was given also to middle schoolers and I think from there they kind of make the judgment that maybe this might be a little too much for some students. And then you also can kind of keep in mind that even though you've been giving it to high school students oftentimes ninth graders, so they're not really removed from middle school right. And so, I think it was from there they kind of made the judgment that this was going to be yeah. No, I think they trained us well with it. The presentation wasn't super great anyways, and so we did that presentation for two years, I think, and then I worked with the social work lead. I was one of the three or four counselors that got together with her and we revamped it. So now there's a new presentation, which we really wanted some more real life situations And so it was scary as like a counselor watching it so you can imagine students watching it
Has or how has the human trafficking curriculum changed your counseling practices?	I remember thinking Gosh what is human trafficking. I mean I've heard of the term but I would need to learn more about it, am my going to be able to deliver this type training if I'm the one asked do it, what will it look like, really just what it is and what it means to our students and jeez how many of our students are struggling. And now and now I don't remember exactly but I don't like it just felt like it came up and then I started hearing about it.

Table 3.0 (continued).

	I don't recall before that ever having those conversations at all. So it wasn't like maybe we did and I just don't remember but it felt like as soon as we learned that this was rolling out then it was like I would be I would hear about it more on the days and maybe I would just like paying attention more certainly had never had any had a conversation with a student about human trafficking or so. And now that's kind of I feel like it's come up every year in some way shape or form. Well we do the presentation. Yes we screen for it But I never really heard of it like I'd heard of it and like you know third world countries I'm like but never thought about it for you
In what way do you see yourself as an advocate for students?	I definitely think it's important that students are learning this because I even think just with everything social media and the way that students are in relationships now the dming and the snap chatting it's just very different. And a lot of it is unhealthy and us trying to teach them what a good relationship a real relationship. Well yeah I think I think again I don't think this is specific to our school but I think we need to talk more about race and inequity here and implicit bias. And we've started to have these conversations. I think the kids have the conversations more than the adults do. And I think adults need to have the conversation more.
In what way would a more thorough training impact your ability to help students? 1. Impact your self-efficacy as a counselor?	So, I know this something a lot of SAP counselors wouldn't say. It seems like any time there's a new initiative, and we get put in charge of it, it seems like ... I do feel like my school is very good about supporting us in that, though. So, at first it was like, okay it's another thing we have to do No I didn't. I didn't feel prepared coming away from that because It just felt so like foreign like this is going to happen like but it obviously does

Table 3.0 (continued).

	But with human trafficking it's kind of like oh it's up to your discretion and it's kind of like well what if I'm not doing the right thing
	I just felt somewhat unprepared to go in and provide classroom guidance. A really heavy topic that could affect students in different ways and how to handle the fall out.
In your opinion, what implications does this programming have on social justice?	When I look at that video, if I was a kid who was maybe undocumented, or my parents were possibly being deported or something like that, I would watch that video and probably freak out. But I feel like it does a really good job of saying, "We're not here to try and find people who are illegal, we're here to help people who are being trafficked
What would you need to feel confident when entering in to follow up scenarios with students?	I think maybe actually going through like watching someone give the presentation that kind of thing because I mean some of the slides it's just there you just like statistic facts just facts and or like a video that kind of just learning how to introduce it like what are some key lines.

Journal reflections. The participants were required to complete two guided journal reflections after each interview. The questions for the first reflection were as follows:

1. Describe how your experiences with the human trafficking program have impacted your counseling practices, beliefs or school counseling program.

2. Describe any shift in your knowledge of human trafficking that has occurred since working with the human trafficking curriculum.

3. Describe your experiences with/or related to the implementation of the human trafficking program.

4. Describe your experiences with any follow up services you provided to students or families.

The questions for the second reflection were as follows:

1. Have any major changes occurred to the training, implementation or follow up of human trafficking curriculum since we last spoke?

2. Has or how has the human trafficking curriculum changed your counseling practices?

3. In what way do you see yourself as an advocate for students?

4. In what way would a more thorough training impact your ability to help students? Impact yourself efficacy as a counselor?

5. In your opinion, what implications does this programming have on social justice?

6. What would you need to feel confident when entering in to follow up scenarios with students?

Content analysis of curriculum. A content analysis of the program curriculum was conducted. Implications from the content analysis provided a better understanding of the key components of the curriculum materials and outcomes of the curriculum. Specifically, to understand what the components were, how do they worked together, what beliefs and assumptions were represented, how the themes identified aligned with the literature, and how the themes aligned with legislation and curriculum objectives. Below are questions that were considered prior to the content analysis (Jensen and Reddy, 1998):

1. What need is your curriculum responding to?
2. Who is the curriculum designed for?
3. Who designed the curriculum?
4. What content areas does it focus on?
5. Who teaches the curriculum?
6. What exposure time is there to this curriculum?
7. How will the success of the curriculum be determined?
8. What resources does the curriculum need?

Positionality

A phenomenological approach to the study design requires that I examine my own personal values and biases. I began by examining my own the axiological assumption to address and make values known to myself and others (Creswell, 2013). This is the process of identifying my own biases and prejudices to enable new knowledge to surface. I addressed my prior experiences with the human trafficking program and as well as my preconceived notions of how counselors experience the program. Therefore, I positioned myself to more accurately understand participant meaning (Creswell, 2013).

I currently work as an elementary school counselor in the same southeastern city where the study took place. The school averages around 500 students each school year. I am the sole school counselor in the building. This far exceeds American School Counselor Association's recommended ratio of 250:1 (ASCA, 2012). My experience in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program has had many challenges. Prevention programming is a crucial component of the comprehensive counseling model; however, responsive services are often a barrier to efficient implementation. I find that I must cancel and reschedule core counseling practices (i.e., small groups, classroom lessons) to respond to immediate student needs. While responsive services are an equally important component of the school counselor role, they often impede on core curriculum practices. Alternately, core practices can prevent immediate response to students when a crisis situation arises. I believe that without appropriate counselor allotments, counselors will continue to struggle to implement standards based on ASCA's National Model. This belief informs my interest in the current research study. A bias I hold is that if recommended ratios are not met for school counselors, it will become increasingly difficult to provide comprehensive programming with fidelity.

At the onset of this study, I had limited experience with the human trafficking prevention program. Again, I wondered how school counselors would be able to add this additional program to the number of existing initiatives and responsibilities. I had to bracket this bias to ensure I did not influence the experiences of participants in any way. Before the implementation of the human trafficking program in the 2016-2017 school year, my exposure and training related to the topic was out-of-date. My lack of knowledge sparked an increased interest in the topic. During the initial role out, elementary school counselors did not receive any training. I believe that all school counselors should receive training on human trafficking regardless of the grade levels they work with. School counselors are expected to respond to any crisis that occurs within their school. Therefore, this type of training would ensure that counselors can identify when trafficking may be impacting students and families. Finally, exposure to training would ensure that counselors have the knowledge to appropriately advocate for students and families and provide responsive services when necessary.

Procedure

Data collection. The first step in the data collection process will be to submit the study to the North Carolina State University's IRB for approval. A copy of the approval letter is provided in Appendix E. Additionally, the district within which the researcher conducted the study has its own internal review board that required approval to conduct research within the county. Upon approval granted by both the university and school district, the data collection process was initiated. The researcher conducted two in person, one-on-one interviews. Both interviews were semi-structured and followed the interview protocols provided previously in this chapter. Interviews were conducted twice to understand the experiences of the participants and build upon the first interview. The interview protocols were used to guide the interview questions

while also allowing the interviewees freedom to express their experiences openly. Tables 2.0 and 3.0 show the detailed interview protocols used during the interviews. All interviews were recorded and stored on a password protected laptop.

The interviews were transcribed utilizing the services of a professional transcription service. The identity of the participants was protected by providing each with a pseudonym. The participants were sent a copy of the final transcriptions of each interview. This allowed each participant to check the transcription for errors. This process is known as member checking and was employed to enhance the trustworthiness and authenticity of the responses. The guided response questions were collected through email with use of the pseudonym. All documents were stored on a secure network, using a password protected laptop.

The content analysis focused on one ninth grade curriculum implemented in the sample district. The district implements the human trafficking curriculum at the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. The researcher is also an employee of the district and had access to curriculum materials. The curriculum materials consisted of one PowerPoint presentation entitled: Human Trafficking the 9th Grade Edition. Embedded within the PowerPoint were four short videos entitled: What is Human Trafficking by the Blue Campaign, Joy Clip, Stages of Exploitation within Sex Trafficking, and Know the Signs of Human Trafficking. All materials were retrieved through the district website and saved on password protected laptop.

Data analysis. Data analysis followed the guidelines for qualitative research. These methods included organizing and deducing the information gained through the interview process. The text was reduced into themes by organizing the text into codes. In accordance with suggestions by Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994), the methods for phenomenological research and data analysis were employed. The steps in this process are outlined in this section.

First, I presented my own experiences in relation to the topic. As stated previously, this is known as Epoche. Presenting my own beliefs regarding the intervention program and training lead to understanding my own personal bias and allowed me to set these beliefs aside to understand the essence of the experiences of the participants (i.e., bracketing). Following the interview and professional transcription process, the transcriptions were read by the researcher while simultaneously memoing and taking notes. From the memoing, the data was horizontalized. This process produced a list of important statements made in each interview. From the horizontalization process, the meaningful statements were grouped together into meaning units (Moustakas, 1994). Meaning units served as deduced themes. Finally, statements were organized into themes illustrated through textural, structural and composite descriptions. This process occurred for both rounds of interviews. For both rounds of interviews, journal reflections were reviewed after coding of the interviews took place. Journal reflections were checked for new information and discrepancies from the interviews.

Content analysis of curriculum. The content analysis of the 9th grade curriculum was analyzed through interaction levels grounded in theory based on Table 4.0, the program objectives were analyzed to consider if the objectives aligned with existing research, and a frequency analysis was conducted to quantify the qualitative data available. The table below ties the analysis back to the original questions in the instrumentation section and analysis based on theory which the research is grounded in (Jensen and Reddy, 1998). The findings are presented in the next chapter.

Table 4.0

Analysis of curriculum based on interaction level

Level	Analysis Type	Critical Analysis
Micro	Impact Analysis	What are the potential impacts of program?
Macro	Design Analysis	What are the underlying theories, research, teaching principles, outcome goals?
Exo	Policy Analysis	Legislation and policy that align with program.

Frequency analysis was suggested as a method to enhance the curriculum content analysis. Thus, a frequency analysis of the available curriculum was conducted. Comai (2017), suggest that qualitative research would benefit from a structured and explicit approach to analyze online data. Comai (2017) makes several suggestions for "standard procedures" before running a frequency analysis including: removing stop words (irrelevant words i.e. "and" "or"), reducing words to their stem (removing stemming), removing sparse words, and combining words with the same meaning. The researcher followed these suggestions when conducting the word frequency query using NVivo software. The most common words were analyzed to determine if the curriculum objectives aligned with existing research. The deduced information was used to explore the questions presented in the instrumentation.

Validation Strategies

Several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative research study. Ensuring trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is an important component of the design (Merriam, 2009). Each measure is briefly outlined in Table 5.0 and also described in detail below.

Credibility. The principal investigator (PI) is an elementary school counselor within the district the research study was conducted. The PI is familiar with the school counseling profession and the environments within which school counselors operate within. The researcher engaged in multiple interactions with each participant in their setting. This consisted of two semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately one hour. Throughout each interview paraphrasing was used to ensure the participant's experiences were accurately understood. Member checking was used at several stages of the research study. Participants received a copy of both interview transcriptions to review for accuracy. During the second interview, participants were asked for feedback on the emerging themes deduced from the first round of interviews to determine if the emerging themes adequately represented their experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Transferability. The context of the research study and the procedures were described in detail. Chapter two provides a detail literature review including the context of human trafficking, legislation, intervention programming in schools, and the role of school counselors. Additionally, the population and sample demographics are described in the detail. This context will allow researchers to determine if it is appropriate to generalize findings to populations beyond that of the sample. Additionally, the themes were described in "rich, thick description" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). These descriptions were provided through the lens of textual, structural and composite to ensure a full picture of the participants experiences was provided. The depth of the descriptions allows the reader to determine if there were enough shared characteristics to transfer the findings to a different population.

