Pre-Print Version

Exploratory Review of Route-Specific, Gendered, and Age-Graded Dynamics of Exploitation: Applying Life Course Theory to Victimization in Sex Trafficking in North America

Joan A. Reid

University of South Florida

aDepartment of Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling, University of South Florida, 13301 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33612, United States
Correspondence may be directed to Joan A. Reid
Email: jareid2@usf.edu

Abstract
The status of research on human trafficking has been characterized as methodologically inadequate and lacking sufficient theoretical framework necessary for solution development. This review of sex trafficking in North America examined prior research regarding victim vulnerabilities through the theoretical lens of life course theory endeavoring to uncover life course dynamics resulting in exploitation in sex trafficking distinguishable by victim type. Shared and distinct life course dynamics emerged based on victim origin and route, gender, and age of onset that corresponded to the key components of Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory of informal social control. Indicators of harmful informal social control processes during childhood and adolescence were common across internationally and domestically trafficked boys and girls, with a desire for acceptance and love commonly exacerbating initial entrapment. Limited social capital typified victims experiencing initial exploitation during young adulthood, with internationally trafficked victims uniquely isolated due to citizenship status and language or cultural barriers. Through the application of life course theory, a more complete understanding of the dynamics affecting vulnerability to exploitation in sex trafficking can be gained, providing enhanced information regarding plausible strategies for prevention and intervention.

Key words: sex trafficking; life course theory; prostitution; North America
1. Nature and Scope of the Problem

1.1 Human Trafficking’s Global Spread

Trafficking in persons\(^1\) is a complex problem entrapping an estimated 2.4 million persons worldwide (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2005). Trafficking in persons takes many forms. Victims can be found in the sex trade, in domestic servitude, in restaurants or bars, in the drug trade, in service industries such as tourism or health care, in mail-order bride schemes, in migrant farm work or construction, in a diamond mine, and in a warlord’s army (U.S. Department of State [DOS], 2008, 2011; Graycar & McCusker, 2007). Different terms describe the various enterprises incorporating different forms of human trafficking such as labor exploitation, bonded labor, forced child labor, child soldiering, commercial sexual exploitation of children, child sex tourism, or even juvenile prostitution (DOS, 2008, 2011; Kelly, 2005; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2010). Although trafficking in person varies in form, name, and location, it is fundamentally an enterprise of profit-driven exploitation through the use force, fraud, or coercion (Bales, 2007). Frequently, victims are falsely promised one job and forced or coerced into another or they are significantly deceived about the working conditions (Goździak & Collett, 2005; Kim, 2007; Shelley, 2010).

Human trafficking ravages a wide path of destruction with tributary aftereffects extending far beyond the lives of the primary victims, as trafficking in persons is a problem with many dimensions and deep social impacts (Shelley, 2010; Shlyk, 2007). As an acute human rights issue, human trafficking deprives millions of men, women, and children of their fundamental rights to human dignity and personal freedoms (Gallagher, 2010; Kelly, 2005; Lehti & Aromaa, 2007). As a global economic and health risk, trafficking in persons contributes to the transmission of disease, creating overwhelming health costs to local communities and ultimately...
sustains poverty by hindering economic and social development (Acharya, 2010; Agrusa, 2003; Leung, 2003; Hynes & Raymond, 2002; Silverman et al., 2006, 2007). In some underdeveloped countries, sex trafficking of children contributes so substantially to the gross national product that the lives of child victims are sacrificed for immediate, short-term economic benefits (Farr, 2005; Leth, 2005). As a source of enormous financial profits for organized crime, human trafficking fuels corruption and violence, creating dangerous degrees of threat to the security and safety of democratic institutions and of thousands of individuals worldwide (Graycar & McCusker, 2007; Kelly, 2005; Raymond, Hughes, & Gomez, 2010; Shelley, 2010; Shlyk, 2007; Studnicka, 2010; Williams, 2008). Accordingly, trafficking in persons has been declared to be more than a human rights issue; instead, it is now perceived as a complex problem involving the criminal justice systems throughout the world (Cooper, 2005; Finckenauer & Schrock, 2003; Friesendorf, 2010; Kreston, 2005; Lebov, 2010; Musto, 2009; Wilson & Dalton, 2008; Zhang, 2