Dependability. Several steps were taken to ensure the dependability of the study. The procedures were outlined in detail. Based on the detailed descriptions of the methods provided in chapter three, the study could be easily replicated. An audit trail was used document the detailed

steps of the research project and account for decision made throughout the process (Creswell, 2013).

Confirmability. First and foremost, the researcher positioned herself to account for any existing bias as an initial phase of the research project. Memoing occurred during the interview process. This allowed the researcher to write down initial reactions and thoughts as they presented throughout the interview. These initial reactions were transferred to the researcher's reflection journal when appropriate. Triangulation methods were used to corroborate the themes. A peer reviewer reviewed all coded transcripts. The peer reviewer provided feedback and when there was a discrepancy, about a code, the reviewer and researcher debriefed and came to a consensus. Additionally, multiple data sources helped to triangulate the data and ensure accuracy of recorded participant responses (Creswell, 2013).

Table 5.0

Measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the study

Credibility	Transferability	Dependability	Confirmability
Researcher familiarity with the school counseling profession and environments. Clear data collection and analyzation procedures derived from field experts. Six one hour long interviews. Engagement with participants to facilitate questions related to the school counselors' experiences. Member checking and paraphrasing used throughout to ensure accuracy and understanding.	The context of the study is fully explained in detail (description of human trafficking, criteria, selection, method, demographics, etc.) and the literature review helps to validate the ability to determine applicability to other contexts.	Procedures outlined in detail. An audit trail will be used to document all study events.	Epoche. Triangulation methods utilized. An audit trail will document all study events and reflective commentary to ensure the originality of findings from participants. Multiple data sources (i.e., journals, multiple interviews).

The purpose of chapter three was to outline the methodology of this phenomenological study. This included a description of the proposed population and sampling methods. Instrumentation was described and addressed how the research questions that will be explored. A statement of positionality was included to bracket the research. Procedures were outlined including data collection and analysis procedures that will be followed. In the subsequent chapter results of the study will be presented.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of school counselors working with the ninth grade human trafficking program. Chapter four will begin by examining the findings of the content analysis of the human trafficking curriculum implemented in the school setting. The analysis consisted of analyzing the potential impacts based on interaction levels associated with theory, analyzing the program objectives to consider if the objectives aligned with existing research, and conducting a frequency analysis to quantify the qualitative data available. The purpose of the content analysis was to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum. Previous research studies will be revisited to determine if the curriculum aligns with existing research on human trafficking prevention. Theories explored in chapter two will be revisited to determine if the impacts of the curriculum and theoretical implications.

Next, chapter four will present themes that emerged from 12 totals interviews and 10 journal reflections from six participants. It is important to note that one participant did not complete the journal reflections. The interview data and journal reflections were collected over a six month time period. The central questions of the research study were: What are the experiences of school counselors who implement the human trafficking prevention program curriculum and follow-up? What factors lead to positive outcomes for students? Little existing research exists on school based school counseling interventions to address human trafficking. The aim of this research study was to describe the experiences of school counselors to fill in this gap.

Content Analysis Findings

Curriculum interaction level findings. This section provides an analysis of the alignment between the program curriculum and the Ecological Systems Theory and

Empowerment Theory that were presented in chapter two. Analyzing the two previously discussed theories will determine if the curriculum has theoretical implications. Theoretical foundations may enhance the fidelity of the program and further support the implementation of similar programming.

Ecological systems theory. The human trafficking prevention program takes place in the school setting. Therefore, analyzing the program from a systems approach is a logical process because multiple systems may be impacted. Also, the curriculum analysis questions presented in chapter three align with the theory. At the micro level, the potential impacts of the program were examined. At the macro level, the design analysis occurred. The macro level specifically looked at the underlying theories, research, teaching principals, and outcome goals. At the exo level, the legislation and policy that align with the program were examined.

Micro level. At the micro level, the curriculum directly informs counselors of what human trafficking is and provides information, including risk factors and warning signs for counselors to consider when interacting with students. It is important to note the human trafficking curriculum was revamped after the original implementation in 2016. Feedback from a focus group of school stakeholders and program implementers, led district administrators to make changes to the original curriculum. Feedback indicated that videos used should provide examples that were more relatable to students in North Carolina and videos should not scare students and rather be informative.

All ninth grade students received direct instruction outlining what human trafficking is, healthy versus unhealthy relationships, the stages of grooming, signs to look for and how to seek help. Additionally, because the program implementation occurs within the school setting other stakeholders existing in the micro level of student interactions become aware of the human

trafficking as an institution. As the program is implemented, parents and staff are notified. Parents and guardians receive memorandum outlining NC Senate Bill 279 mandate that all students in seventh, eighth and ninth grades receive instruction on human trafficking prevention and awareness. Also, included are the outline objectives taught in each grade level.

Overall, the program implementation brings awareness to multiple individuals that permeate micro level interactions directly with students (i.e., counselors, parents, teachers, administrators, friends). The rise in awareness has the potential to safeguard students from potential trafficking situations and provide the necessary knowledge to individuals who may intervene on a student's behalf.

***Macro level*.** The clarifying objective of the human trafficking prevention program for ninth grade students were as follows: "Explain how power and control in a relationship can contribute to aggression, violence and sex trafficking." The purpose of the lesson is stated as: "The purpose of this lesson is to educative students on how traffickers can use power and control to pressure victims into human trafficking." The statement of objective: "By the end of this lesson, students will be able to describe signs of unhealthy relationships and how traffickers exploit victims who are susceptible to unhealthy relationships. They will have the opportunity to discuss what to do if they feel that they/someone they know is involved in an unhealthy relationship." Please note that all this information is located on the district employee website.

This section will identify previous research as related to the program objectives, lesson purpose and statement objective all easily identifiable within the curriculum information. A brief overview of literature alignment is provided in Table 6.0.

Table 6.0

Curriculum Component Aligned with Literature

Curriculum Component	**Literature Alignment**
Clear Definition of Human Trafficking	Stotts and Ramey (2009) Logan, Walker, and Hunt (2009) U.S. Department of State (2016)
Healthy versus Unhealthy Relationship	Thompson and Haley (2018)
Grooming Process	McClain and Garrity (2010) Logan, Walker and Hunt (2009) Thompson and Haley (2018)
Risk Factors	Thompson and Haley (2018) McClain and Garrity (2010) Elliott (2017)
How to Seek Help Post Curriculum Survey	Wandersman, Morrissey, and Davino's (1998)

First and foremost, the literature highlights the role of school counselors as student advocates and the importance of shifting to a proactive approach to human trafficking. Ratts and Hutchins (2009), explored the American Counseling Association's (ACA) social justice advocacy competencies at the client/student level. They suggested that the implications of this work are to create a paradigm shift from reactionary to proactive. Both the American Counseling Association and the American School Counselors Association (ASCA, 2012) support proactive program implementation. Bemak and Chung (2008) discussed the necessity of future school counselors to understand the institution of human trafficking. This was again supported by Stotts and Ramey (2009). The action taken by the district as a result of NC Senate Bill 279 ensures that steps are taken to first educate school counseling professionals. Next, each component of the curriculum presented through the ninth grade curriculum is aligned to previously existing research.

The curriculum first provides students with a clear definition and understanding of human trafficking. Stotts and Ramey's (2009) and Logan, Walker, and Hunt's (2009) definitions align with the definition within the PowerPoint presentation and video selections of the curriculum. Logan, Walker, and Hunt (2009) human trafficking is defined as a form of modern-day slavery. From Stott and Ramey (2009) a description of the emotional, physical, psychological damage inflicted on victims of this modern-day slavery system. Human trafficking is also defined by the U.S. Department of State (2016) as, "a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age." The curriculum provides the following definition for students: "The exploitation of a person through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of forced labor, commercial sex, or both. Human trafficking is considered an international and domestic problem that consists of forced or coerced prostitution, domestic servitude, and/or other types of forced labor." This definition clearly defines human trafficking in a way the aligns with what is available in the literature and government sources.

Following the definition of human trafficking, the curriculum provides a discussion of the characteristics of healthy versus unhealthy relationships, the grooming process, and risk factors. These components of the curriculum align with several articles, discussed in chapter two, focused on the risk factors and warning signs of human trafficking. The literature on the grooming process and healthy versus unhealthy relationship came from McClain and Garrity (2010). Both McClain and Garrity (2010) and Thompson and Haley (2018) discuss the importance of understanding how geographic locations impact potential trafficking within an area. Risks factors from McClain and Garrity (2010) included vulnerable populations, specifically, adolescent girls or adolescents experiencing poverty, isolation, drug addiction,

violence in homes, failure in schools, criminal history and/or childhood sexual abuse. Elliott (2017) outlines the grooming process of sexual violence. The curriculum aligns with components of the available literature. However, the curriculum provides a developmentally appropriate depiction of unhealthy relationships. The Joy Clip, a video embedded within the curriculum, provides a relatable example for students of a survivor of human trafficking. The woman featured explains her own upbringing in a middle class family and how an unhealthy relationship and the grooming process led to years of victimization.

Lastly, the curriculum introduces to students how to seek help. This section depicts who students can go to seek help for themselves or another person. Following the conclusion of the curriculum presentation, students are required to fill out a post survey. This aligns with Wandersman, Morrissey, and Davino's (1998) essential strategies for implementing prevention programming. Specifically, with the steps to collect process evaluation, outcome and impact evaluations, and consider lessons learned. As school counselors, we aim to teach students how to advocate for themselves when there is a need. It is also important to remind students that they have support available to them in the school setting.

Exo level. The human trafficking curriculum, examined through this phenomenological study, takes place in a large school district in North Carolina. The curriculum was propelled into place by state legislation. NC Senate Bill 279 was ratified in 2015 and mandates that all students in seventh through ninth grades receive instruction concerning trafficking. NC Senate Bill 279 outlines the requirements, roles, and responsibilities of professional counselors. North Carolina mandates that individual districts are responsible for the implementation of mandated legislation and are responsible for the following: 1. collaborate with outside consultants, including law enforcement with expertise in sex trafficking prevention education, to address the threats of sex

trafficking; 2. Collaborate with outside consultants, including law enforcement with expertise in sex trafficking, on a referral protocol for high-risk pupils and minors. Thus, this legislation led to the implementation of the programming. This researcher was able to speak directly to district administrators to understand more about the process of creating the curriculum. The county modeled the curriculum programming after a Virginia district with similar demographics.

Empowerment theory. The human trafficking curriculum was also evaluated through the lens of the Empowerment Theory. Empowerment theory has two major constructs which are empowering processes and outcomes. These occur at three levels: individual, organizational, and community. The basic premise of the Empowerment Theory is to provide sustainable tools to permeate systems in order to elicit change. The human trafficking curriculum was evaluated based on the conceptualization of the three levels and the empowering processes and outcomes.

Several empowering processes and outcomes were identified. At the individual level, through the implementation of the human trafficking program counselors gained an understanding of human trafficking as an adverse system impacting students. The empowering outcome is that school counselors have knowledge and skills to intervene on students' behalf, which ultimately leads to increased student safety.

At the organization level, empowering processes can be contextualized as decision making and shared responsibilities (Zimmerman, 2000). School stakeholders worked to write, implement and revise the human trafficking curriculum. The empowering outcome is that students can identify healthy versus unhealthy relationships. This will empower students to recognize and avoid potentially adverse relationships and situations.

Lastly, the community level analysis was based on evidence of access to resources. The empowering process identified was the human trafficking curriculum as a facet of the required

curriculum in the described public school system. The empowered outcome is that all students in the ninth grade receive this education, parents are made aware of the program, and stakeholders are trained to implement the program. These facets increase awareness and thus the safety of community members.

Synthesis of interactions and theoretical analysis. As evident through the above analysis, the human trafficking curriculum, regardless of whether done so intentionally or not, exhibits elements of both Empowerment Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The prevention program permeates through the complex environments that make up a student's world. It is apparent that the prevention program is an empowering process which leads to several empowered outcomes. The combination of program components aligned with theory indicates that there is a strong foundation to uphold the program's objectives. This indicates that the program fits within the suggested theoretical foundations. This finding implies that similar programming may benefit from aligning with theory components to address adverse student outcomes. Additionally, the combination of Systems Theory and Empowerment Theory may extend to other prevention programming aimed at empowering populations to circumvent adverse experiences.

Frequency analysis findings. Figure 1.0 depicts a word cloud that depicts the results of the frequency analysis of text from the PowerPoint and the transcripts of the four videos through a text cloud. From the text cloud, the words that stand out represent the highest frequencies within the curriculum. The frequency analysis revealed the top 10 most commonly used words: trafficking, human, victims, help, forced, relationship, sex, happens, exploitation and lastly, make and life (both with 10 counts). Most notably, commonly used words are easily identified. This allows the use of language to be considered. Within the test cloud the word "victims"

standouts. This would indicate the empowering language such as, “survivor” should be used to describe past experiences of individuals. Empowering language should be used throughout prevention programming.

The frequency analysis allowed for further analysis of the content of the curriculum. The alignment shows that the words contained within the text of the curriculum match the objectives and purpose. This would indicate that the content of the program adequately addresses what it is intended to address.

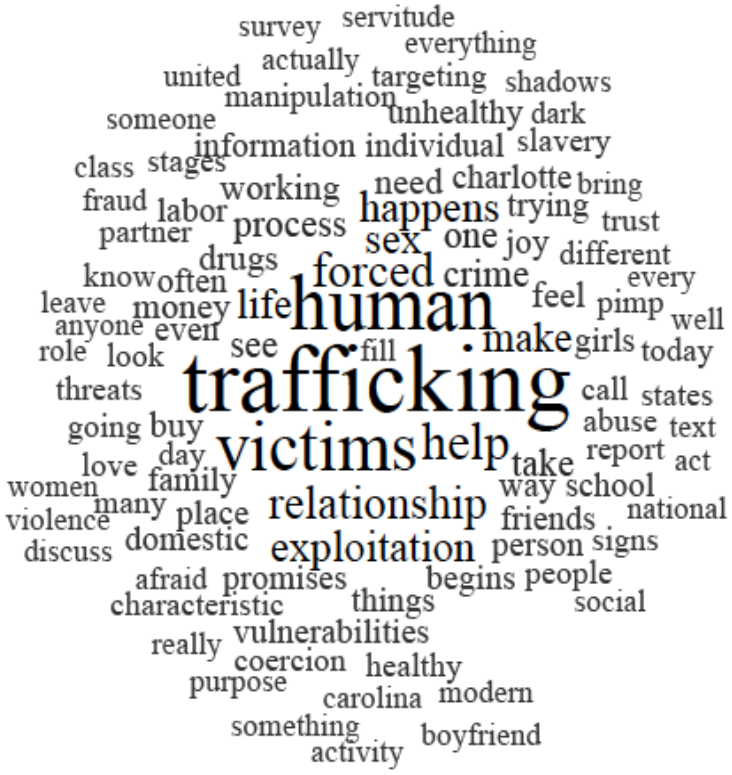

Figure 1.0 Curriculum Text Cloud

Synthesis of content analysis. The focus of the ninth grade curriculum is healthy relationships which is an appropriate preventative approach to avoiding coercive relationships that may lead to trafficking situations. The content analysis revealed that the program objectives align with limited existing research on human trafficking programming and intervention. The potential impacts of the program were identified based on interactions levels which aligned with theory. The frequency analysis identified commonly used words within the program. Overall, the findings indicate that the program is educating students on what factors encompass human trafficking and the risk factors associated with human trafficking as available in the research.

Emerging Themes

As outlined in chapter three, the transcripts of the 12 interviews and 10 journal reflections from six participants were analyzed based on the guidelines for qualitative research. After memoing and coding occurred, significant statements were organized into meaning units that were then grouped into emerging themes. Through the horizontalization process, the following themes emerged: (a) counseling approach (b) initial reactions to human trafficking programming, (c) professional development and training, (d) follow up and screening, and (e) impacts and outcomes. The themes are organized by textural, structural and composite descriptions. Table 7.0 provides an overview of the themes, sub-themes and secondary sub-themes described in this next section.

Table 7.0

Emergent Themes, Sub-themes and Secondary Sub-themes on Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews and Journal Reflections.

Themes, sub-theme and secondary sub-themes	Participant statements
Theme 1: Counseling approach	
1a. Relationships as foundation	I always try to build really good relationships with my kids.
1b. Holistic systems approach	I mean the role of the school counselor as we have a holistic view of the students.
1c. Advocate	I see myself as an advocate for students by arguing on their behalf, in terms of whatever challenging issue that they're presenting.
Theme 2: Initial reactions to human trafficking programming	
2a. Another initiative	It seems like any time there's a new initiative, and we get put in charge of it.
2b. Valuable programming	Definitely appropriate for certain concerns that were emerging within the school system.
2c. Misconceptions	But I never really heard of it like I'd heard of it and like you know third world countries.
Theme 3: Professional development, training and protocol development	
3a. Improvements to training	
Comprehensive training	I think school... We should all be trained, it should be mandated, and we should be supported.
Development of protocol	But, yeah, there is more of a step-by-step procedure, whereas with the human trafficking, I didn't feel as such.
Desired outcomes of improvements	I would want to make sure that I was you know getting the information and getting it to the right people and not making sure the student was safe.
Theme 4: Follow up and screening	
4a. Collaboration	It would take all of us to kind of collaborate together to come up with a course of action.
Theme 5: Impacts and outcomes	
5a. Positive outcomes and implications	
Change in counselor practices	I think just having an awareness of that circumstance possibly coming up for students.
Responsive district leadership	So now there's a new presentation, which we really wanted some more real life situations.
Rise in awareness and student safety	I thought that was very instrumental to be able to educate students about that.
Conversation about relationship	

Table 7.0 (continued).

5b. Social justice and equity implications	Well, I think in terms of the equity piece is just the aspect of access.
5c. Challenges	And so that's kind of like a weird gray area for me is like I've had students that have stayed in hotels and done things.
Counselor self-efficacy	So, it's kind of like a little nerve wracking when we get a yes. What are they going to say? It could be anything.

Theme #1 Counseling Approach

During the first interview, participants were asked to describe their counseling approach. The rationale for beginning each interview with this question was to gain an understanding of how each individual participant views their role and to understand the framework from which they work. Understanding school counselors' theoretical context can provide insight into their working relationships with students, role within the school setting, and interactions with stakeholders. As a result of counselors sharing their counseling and/or theoretical approaches, the following sub-themes emerged: (a) relationships as the foundation, (b) holistic systems approach, and (c) advocate.

Relationships as a foundation. Five of the six participants described building relationships as a significant component of the school counselor role. Relationship building was described as a precursor to a positive working relationship with students. KD described why initial relationships are important, "So that when bad times come you can help them." She described that initial positive relationships help students open up with more difficult topics. SLN stated, "I approach all of my students with unconditional positive regard." Unconditional positive regard helps establish positive relationships with her students. Monique described herself as, "a little Adlerian." This indicates that she also believes in the importance of relationships as the foundation of the counseling relationship.

Sarah described the importance of compassion in building relationships with students:

> And you know what if my approach was where these students all would be with the passion but also understand where to take a harder line with certain students but predominantly to lead with compassion really be able to provide that to students especially when they don't feel like they're receiving from other people. And when they don't feel equipped to offer to themselves.

Tarheel19 provided this context to the importance of relationships:

> I always try to build really good relationships with my kids. I feel like when I develop that connection with them, then they really seem to work harder for me. When they see somebody is invested in their education, or their goals, or whatever then they really start to open up.

All counselors cited establishing a positive relationship as foundation to the counseling relationship. Counselors believed that positive connections lead to positive outcomes for students.

Holistic systems approach. Four counselors cited working from a holistic systems approach. They expressed viewing the whole student as a unique individual with many facets. They indicated that it is important to understand a student's perspective when working together. Monique stated, "I'm all about the systems and understanding context people. So that's huge for me." SD stated the value of understanding a student's perspective:

> I like the official words but I just you know try to meet the student where they are and understand what they're coming from. Is their perspective helping students something that's important to me and helping students to see perspectives and views of others and how they fit into that and then just working with students on supporting them and helping them and the changes they want to make in their lives.

Sarah explained how a holistic approach impacts her counseling style:

> So, you know a gross oversimplification of my job I come up on my own. But more specifically do I mean the role of the school counselor as we have a holistic view of the students. The administrators see one side of things or have one or a certain set of focus. Teachers have another set of focus when it comes to students. But for counselors we, at this level, have a very holistic approach. So, we're looking at all aspects of what's going on with the student. And we kind of fill in the gaps where the academic piece sees, where

> the behavior piece sees and we kind of are the glue almost that kind of fills in every other aspect there's not a catch all when it comes to academics or behavior.

Advocate. All six participants identified as advocates for students. The ways in which this was conceptualized for each participant varied. The root of each statement was comprehending individual students needs and helping them access resources to promote success. SD described her role as a student advocate:

> Oh, just in general. Well, just, I'm here for the students. So being an advocate for them kind of is different depending on the situation. But I'm basically trying to support you their education and what that looks like, whether it's support from teachers or pulling people together. And then also like their social and emotional wellbeing, doing referrals, things like that. So just trying to support students as a whole, as a whole person.

Similarly, SLN described her role as an advocated in terms of viewing the students as a whole person:

> I see myself as an advocate for students by arguing on their behalf, in terms of whatever challenging issue that they're presenting. Or, helping them to navigate systems so that they're more successful, specifically in schools because I'm here as a support to them while they're at school. But, generally speaking, I guess I advocate for them based on their academics and their personal and social wellbeing.

SLN mentioned helping students to "navigate systems." As advocates, each counselor implied that advocating for students and helping students learn to advocate for themselves led to positive outcomes. Sarah described her work as an advocated in detail:

> I think so. Just in my experience, like so far in my career I've found myself in different circumstances where I've had to advocate for the student within school and outside of school. And so yeah, I would definitely say I'm an advocate for the students.

Below, Sarah describes a specific situation related to student safety:

> Well, definitely academically, you know, working with teachers and really kind of helping students articulate their needs in a more appropriate way. And then also with the mental health piece, when one circumstance I encounter a lot with students, especially in a situation where I have to do suicide screenings. There's a great deal of fear for the kids and having the parents know about it, and really being able to kind of talk with the

> parents before they talk with the student and really kind of be able to walk them through and help them process what happened.

The essence of the theme one "counselor's approach and foundations" is that the needs of the students are first and foremost. These counselors recognize that building the foundation of positive working relationship requires positive interactions with students, a holistic understanding of their students, and advocating on the student's behalf. They believe that their ability to elicit initial positive relationships produce positive working relationships with students.

Additionally, the essence of the school counselor's role as advocate sub-theme seemed to be the ability to understand students' needs and help students access the resources necessary for success. Again, all counselors stated that helping students to "navigate" situations was an important component to their work as advocates. This could be in terms of knowledge, relationships, systems, and/or access to resources. Through each conversation it was apparent in tone and responses that the school counselors have a strong sense of purpose and importance related to their work with students.

Theme #2 Initial Reactions to Human Trafficking Programming

During the first interview, participants were asked to describe their initial reactions to learning about the implementation of the human trafficking program. This allowed a firsthand account of this phenomenon from the perspective of individuals who experienced it. Each participant had a unique reaction to learning about the initiative. It is important to understand the context of this curriculum rollout from the counselors directly involved with any and/or all components (i.e., training, implementation and/or follow up and screening). How each participant reacted to learning of the initiative varied. Therefore, the following sub themes emerged (a) another initiative, (b) valuable programming, and (c) misconceptions.

Another initiative. Within the school setting it is common that new initiatives are implemented. However, some participants experienced adverse reactions. These reactions seemed to be tied to misconception and the general vastness of the school counselor role. Counselors are often called on in the school setting to be experts in numerous topics. SLN described her initial reaction to the human trafficking initiative:

> I remember thinking Gosh what is human trafficking. I mean I've heard of the term but I would need to learn more about it, am my going to be able to deliver this type training if I'm the one asked do it, what will it look like, really just what it is and what it means to our students and jeez how many of our students are struggling.

Tarheel19 described her reaction when she learned that SAP counselors were in charge the human trafficking program coordination at their individual schools.

> So, I know this is something a lot of SAP counselors wouldn't say. It seems like any time there's a new initiative, and we get put in charge of it, it seems like ... I do feel like my school is very good about supporting us in that, though. So, at first, it was like, okay it's another thing we have to do."

Tarheel19 learned of the new programming during an SAP (Student Assisting Programs) PLT meeting. The SAP counselors serve a unique role and in most high schools oversee programming. So, therefore, SAP serves as the point person for the human trafficking programming within the sample district.

Valuable programming. Despite initial misconceptions, all counselors made statements referencing the value in the program. Sarah stated, "I was very much in favor of it. I thought it was incredibly useful. You know, definitely appropriate for certain concerns that were emerging within the school system." Tarheel19 stated, "I think it's good to open the kids' eyes to things that are going on outside of our little bubble." SD described her experience in her own awareness and the shift in her conscientiousness:

> I don't recall before that ever having those conversations at all. So it wasn't like maybe

> we did and I just don't remember but it felt like as soon as we learned that this was rolling out then it was like I would be I would hear about it more on the days and maybe I would just like paying attention more certainly had never had any had a conversation with a student about human trafficking or so. And now that's kind of I feel like it's come up every year in some way shape or form. Well we do the presentation. Yes, we screen for it.

All counselors believed there was value in prevention programs designed to inform students and prevent adverse student outcomes.

Misconceptions. All the participants stated that the program had value in leading to positive outcomes for students. However, during the initial year they had misconceptions of how human trafficking could potentially impact students they work with directly. Tarheel19 stated, “But I do think it's very important, and at my particular school I don't feel like it's something that you would think might be an issue.” SLN described her own preconceived notions of what trafficking was, “I didn't [have strong understanding] and I basically ever heard the term. I thought of the movie Taken. Yeah. So, it's not a good knowledge base.”

Similarly, KB shared her initial lack of knowledge on the confines of human trafficking, “But I never really heard of it like I'd heard of it and like you know third world countries I'm like but never thought about it for here.” Monique described the sense she received from students and stakeholders:

> Or I guess yeah, I mean but this is again my limited exposure, but I felt as though from both students and teachers like I didn't sense a lot of buy in or a sense of this is this is up this is an actual problem.

Sarah shared her thoughts on misconceptions surrounding human trafficking:

> And you know being able to provide that education to students because you know that was a term that was being thrown around, but I don't think many students I mean I don't think many professionals really understood what human trafficking and human trafficking meant or what it looked like especially. I think one of the biggest myths was that it was only an international issue. And it really could be something that's occurring in

> your backyard. Yeah. So, I think that was I felt very good that that was something else going to be offered to students.

These statements shed light on misconceptions experienced by professionals working with high school students. These statements reinforce a sub theme described later regarding the positive outcomes of the program, one of which, was a rise in awareness for students and stakeholders.

The context of theme one was that there were initial adverse reactions related to misconceptions and implementation of a new initiative. Concurrently, all counselors deemed the information valuable. The essence of this theme is that counselors value work which promotes positive student outcomes. However, the job demands of the school counselor role are vast. The addition of a new initiative to a cumbersome workload can elicit negative reactions. However, this did not undermine the importance of empowering students with the content covered by the curriculum.

Theme #3 Professional Development, Training and Protocol

As evident through the data collected, training varied for all six participants. All, but one, participant engaged in some type of training prior to the implementation of the curriculum. It is important to understand how the participants experienced the training component of the program implementation. How each counselor experienced the training impacted the sub themes described below. For SD, SLN, and Sarah training occurred by school counselor professional learning teams (PLTs). Tarheel19 was trained through her SAP counselor PLT. Monique was exposed to the program during her internship. She shadowed the SAP counselor at her site placement, however, did not engage in any other training. Monique recalls, “So when I was doing my internship I worked with, shadowed the SAP counselor. She does the she does it 9th

grade and 12th grade I guess when the programs go out." When asked about her training experience KB simply stated, "Nothing." Participants described their training experiences to the best of their recollections.

SD recalled that the training occurred along with a refresher course on suicide screenings:

> So it was, if I remember correctly, it we I went to mine on the same day as a suicide refresher training. I think that's how it was rolled out. Like you could sign up for it like that. And then we just went and kind of learned about it and then yeah so like to see the presentation that the students were going to get.

Sarah detailed the training with her PLT:

> So, it was something that was definitely done at the county level that it was disseminated to us. It started out with we had it through our PLTs. Yes. And so, K. L [department chair]. later met with all the different PLTs to kind of go over the curriculum. What was interesting was how they adjusted it after the initial rollout to make changes, one for time but also for content.

SLN recalled a department leader presentation at one of her PLT meetings:

> So, I would want to say there was a person from the county where I work whose role is over crisis and intervention. Who handles training on suicide assessment and things like that? And she may have come in. I don't think it was a very long training and told us what we were called you need to be doing it provided like a short PowerPoint, and that was the extent of it.

Tarheel19 described her experience with the training and the evolution of the curriculum:

> So, we had an SAP PLT, that was one of our PLT meetings, I guess what was that? Three, four years ago now where they trained us on it. It was still very new. I think what they originally did, was they rolled it out to several of the PLT, the 12th grade ... We have a 12th grade counselor PLT, 9th grade counselor, you know? We have one for each grade. The funny thing is they rolled it out to these other counselors first. We were the last ones to get the training. I'm pretty sure we were the last ones, if not second to last. So, by the time they got to us they had really cut out a lot of, there was a video, so they had cut out a lot of things out of the video. So, we saw what we ended up presenting that first couple years, we saw that finished product.

As evident through the textural descriptions, reactions to the training varied. Through the interview process, it was obvious that some counselors had stronger opinions than others. Two

counselors took action to fill in the gaps in the training and increase their own understanding. Sarah and Monique both sought out additional information on their own. Sarah describes how she educated herself on the topic:

> It's just educating yourself, you know. Really being able to make sure you have a good grasp of the subject. There are tons of really good documentaries, news reports, lots of ways in which you can educate yourself about the subject of human trafficking and really being able to then kind of speak more from a place of understanding.

SLN describes her reaction after the training:

> I just felt somewhat unprepared to go in and provide classroom guidance. A really heavy topic that could affect students in different ways and how to handle the fall out. I remember thinking I was. Well it was my responsibility in identifying students being trafficked or not. Yeah just varying thoughts about how I will deliver it without being an expert in it. And how to work with students who are potentially being trafficked.

All participants offered insight into how they believed the training could be improved to promote feelings of preparedness for other stakeholders charged with the responsibility of implementing the program. Common statements by participants led to the following sub themes related to improvement in the training: (a) improvements to training and (b) desired outcomes of improvements.

Improvements to training and protocol. Each participant, apart from Sarah, identified ways in which the training could be improved. Sarah felt the training was enough and stated that she spent time doing research on her own. This allowed her to feel comfortable with the content. All other participants believed that the following suggested improvements would increase the fidelity of the training and thus increase positive outcomes. The secondary sub-themes were: (a) comprehensive training, (b) development of protocol and (c) desired outcomes of improvements.

Comprehensive training. Participants cited training and professional development surrounding the human trafficking curriculum should take place more frequently and on a

consistent basis. This would ensure the information counselors have is current and counselor practices surrounding follow-up, screening and intervention are aligned with best practices as determined by program stakeholders. During the 2019-2020 school year, counselors mentioned that refresher courses were available as a part of the district wide professional development (PD) plan. Counselors noted the difficulty of getting out of the building for PD opportunities and suggested online training and online resources (i.e., webinars, documents, presentations, community resources) that could be revisited at any time. An online resource library would be ideal and remove the barrier of accessing off site training. The counselors determined that training should be mandated for all counselors and should take place before any engagement in the curriculum or follow up services. Monique described her thoughts on mandated trainings for counselors and administrators:

> We should all be trained, it should be mandated, and we should be supported. I guess you can't all leave at the same time, but maybe on a workday in the summer, when there aren't kids in the building. I think admin needs to be trained. It shouldn't just be our responsibility.

KB shared her hopes about how the training will evolve in the future:

> I just hope over the years maybe it just improves and there may be everyone's required to go to another training, even if they have been trained in the past. When they've maybe advanced the training a little more to be more specific to how to follow up with those certain situations.

Sarah shared her thoughts on how consistent professional development opportunities can help keep information current:

> Just again to update them on any new information, to be able to address any questions or concerns that have arisen for counselors through their dissemination of that information that can then help to keep the presentation fresh and up to date with the current trends that are going on

Generally, the counselors described that training as an overview of the PowerPoint presentation that they would be presenting as the curriculum content. More in depth training was desired by all counselor participants. SNL reflected on her training experience. She did have training on the curriculum content, however, did not recall training on following up and screening potential trafficking victims:

> And this one was a real quick one they provided the PowerPoint that we were to use to implement it but not at didn't have a lot of detail about it. So basically, I guess we were called upon to teach this to students when we hadn't been taught in more depth about what it all means.

SLN shares how she felt after the training occurred:

> Follow up [related to training] negative in that. I don't remember being trained on that at all. I don't remember that piece at all. Negative. I'm just not 100 % comfortable giving this training.

Counselors offered feedback on how they believed the training could be improved. The suggestions for providing a comprehensive training included background information on how the program was initiated (i.e., laws such as NC Senate Bill 279), general information on how human trafficking could or has impacted students in the area (e.g., including statistics related to interventions and screenings), protocol for follow up and screenings situations (discussed in more depth in the next section), opportunity to present the curriculum presentation amongst peers, and role played follow up scenarios. KB and SLN describe how a comprehensive training could look:

> I think maybe, a training where they're actually showing you, okay, this is how you should go through it. And actually, giving examples of how to start certain conversations with the students. Could then help the presentation as a whole and help the counselor. Because I mean we're not classroom teachers, some counselors aren't used to teaching a lesson really in front of groups. I mean we do it but not as often or sometimes it's just a basic PowerPoint. But with this presentation it is just to be more of conversation and engaging the students to think critically about human trafficking. So, I think maybe role playing or something in training and trying to discuss with others how to approach certain

> topics or certain parts of the presentation that could definitely positively impact, I think.
>
> Absolutely the way we're trained and school counselors in our master's program we do a lot of role play role playing modeling. We did not receive any of that or even just to be a participant in the training.

KB and SLN also believed that school counselor training programs have a responsibility to include education related to human trafficking to counselors in training:

> Yeah. Because it's like we didn't have any training on this in grad school. But right, it's like you're supposed to be the expert in the building, but it's like when you've had minimal kind of crappy training, it's hard to feel like an expert in it.
>
> And, there was something else I had in mind ... Otherwise, I think an important implication is human trafficking being a curriculum focus in training programs, specifically for school counselors.

The essence of theme three, "professional development, training and protocol," counselor experiences with training was diverse. Counselors believed that training practices could be improved upon to ensure counselors are optimally prepared to conduct programming and follow up services with fidelity. Counselors desire accessible tools to help them determine a student's safety and next steps. Ultimately, the desired improvements to the training would aid counselors to feel equipped within this role.

Development of protocol. Throughout the interview process, comparisons were made between the human trafficking follow up and the signs of suicide screenings (SOS). The SOS curriculum is a similar prevention program that targets suicide prevention. Counselors referred to the clear protocol provided for the screening process in the SOS programming. Participants expressed a desire for the creation of a similar tool when conducting follow up screenings from the human trafficking curriculum. KB states, "But with human trafficking it's kind of like oh it's up to your discretion and it's kind of like well what if I'm not doing the right thing…"

Additionally, a protocol may provide guidance to counselors in follow up situations on

when to contact law enforcement and child protective services versus a guardian; or when to do both. Tarheel19 stated, “I mean it doesn't really tell us what to do other than, we can call CPS, or we can do the normal things. But there's not, other than calling one of the hotlines, they gave us a lot of hotlines in the videos, the presentation, so I guess we could always do that.” Monique echoed this sentiment as she wondered aloud what she would do if a student presented with potential trafficking warning signs, “Then what. Like what. Then what I do. Right. You know what's the next thing I do and who.”

***Desired outcomes of improvements*.** Addressing the deficits in the training and follow up would lead to higher self-efficacy of counselors regarding their beliefs about their capabilities to handle situations, connect students to resources and screen for possible situations. Ultimately, improvements to the training and providing a protocol to guide counselors in the screening process could lead to more appropriate identification of students in trafficking situations. Well trained professionals have the potential to increase student safety and lead to a decline in trafficking incidents.

The essence of theme three, “professional development and training,” was that counselors mostly found the training procedures insufficient. The deficit in the training procedures and lack of clear protocol negativity impacted their beliefs about their ability to recognize and support students in potential trafficking situations. These counselors believe that improvements should be made to professional development, training, and protocol development in order to best support students.

Theme #4 Follow up and Screening

All counselors interviewed had participated in follow up and screenings related the human trafficking curriculum. The follow up conversations occurred after the program

implementation. At the end of the lesson, all students fill out a post-survey with the following questions:

> Based on the lesson today I feel: I need to talk to someone about myself or a friend. I do not need to talk to someone about myself or a friend (students check yes or no).
> In the last year has anyone done things to you to make you feel unsafe?
> last year has anyone ever done things to you that made you feel unsafe?
> In the last year has anyone ever asked you to do things that made you feel unsafe?
> Have you been or are currently in a romantic relationship where you feel unsafe?
> Are you in a job in which you feel unsafe?
> Do you currently have a safe place that you go to every night to sleep?

Based on student responses to the survey questions, counselors conduct follow up sessions with students to further screen for student safety. Counselors had varying experiences with follow up and screening services for students. Many of the follow up sessions were not related to specific human trafficking situations. When asked how counselors navigated these conversations counselors cited relying on their basic counseling skills. Additionally, responses included being cautious not to retraumatize students. SD stated, “I don't even know what questions to ask because and there's a whole other thing where you're not supposed to retraumatize people.” Counselors stated that they would inherently rely on basic counseling skills to navigate conversations. SLN talked through what this may entail:

> I felt like I knew what to do or my counseling experience was deemed which is basically to be nonjudgmental either for the student and then ensure that I notify the appropriate people whether it's a CPS report or call or calling home first CPS report or whatever the case may be to protect the students as our mandatory role but in terms of talking through what exactly it means to be human trafficked.

Counselors frequently referred to collaborating with other student service members and stakeholders when student safety concerns surfaced. Through these conversations an emphasis on collaboration became apparent. Counselors valued the ability to work with team members and school staff to ensure the best decisions were being made for any case where student’s safety was

questioned. Collaboration emerged as a sub theme.

Collaboration. Collaboration was the most often cited way to navigate the follow up and screening process and, when necessary, intervention. All counselors interviewed described collaboration as an important component of the follow up and screening process. Counselors relied heavily on collaboration with department heads or deans, administrators, student resource officers (SROs), child protective services, and, when appropriate, parents and guardians to make decisions regarding student safety. Sarah seemed to be the most comfortable in follow up situations. She attributed this to being able to collaborate with the SRO and administrators in the building to ensure student safety. Sarah described how working with the SRO officer can be helpful:

> I will say one thing for them (SROs) is they're great for consultation in terms of you know advising on the legal ramifications of someone's situation and being able to be that liaison with the law enforcement if we need to bring someone else because typically they don't if there's a crime has been committed they're not necessarily the ones that investigate it. But you know again there are great channels to be able to move information through and then get involvement from the local police department

The ability to collaborate with administration was also valued by counselors. Sarah described relying on her school administration for support:

> Our administrators You know definitely getting them involved and being able to have them have an appropriate and timely response to those reported situations especially with the student who was being sexually harassed by the other student you know getting them involved right away and then being able to know how to respond

Collaboration served as an essential process for school counselors to appropriately screen students and intervene on their behalf when necessary. Counselors rely on collaboration to navigate what they considered to be the “grey area” of human trafficking without any clearly defined protocols. Especially in situations where confounding risk factors (i.e., transient student populations, students in foster care) make determining student safety more challenging. SD

described specific challenges she has encountered working with transient students (i.e., students that do not have a stable living situation):

> Well, ideally just to identify, because we do have, speaking of our school being high-needs, we do have a lot of kids that live in random situations staying with this person, you know? And so just knowing more of those red flags and what to look for. And I think it's hard, too, with high school students because... I don't know, like they may not even realize themselves what's going on. They might think they're willingly in a situation. And so that's kind of like a weird gray area for me is like I've had students that have stayed in hotels and done things.

In the essence of theme four, "follow up and screening," counselors felt unprepared to enter into follow up and screening services with students. They relied on their counseling skills to navigate conversations with students. Additionally, the counselors relied heavily on collaboration with other stakeholders to determine next steps (i.e., referrals, parent contact, law enforcement personnel) regarding student safety.

Theme #5 Outcomes and Implications

All participants identified positive impacts and outcomes of the human trafficking prevention program. However, challenges were also described in relation to the training, implementation and follow up. Sub-themes that emerged in section were: (a) positive outcomes and implications, (b) challenges, and (c) social justice and equity implications.

Positive outcomes and implications. All counselors cited positive outcomes and implications of the initiative regarding their student populations. All counselors believed that the preventive human trafficking initiative provided a valuable learning opportunity for students. This led to further sub themes as they related to the positive outcomes and implications. Secondary sub-themes that emerged in this section were: (a) change in counselor practices, (b) responsive district leadership, (c) rise in awareness and student safety, and (d) conversations about relationships.

Change in counselor practices. One positive outcome mentioned by each participant was a change in their own counseling practices. Counselors stated that the program initiative had provided a better understanding and how it may impact student populations they have direct contact with. Sarah described how she listens for keywords which now may have a different meaning when considering student safety:

> I think just having an awareness of that circumstance possibly coming up for students. Can, I think, you know, it's almost a matter of just kind of incorporating into your repertoire as a counselor and just being aware that, you know, there are certain, I guess, keywords or catch words that you should just want to be mindful of. Or situations that you just kind of want to be attentive to and kind of recognize. Being able to recognize those signs for what they are possibly. And then just also helping students recognize those signs for what they are as well.

Tarheel19 enters conversations more aware off all students' may be experiencing:

> I feel like it has definitely made me more aware of different situations that might be coming in as students register. They might be in some sort of situation. They might be in the trafficking situation, so that's always in the back of your mind now, but it is prevalent here. So, yeah.

Responsive district leadership. Three of the counselors described the programming after the first year of implementation. These counselors each expressed concern regarding the content of the curriculum. In response to the concerns, district leadership held a focus group of stakeholders Based on counselor feedback, the content of the curriculum was changed to the current edition. Tarheel19 described her concerns and her role in the revamp team:

> No, I think they trained us well with it. The presentation wasn't super great anyways, and so we did that presentation for two years, I think, and then I worked with the social work lead. I was one of the three or four counselors that got together with her and we revamped it. So now there's a new presentation, which we really wanted some more real life situations. Like these things are happening with your sort of things, because I feel like your kids might see some of this and be like, oh well, it's not happening here, it's happening in Mexico, or Texas, or something like that.
>
> I think we'd appreciate our office really listening to our concerns and our feedback. So, I really appreciate that. I really feel like a new curriculum, there's several videos in it that

> sometimes, I've had one class that was like, oh another video, but they're all very good videos it's not like you could say, "Cut this video out." I feel like each video has something really positive. Yeah, but I do feel like with the revamp they added a lot of things. There's a story in there about a girl who was trafficked out of Charlotte and I think that that, you can really see kids really paying attention to that now.... made it more relatable, and it gets the information across without it being, frightening-

The counselors valued working in a district and department that valued their feedback about the existing program. The counseling and student services (CaSS) department sought out the experiences of counselors involved with the program, listened to feedback and implemented suggested changes. The responsiveness of the CaSS department evoked a positive response from counselors who felt as though their voices had been heard.

Rise in awareness and student safety. All counselors described an increase in their knowledge about human trafficking and how human trafficking can potentially impact students. The most frequently cited outcome was a rise in awareness. An increase in awareness permeated the school setting beyond student services (i.e., counselors, social workers, psychologists) and included administrators, teachers and parents, leading to an increase in overall student safety. Each counselor mentioned awareness and knowledge when asked specifically about positive outcomes of the program. SLN stated, “I think awareness number one. Again, I haven't delivered a training in a couple years.” Sarah described how she views the human trafficking curriculum as an opportunity to initiate conversation with student and increase their knowledge:

> And it is hard to kind of bring it up in an organic way. And so, I thought it was very useful from that aspect because it does talk about you know the primary piece of human trafficking you know someone compelling you to do something that you're not comfortable with for. You know oftentimes for money or you know not necessarily for yourself but to maintain your safety you know to kind of take a step back and say these are things that can lead to human trafficking. These kinds of experiences can be the precursor to be finding yourself being trafficked. I thought it was really useful.
>
> I think again it goes back to being able to, you know, take the time to actually have that conversation and to educate students about that versus kind of making an assumption that is something they'll know or something they'll be able to avoid and protect themselves

from because that definitely is not the case.

Conversations about relationships. The language used within the curriculum content focuses on healthy versus unhealthy relationships. Counselors stated this is a positive outcome because intentional conversations can happen about healthy relationships. Prior to the initiative, conversations about relationships occurred less frequently. SLN stated, “And you know not from me implementing but just talking with students that it helps students in relationships identify what is a negative relationship and what is a positive relationship.” Sarah described this in her experience working with students:

> And so, I thought that was very instrumental to be able to educate students about that. To understand, you know, there are some things that shouldn't be allowed to go on that you shouldn't be you know so passive about you know encountering and accepting from someone that you're in a relationship with.

Social justice and equity implications. Through the interviews and journal reflections, the theme of social justice and equity emerged. All six participants identified components of the human trafficking initiative that targeted issues of social justice and equity. The counselors found this to be particularly important to marginalized student populations that may be exposed to more risk factors. Common statements of participants included access to education on human trafficking and disrupting cycles. SD described how the education piece may elicit a response from a student that was unaware of the coercive nature of a relationship:

> Well, I don't know if this fits that category, but talking about it, and making students aware of it, and staff aware of it, was certainly a way to bring it up. Because again, a student might not know they're walking into that. If they were in a relationship that was starting to feel forced, or they might themselves say, "Hey, that's me." And so, I guess just the awareness is important to make sure that we're identifying students and getting the help they need.

Sarah described how she experienced how the curriculum can impact issues of social justice and equity:

> Well, I think in terms of the equity piece is just the aspect of access. Access to the information, access to the resource, helping to expand students' knowledge. Because you have to think about it in terms of not just in our... We think about our general population, but you have to think about the cultural aspects and what is accepted versus what's not accepted so much in different cultural backgrounds. You know, when you think about our Latino students who often live in transition. I mean, honestly, at this point there's a lot of fear. And so, there's a lot of things that, you know, because students are moving around or because things don't get reported out of fear. A lot of things that go unaddressed. Or how, you know, they may be more vulnerable to this happening to them because of the language barriers, the lack of familiarity with their surroundings, with other people, feeling the needs to be more insular about things and kind of keep things in the family.

KB described how the programming may impact breaking negative cycles:

> I think just the psycho-education portion of it, especially for maybe lower income students who might not realize. Or not even just lower income, but just like typically there can be a lot of domestic violence in lower socioeconomic class, so maybe helping students realize that maybe what they're seeing in their home or their families go through isn't necessarily a healthy relationship. And trying to teach them ways of how to move forward and have healthy relationships with people. So maybe trying to break a cycle. For sure.

In the essence of theme five, “outcomes and implications,” counselors experienced several positive outcomes and implications as a result of the human trafficking initiative. Overall, the outcomes described; rise in awareness, conversations about healthy relationships and social justice and equity implications, have the potential to increase student safety. However, there were also challenges experienced regarding the training and follow up services of the program. The challenges provoked counselors to think critically about what changes could be implemented to alleviate adverse reactions, enhance the fidelity of the program and further safeguard students through empowering processes.

Challenges. Challenges to the program implementation transpired for all counselors and therefore emerged as a sub theme. A common challenge was how to adequately and equitably provide training and ongoing professional development opportunities to support counselors in the implementation of this initiative. An additional challenge was to ensure counselors are

trained prior to working directly with students and to ensure they have support in their buildings. The sub theme “improvements to training” provided suggestions by the participants based on their experiences to combat the challenges they encountered.

Challenges arose in response to the follow up and screening procedures. One challenge was that counselors did not have a protocol to follow to help ensure they were making appropriate decisions in terms of interventions. This led the counselors to feel as though this was a “grey area.” KB stated, “It's just kind of a huge gray area with human trafficking. It's not as black and white.” The counselors want to be able to intervene in an effective manner and desire a better understanding of how to most appropriately support students and families. Additionally, these counselors would like to understand how community agencies may be able to assist or be accessed for additional support.

Counselor self-efficacy. The theme of counselor self-efficacy emerged as a layer of this research endeavor. Throughout the interview process it was apparent the school counselors care deeply about the students they serve. What emerged was that counselors questioned their ability to adequately disseminate the curriculum to students and to navigate follow up and screening situations. The responsibilities of the school counselor role continue to grow, and, in this case, it is with a new initiative. This theme is supported by the textual evidence obtained through interviews and journal reflections.

Anxiety was expressed by five of the six participants regarding different components of the human trafficking prevention programming. KB described her feelings about handling questions from parents. She recalled her internal dialogue in response to one parent:

> Yeah. Because it's hard to feel confident about the knowledge I'm supposed to have. But I'm trying to justify why we have this programming to a parent when I don't necessarily feel a hundred percent confident.

KB and SD described their experience in follow up situations. Follow up with individual students was initiated by student response to a post lesson survey. KB stated, “So, it's kind of like a little nerve wracking when we get a yes. What are they going to say? It could be anything.” SD said, “Like if I found out if I was talking to somebody either through a screening or just a student I've been working with them they started telling me the stuff going on I would be like whoa I would feel like I have no idea what to do.”

SD and KB described human trafficking as a gray area and described the lack of a clear protocol. KB stated, “It’s just kind of a huge gray area with human trafficking. It's not as black and white.” SD echoed these sentiments, “And so that's kind of like a weird gray area for me is like I've had students that have stayed in hotels and done things.” SD described the challenges she faces working with a transient student population. The lack of secure housing is a risk factor for the student population she serves. However, distinguishing potential trafficking situations is a challenge.

Through the data collection, it was clear the anxiety expressed was related to the fear of not knowing how to help or recognize students in possible human trafficking situations. Uncertainty caused counselors to question their ability to adequately address student concerns. This related back to participants’ suggestions for how the training could be improved to increase counselor self-efficacy related to the programming.

Essence of the Phenomenon

Human trafficking initiatives are a new phenomenon emerging in districts across the county based on state legislation. The goal of this research endeavor was to fill in gaps in the professional literature, which at the start of this endeavor, was nonexistent for school based human trafficking prevention programs. Proactive measures are emerging to educate students

about human trafficking with objectives focused the role of relationships. Essential to the learning outcomes is understanding healthy versus unhealthy relationships.

The role of the school counselor is becoming increasingly more complex. Professional counselors are called to advocate for their students and work from a proactive approach. Often counselors are at the forefront of issues that impact social justice and equity in schools. This can often feel overwhelming for counselors whose caseloads are almost double the American School Counselor Association's recommended ratios. Therefore, school counselors are implementing the human trafficking curriculum and conducting follow up and screenings based on student responses to a post-curriculum survey regarding any potential safety needs or previous traumas.

The school counselors view human trafficking prevention work as valuable and can identify social justice and equity components of the program. They rely on training and professional development opportunities to stay current on issues that impact students. Recurring, quality training helps counselors to feel equipped to handle issues that impact student safety. These school counselors desire comprehensive training opportunities that allow them to immerse themselves in the curriculum content. Suggestions were made by participants to develop a comprehensive training and screening protocol.

The school counselors understand the importance of their role in the human trafficking initiative. Specifically, in presenting curriculum and screening students. These counselors believe that their involvement can positively impact students. Ultimately, this prevention program could decrease the number of trafficking cases by taking a holistic approach to empowering students. The counselors believe that, for this initiative to be implemented with fidelity, measures need to be taken to ensure quality training for stakeholders, especially those

working closely with students, and clear protocol surrounding screening and interventions is needed.

Through this research study, school counselors' experiences with working with the ninth grade human trafficking curriculum was explored in depth phenomenologically. Five emerging themes were described in detail and provide the context to begin to answer the research questions. Additionally, implications can be drawn from the study that may indicate best practices for implementation and findings may be generalizable to other school districts.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of high school counselors working with the ninth grade human trafficking intervention program. Limited research exists in the professional literature directly related to human trafficking intervention programs in the school setting. Data were collected by conducting a curriculum content analysis and from six participants using two rounds of semi-structured interviews and two journal reflections. The interviews and journal reflections were analyzed by coding significant statements. From these significant statements meaning units were created and themes emerged (Creswell, 2013). Chapter four included five themes, 11 sub-themes, and eights secondary sub-themes. Each theme was described with a textural, structural and composite description.

The criteria for participation in the research study included counselors involved with the training, implementation and/or follow up of the program since the program was initially introduced to the curriculum during the 2016-2017 school year. Each participant had different levels of involvement with the curriculum. The following section will include discussions related to the research questions, curriculum, theory, limitations, implications for practice and implications for future research.

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions

The central research questions explored in this study were: (a) What are the experiences of school counselors who implement the ninth grade human trafficking prevention program curriculum and follow-up? and (b) What factors lead to positive outcomes for students? The findings are discussed below based on the themes which emerged through the journal reflections and interviews. In total, five major themes and several sub-themes emerged from the research study.

What are the experiences of school counselors who implement the human trafficking prevention program curriculum and follow-up? This research question was explored in depth, and the themes that emerged described counselors' experiences throughout the components of the human trafficking prevention program. According to the findings, the following themes directly addressed this research question: (a) initial reactions to human trafficking programming; (b) professional development, training, and protocol development; and (c) follow up and screening.

In the sample district, the human trafficking program was rolled out during 2016-2017 school year. This intervention program was the result of mandated state legislation. Preventative social justice approaches to school counseling programs are supported by professional organizations. These professional organizations include the American School Counseling Association and the American Counseling Association. The American Counseling Association's Social Justice Advocacy Competencies support this type of initiative. Additionally, the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) a revision to the ACA competencies by Ratts, Singh, Nassar-Mcmillan, Butler, and McCullough (2016) support the intervention at the institutional level to advocate for marginalized student populations. Interestingly, only one of the school counselor participants stated social justice advocacy as a framework from which she worked. When asked directly, all participants agreed that advocacy was a component of their role. Several participants described their advocacy work as helping students access resources, removing barriers, and encouraging students to use their own voice to advocate for themselves. The lack of multicultural and social justice role descriptions may indicate that counselors need professional development opportunities to understand how this

advocacy work is related to the inherent role of the professional school counselor as supported by professional organizations.

Throughout the study, the school counselors described their experiences with the many layers of the human trafficking prevention program. This process included their initial reactions to the program and their experience with the training, implementation, and follow up. Each counselor participant varied in their exposure to each of these components. For example, one participant was the school contact person for the human trafficking program and was responsible for the implementation of all classroom curriculum components. Contrarily, three other participants had not implemented the classroom content aspects at all. These discrepancies may have impacted the findings; however, these differences accurately reflect the varied counselor involvement in the sample district.

It is important to consider the complexity of the school counselor's role and responsibilities to adequately understand the context of this experience. Participants described large caseloads and numerous responsibilities. Other pertinent responsibilities included 504 contact, scholarship coordinator, senior coordinator, and various committee chair positions. This list is not exhaustive; however, it illustrates the vastness of the school counselor role. The vast nature of the role of school counselor may have also impacted initial reactions to the program.

Initial reactions as described by participants were both negative and positive. The counselors initially felt shock, anxiety, and lack of knowledge; however, they simultaneously understood the value of the initiative. At the time, one participant was a first-year counselor and felt overwhelmed by the heaviness of the topic. She was unsure of how to answer parent questions related to the program and, overall, felt ill equipped to navigate any follow up situation that may have arisen. These findings presented an interesting duality in the counselors'

experience. It was evident that negative reactions to the initiative were related to the counselors' belief that they could not add yet another initiative to their "plate" and still meet the needs of caseloads that are nearly double the size of the ASCA's recommendation.

Thompson and Haley (2018), suggest training aimed at increasing counselor self-efficacy and competence when working with survivors of human trafficking. Only one participant found the training provided to be satisfactory. All other participants felt as though the fidelity of the training could be improved. Participants described their experiences with the training. It was clear that training varied dramatically across the participants, and one participant stated that she did not receive any training at all. All participants offered suggestions for improvements to the training and professional development opportunities available. Five of the six participants believed that improvements to the training process would increase their self-efficacy, ability to implement the content of the curriculum, and ability to engage in follow up situations with confidence.

Throughout the interview process, a common comparison was made between the human trafficking program and the signs of suicide programming. Signs of Suicide is a suicide prevention initiative formatted similarly to the human trafficking program. Overall, the counselors were very comfortable with all aspects of the Signs of Suicide programming. As stated by participants, there is protocol aligned with Signs of Suicide to use during any follow up interview with a student or any time a suicide screening is conducted. This protocol clearly indicates whether a student is a low, moderate, or high and action steps to take based on how students are identified. Participants deemed this valuable during the process of identifying and intervening on a student's behalf. The counselors suggested that a similar protocol for the human trafficking program would streamline the process and allow counselors to feel more confident in

the process of identifying students at risk or in possible trafficking situations. Another consideration based on this comparison is that with time and exposure to the human trafficking program counselors will become increasingly comfortable with the initiative.

Counselor experience during the follow up and screening process was impacted by their experience with training and lack of clear protocol. The results indicated that this was an area which the counselors expressed feelings of self-doubt. To navigate through the process counselors relied on their basic counseling skills (i.e., reflective listening, unconditional positive regard, and empathy) and collaboration with other school stakeholders. However, participants questioned whether this would be enough for them to recognize a trafficking situation and successfully intervene. This finding again supports further training for counselors to conduct follow up and intervention with fidelity.

Kam, Greenberg and Walls (2003) conducted a quasi-experimental design to assess the efficacy of an intervention program targeting an at-risk population. The findings mentioned two major factors of successful interventions in an urban setting. They were principal support and quality of teacher implementation in classrooms. Similarly, the participating counselors understood that their ability to implement the curriculum and provide follow up services with fidelity had the potential to directly impact student safety. This understanding supports ensuring quality accessible training is available for all stakeholders involved in the human trafficking program.

The counselors relied heavily on collaboration throughout the process. Common stakeholders mentioned when navigating follow up cases were student resource officers, other school counselors, and administrators. When asked what could strengthen the programming, the counselors commonly explained a desire to feel more connected with agency and law

enforcement individuals who work with human trafficking survivors. The findings indicated that collaboration beyond the school setting would strengthen the interventions process. The counselors want to know what happens when a report is made to law enforcement officials and what types of resources are available to individuals and families. The findings support a holistic approach that addresses the intervention process within the complex and multifaceted environment of the school setting. In order to continually strive in prevention efforts schools, community agencies, and law enforcement must collaborate.

What factors lead to positive outcomes for students? According to the findings, the following themes directly addressed this research question: (a) counseling approach and (b) impacts and outcomes.

Counseling approach. The counselors were asked to describe their approach to counseling. This could include their theoretical framework, counseling practices, and/or beliefs. Every participant stated the importance of establishing positive rapport with their students. Participants believe that a positive relationship consisting of, at least, one caring adult was a factor that leads to positive outcomes. The counselors view establishing positive relationships with students as one of the most important aspects of their job. They described how the foundation of a positive working relationship with students increased the likelihood that students would seek out counselor support to work through adverse experiences.

Impacts and outcomes. The counselors identified specific ways the curriculum implementation had generated positive student outcomes. All participants believed that the curriculum had increased student safety. This was the result of educating students about human trafficking and relationship dynamics. All participants cited the overall rise in awareness as a major result of the program. Due to the systematic nature of the school setting, the rise in

awareness permeated many environments students operate within. Counselors, teachers, parent, and community members gained knowledge, further increasing protective factors for students. Lastly, the counselors commonly described a shift in conversations that were occurring as a result of the interventions. Participants commonly described a rise in conversations about relationship dynamics and healthy versus unhealthy relationships. Prior to the program implementation, these types of conversations occurred less frequently.

Additionally, the participants cited cultural and social justice implications of the program. Several participants viewed these implications as a strength of the program that lead to positive student outcomes. Several participants cited that components of the program may potentially end negative cycles experienced by student populations. The counselors noted their assumption that it is often students from marginalized populations that are exposed to domestic violence and other forms of power imbalances. Through the intervention program, students learn the potential dangers of imbalances associated with power differences, vulnerability to coercion, and the impact of the grooming process. Additionally, the intervention teaches students how to seek out help. This knowledge can help students make empowered decisions about relationships and recognize potentially harmful dynamics.

Conclusion of Findings

Figure 2.0 below shows the major findings related to the research questions. Ultimately, school counselors found that the training related to the human trafficking curriculum was insufficient. Participants described changes to the training and procedures that they believed would increase counselor self-efficacy and the fidelity of the curriculum, interventions and follow up. Suggestions stated were to create an in depth initial training with opportunities to practice curriculum delivery and follow up scenarios. Additionally, the counselors described how

written protocol and procedures would be useful in follow up situations and help to ensure that best practices for reporting and intervention are followed. The counselors believed that improvements to training would increase the fidelity of the overall program and increase student safety, ultimately decreasing incidents of human trafficking among high school aged students.

The findings revealed several strengths of the program that led to positive outcomes for students. Strengths were both directly aligned with the program and more inherent to the counseling role. The counselors believed that student safety was enhanced due to the increase in knowledge of human trafficking experiences as a direct result of the intervention (students, counselors) and as a byproduct (parents, teacher, community member). This led to an overall rise in awareness for multiple student stakeholders. Students learned valuable information that will help them to make informed decisions about relationships. Lastly, positive relationships with supporting adults provide students with safe spaces to navigate through adverse situations.

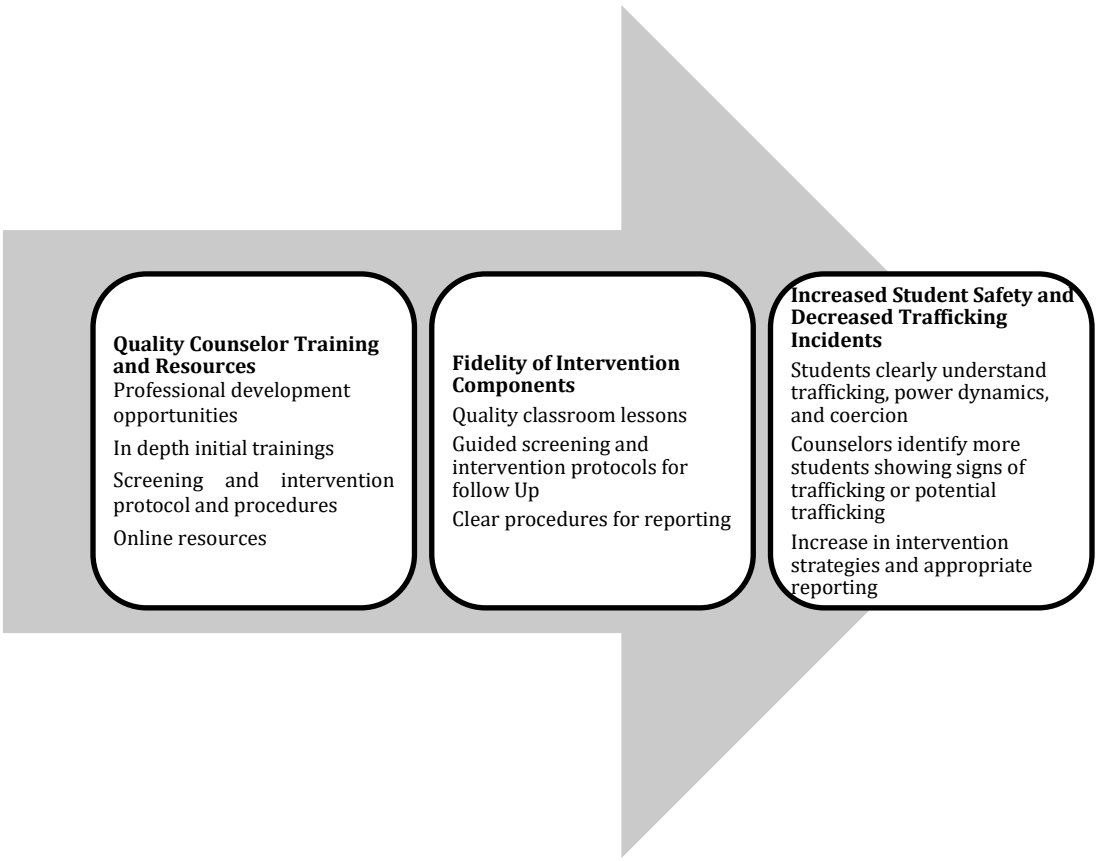

Figure 2.0 Implications of Quality Training

Discussion of the Curriculum

The content analysis of the curriculum proved to be a challenge that is also discussed later in the limitations of this study. As previously mentioned, the content of the curriculum was limited. The content included a letter to parents, an objectives and standards document, and a PowerPoint presentation embedded with four videos. The ninth grade curriculum is delivered in one class session. When and how this is done is a collaborative decision between student services team members, usually the SAP counselor, and the health and physical education department.

Discussion of Theory

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000) were used to ground the work of this study. Both theories were analyzed in the previous chapter. Therefore, implications may be made based on the analysis provided.

Ecological Systems Theory. Ecological System Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) provides a framework for working within multiple, interconnected settings. When considering intervention practices in the school setting it may be necessary to examine the full range of impact given the targeted population. Ecological systems theory allows leaders to consider the possible impacts and outcomes of an intervention taking place within students' micro system.

Chapter four details the interactions of the current human trafficking curriculum at the micro systems, macro systems, and exo systems levels. While the analysis was directed at the human trafficking intervention, it illustrates how school stakeholders may examine any intervention through this theoretical lens. This would be a useful undertaking for any stakeholder wishing to examine system interactions or possible intervention outcomes.

Empowerment Theory. Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000) postulates that there are actions, activities, and structures that serve to empower populations. Additionally, the theory posits that problems should be addressed from a collaborative stance. Stakeholders work together as collaborators to initiate empowering processes (Zimmerman, 2000). The human trafficking prevention program is an example of an empowering process. The program objectives and goals target outcomes that have the potential to increase an individual's psychological empowerment.

Chapter four outlines the empowering processes that can be identified at the individual, organizational, and community levels. This analysis again illustrates that founding interventions in Empowerment Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) would be appropriate when considering the

necessary empowering process to illicit empowering outcomes. This an example of how stakeholders, school leadership and policymakers may use theory to ground intervention efforts for desired outcomes.

Limitations

Limitations of the study include difficulty in a content analysis of the curriculum, analysis of transcriptions, representation of the target population, and participants' relationship with the interviewer.

Content analysis of the curriculum. The human trafficking curriculum for ninth grade students consisted of one PowerPoint presentation with four embedded videos. The content of the curriculum itself was limited. Due to this circumstance, there was limited textual information for analysis; thus, making the process of the curriculum content analysis difficult. The researcher used available materials to analyze the text and draw conclusions based on alignment with previous research and theory. There are numerous, somewhat competing suggestions in the extant research for how to conduct content analysis based on educational curriculums which made the process cumbersome for the researcher.

Coding. A second coder was not used during the data analysis of the interviews and journal reflections. However, many measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. This included an external audit to ensure that all codes aligned with significant statements for both rounds of interviews and for emerging themes.

Representation of the target population. The goal of the recruitment process was to produce a sample that was representative of the population. The sample did include participants from various school settings that were representative of the geographic and socio-economic diversity of the target population. All participants identified as female, five of the six participants

identified as white, and one participant identified as black. While the target population does have a majority of white female counselors, the obvious lack of diversity of the sample was a limitation in the research study that may have impacted the findings.

Participants' relationship with the interviewer. One possible limitation of the study was the participant and interviewer relationship. Several dynamics existed within this context. This may be attributed to the purposeful and convenience sampling methods elicited to recruit participants. Also, the primary investigator (PI) is a school counselor in the district where the research study took place. Only two participants had no existing relationship with the primary investigator. All other participants had some degree of a preexisting relationship with the PI. This may have impacted how participants responded to the interview and journal questions. Participants may have responded in ways they thought the PI wished them to respond. Conversely, the previous existing relationship may have helped participants to feel more at ease in the interview process and to respond to questions honestly.

Implications for Practice

Several implications for practice emerged throughout the research endeavor. The implications are organized by leadership, school counselors, and school counselor training programs. Several opportunities for improvement in the employed counselors' training could be considered. This may include more frequent training opportunities, a more in depth training approach, procedure and protocol guidelines, and an online reservoir of materials for counselors. Additionally, considerations for school counselors and school counselor training program are discussed.

School leadership. Based on the findings, district leadership is encouraged to work on revamping the current training approach. Bemak and Chung (2005) make several suggestions for

counselor training that aimed to preparing counselors for the modern advocacy-focused role of school counselors. School leadership may find it helpful to follow these suggestions for preparing school counselors. A more in depth training could include a detailed background of human trafficking to ground the counselors in the importance of the work. This may also include presenting background on how the legislature initiated the work in the school setting. Additionally, counselors may feel better equipped if given more interactive training experiences. Counselors could potentially lead the curriculum for other counselors and then engage in roleplay to practice follow up situations.

Overall, the findings indicate that there were some discrepancies in counselor knowledge about how often training is required. This may indicate that school leaders may need to communicate clear expectations about professional development and training concerning the human trafficking curriculum. Consequently, it would also be necessary for school leaders to ensure that training and professional development opportunities were available and appropriately aligned with district requirements.

School leaders may engage with other districts or community agencies to consider if existing protocols could be transferred to the school setting or consider creating their own protocols. Written protocol and procedures are needed to help counselors navigate follow up situations beyond their own judgment calls. It may be beneficial for school leaders to collaborate with law enforcement and community agencies to ensure best practices to help individuals are commonplace.

District leadership and stakeholders could work to create an online library of resources to be housed on district platforms. This would allow information to be easily accessible to student services team members and other school personnel working with human trafficking programs.

Available resources would allow school stakeholders to review pertinent information as they deemed necessary.

Lastly, human trafficking is not an issue that can be adequately addressed by one entity. School leaders are encouraged to work to strengthen ties with community agencies and law enforcement entities to further develop procedures and create best practices in educating, intervening, and providing follow up services related to human trafficking prevention and work with survivors. Additionally, leadership may consider inviting in experts to lead trainings for school stakeholders. Trainings should move beyond school counselors and student services teams. Knowledgeable school administration and teachers would further support the fidelity of the curriculum. This would ensure that professionals working with students understand how human trafficking can directly impact their student populations.

School counselors. The findings yielded several implications for school counselors, including the need to stay current on topics related to the school counseling profession. As indicated by several participants, this intervention was surprising when initially introduced. School counselors should join professional organizations, attend conferences, and read the latest developments in research to ensure they are not surprised when new initiatives are developed. Staying abreast of current issues would give counselors an understanding of the progression of events leading up to new initiatives. Additionally, school counselors should be aware how legislation impacts professional obligations.

The importance of advocacy was an additional finding based on this research study. The participating counselors voiced their concerns about the original content of the curriculum. Based on their feedback school leaders stepped up to assemble a task force to revamp the content. Counselors must acknowledge their role as advocates and continue to speak out for their

students and profession. Additionally, school counselors must continue to advocate for appropriate allotments for school counselor ratios. Allotments that follow the recommended 250:1 (ASCA, 2012) provide the personnel to implement prevention programs with fidelity.

School counselor training programs. The findings may also suggest the school counseling training programs have a role to play in this work. Thompson and Haley (2018), discussed the deficit in general knowledge about human trafficking and suggest that counselors in training receive an in service about this pervasive social injustice. The counseling profession continues to evolve to address issues of social injustice. Counselors training programs could continue to build the breadth of multicultural and social justice courses offered to students.

Future Research Implications

Implications for future research may include (a) understanding the experiences of other stakeholders involved, including students; (b) conducting outcome studies designed to assess how students' knowledge and beliefs change as a result of the program, (c) initiating longitudinal studies that can track the phenomenon over time, and (d) designing studies aimed at assessing how successful the intervention is at identifying students in trafficking situations.

The body of research on human trafficking in counselor education may benefit from research aimed at understanding student experiences with the human trafficking program. A follow up study to understand student experiences could gain a valuable perspective on what aspects of the program were most valuable to student safety. The initiative is aimed at increasing student safety and therefore a logical next step would be to understand how students experience the intervention initiative.

An experimental study aimed at understanding how students' knowledge and beliefs change as a result of the program would be a logical next step. The results of such a study may

solidify the intervention as an evidence based practice. This type of study would further increase the validity and reliability of the program and increase the likelihood that other states and districts would implement similar practices.

Researchers may wish to conduct further action research to assess if the intervention is leading to increased identification of students in trafficking situations. Similarly, this type of study would further increase the of the trustworthiness of the intervention. It may be appropriate to design this study longitudinally and assess the impact the intervention over time.

Impact of Legislation

Legislation is a pivotal indicator of mandated programming in public education. This has been made evident throughout this research endeavor. To understand human trafficking programming, it was necessary to provide an overview of the progression of legislation related to steps taken to eradicate the institution of human trafficking. Chapter one described key legislative action and how the legislation was intended to tighten policies. The legislation outlined in chapter one included how North Carolina and other states should provide support to survivors, protect minors, ensure safe harbor laws, prevent the occurrence of human trafficking, inform the public and prosecute those found guilty of trafficking. The most central piece of legislation related to this research study was NC Senate Bill 279 (2015).

North Carolina Senate Bill 279 ratified in 2015. As stated previously, this bill required that North Carolina Boards of Education to, “address sex trafficking and prevention.” Section four of the bill outlines the requirements including consultation and collaboration with appropriate outside consultants (i.e., persons or groups with expertise in human trafficking) and the materials used are based on objectives and research based. This particular legislation led to

prevention programming in North Carolina schools. However, legislation regarding human trafficking continues to evolve.

In December of 2019, North Carolina Senate Bill 199: An act to protect children from sexual abuse and to strengthen and modernize sexual assault laws, was passed. This legislation was passed after the data collection components of this study. However, it is no doubt an important piece of legislation in the fight against human trafficking. Several implications for school counselors and school leadership should be mentioned. School counselors are now required to make direct reports to law enforcement when there is reason to believe a child has been the victim of a violent crime or sexual offense. Previously, school counselors were only required to report to child protective services. Additionally, a required yearly staff training is outlined. This ensures that school staff receive yearly training on human trafficking. These changes in the reporting policies and training of staff have the potential to increase positive outcomes in students. Tighter reporting laws will ensure law enforcement becomes of aware of adverse situations in timely manner. Additionally, knowledgeable school staff will help to increase protective factors for students.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of high school counselors working with the ninth grade human trafficking program. The central research questions explored in this study were: (a) What are the experiences of school counselors who implement the ninth grade human trafficking prevention program curriculum and follow-up? and (b) What factors lead to positive outcomes for students? The experiences of school counselors were reported in the results sections as discovered through the thematic analysis in chapter four. Additionally, the intervention was analyzed in relation to Ecological Systems Theory and

Empowerment Theory. The content of the curriculum was analyzed based on word frequency and connection to scholarly research and theory.

At the beginning of this endeavor, existing research on school-based human trafficking interventions was nonexistent. The purpose of this study was to begin to fill in the gap in the professional literature by understanding the experiences of the individuals charged with the implementation of the program. Through this study, an understanding of the school counselor experience was gained. Based on the findings, both strengths and weaknesses of the program emerged from school counselor perspectives. Additionally, factors that lead to student success were highlighted through a school counselor lens.

Implications were made for future research and practice. School leadership may use the results of this study to strengthen their school counselor training practices in relation to the human trafficking intervention. Changes could be made based on the recommendations specified. School counselors may be encouraged by the findings to seek additional professional development opportunities or advocate within their district. Lastly, legislation continues to drive practice. This establishes a need for school counselors to stay aware of evolving legislation, advocate and understand the impact legislation has on student outcomes and counselor practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Invitation

Perspective Participant,

My name is Sallie Wooten. I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University in the Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development at North Carolina State University. I am seeking school counselors to participate in a research study. The study is entitled High School Counselors Experiences with the Training, Implementation and Follow up of a 9th Grade Human Trafficking Prevention Program: A Phenomenological Study. The purpose of the study is to understand school counselors' experiences' throughout the process. This research study has been approved by North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol 16554) and Wake County Public School System. Participation in the study is voluntary. You are invited to participate in this study but can choose not to participate. If you chose to participate you may stop at any time during the study. Upon completion of the research study, all participants will receive a $10 gift card from a merchant of their choice.

Data Collection: Participant data collection for this study will be collected through a demographic survey, two face-to-face interviews (lasting approximately one hour at a location of the participants choosing), and two journal reflections. Participants will be asked to review the transcriptions of their interviews to ensure the accuracy of the document. The interviews will take place in the spring and summer/fall of 2019. The two journal reflections will be sent out following each interview.

Eligibility Requirements: Potential participants interested in participating in the research study must meet be a **current** high school counselor and must have been involved with the implementation of the **9th grade** human trafficking program during the **2017-2018 school year**.

This email may be forwarded to those you feel fit the eligibility requirements of this study. If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact me at swooten@wcpss.net. My faculty advisor is Dr. Stanley Baker at North Carolina State University and can be contacted at sbaker@ncsu.edu.

In accordance with North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board, your consent to participate in the research study is required. **If you would like to participate please review the attached consent form and complete the short demographic survey linked HERE.** The consent form must be signed and returned prior to proceeding with any component of the research study.

Thank you,
Sallie Wooten

Appendix B

Informed Consent

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: High School Counselors' Experiences with a ninth grade Human Trafficking Prevention Program: A Phenomenological Study (16554)
Principal Investigator: Sallie Wooten

Faculty Sponsor: Stanley Baker

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of high school counselors experiences' in the training, implementation and follow up services surrounding the ninth grade human trafficking prevention program. This intervention was implemented in the 2016-2017 school year for the county sampled. The objective of the program is to combat human trafficking by increasing student awareness of human trafficking and coercion.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office as noted below.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of the study is to understand how high school counselors experience training, implementation and follow up of the ninth grade human trafficking prevention program.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?
In order to be a participant in this study you must have participated in the training, implementation and follow up of the 2017-2018 ninth grade human trafficking prevention program.
You cannot participate in this study if you did not participate in the training, implementation and follow up of the 2017-2018 ninth grade human trafficking prevention program.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey, complete two semi-structured interviews each lasting approximately one hour. The first

interview will take place in the spring of 2019 and the second in the summer/fall of 2019. You will be able to choose the location of the interview. An audio recording of each interview will be made in order to transcribe the interviews later. A third party company will transcribe each interview. After the completion of each interview you will be sent a journal reflection with guided response questions, totaling in two journal reflections. Your reflections have approximately four questions each. After the transcriptions of each interview are complete, you will have the opportunity to review the transcriptions for accuracy. Additionally, as themes emerge within the research process you will be asked if you agree with the themes in order to ensure accurate reflection of your experiences. The process will occur over, approximately, a six month process. However, your total time spent engaged within the process will require no more than six hours (one hour interview x 2, journal reflections x 2, and reviewing transcriptions and final themes). At the conclusion of the second interview you will receive a $10 gift card of your choice.

Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The direct benefits to your participation in the research is that you will have the opportunity to advocate for a school counseling profession by describing your experiences. The indirect benefits are that the themes discovered through this research endeavor will be shared with stakeholders. Themes may indicate areas for improvements or strengths within existing programming. This information can be shared with other counties attempting to implement such programs.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on an NC State managed computer. Unless you give explicit permission to the contrary, no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Individual data with identifiable details removed may be made available to the public as required by a professional association, journal, or funding agency. Any identifiable information collected as part of this research, including any biospecimens, will not be used or distributed for future research purposes without your consent.

Compensation

For participating in this study, you will receive a $10 gift card of your choice. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still receive $10 gift card of your choice.

What if you are a NCSU student?

Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

What if you are a Wake County employee?

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at Wake County, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Sallie Wooten, via email at Sdwooten@ncsu.edu or via phone at 252-364-5774.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (institutional Review Board) Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1.919.515.8754. You can also find out more information about research, why you would or would not want to be a research participant, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Participant's signature **Date**

Investigator's signature_____Date_____

Appendix C

First Interview Guide

Note: Questions subject to change based on participants' responses. We are attempting to gain an understanding of the essence of the participants' experiences and will need the flexibility to alter questions (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggests approximately five to seven open-ended questions.

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Questions:

1. Describe yourself as a school counselor (years of experience, grade levels worked with).

2. Describe your school and student population.

4. Describe your reaction to learning that you would be involved in the human trafficking prevention program.

5. Describe your experience with any training you participated in related to the human trafficking program.

6. Describe your experience with the implementation of the human trafficking program.

7. Describe your experience with any follow-up you engaged in based on the post-survey data collected.

8. Describe any positive or negative feedback you have regarding the program and follow up services.

Appendix D

Second Interview Guide

Note: Questions subject to change based on participants' responses. We are attempting to gain an understanding of the essence of the participants' experiences and will need the flexibility to alter questions (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggests approximately five to seven open-ended questions.

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Questions:

1. Have any major changes occurred to the training, implementation or follow up of human trafficking curriculum since we last spoke?

2. Has or how has the human trafficking curriculum changed your counseling practices?

3. In what way do you see yourself as an advocate for students?

4. In what way would a more thorough training impact your ability to help students?
    a. Impact your self-efficacy as a counselor?

5. In your opinion, what implications does this programming have on social justice?

6. What would you need to feel confident when entering in to follow up scenarios with students?

Appendix E

IRB Approval Letter

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research, Innovation and Economic Development
Sponsored Programs and Regulatory Compliance Services
research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/

Campus Box 7514
2701 Sullivan Dr. Suite 240
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514
P: 919.515-2444, F: 919-515-7721
E: sps@ncsu.edu

From: Jennifer Ofstein, IRB Director
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: February 3, 2020

Title: High School Counselors' Experiences with the Training, Implementation and Follow Up of the 9th Grade Human Trafficking Prevention Program: A Phenomenological Study

IRB#: 16554

Dear Stanley Baker and Sallie Wooten,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.104. d.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable.
Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennie Ofstein
IRB Director
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
irb-director@ncsu.edu
919.515.8754
North Carolina State University

Appendix F

District Research Approval Letter

WAKE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Data, Research and Accountability
Phyllis D. Spencer, Director for Testing
Research Review Committee
Crossroads II
110 Corning Rd
Cary, NC 27518

tel: (919) 588-3639
fax: (919) 589-6771

February 4, 2019

Sallie Wooten
1046 Mica Lamp Ct.
Apex, NC 27502
swooten@wcpss.net

RE: Application No. 1485

Dear Ms. Wooten:

Your request to conduct research in the Wake County Public School System has been accepted and approved (pending IRB approval). We wish you well in conducting your study, ***High School Counselors' Experiences with a Human Trafficking Prevention Program: A Phenomenological Study***. You may proceed with data collection plans as outlined in your proposal.

This letter serves as evidence of project approval and you are free to share it with relevant staff and supervisors as needed. Remember that in accordance with WCPSS Board Policy 3140, approved research must at all times be conducted in a manner that is consistent with your original application and you must provide us with interim and final results as they become available. Approval of this research does not constitute any obligation for your selected participants to cooperate.

In any future correspondence with us, please refer to your application number (1485). We look forward to learning about your findings.

Let us know if you have any questions as you conduct your research.

Sincerely,

Phyllis D. Spencer

Phyllis D. Spencer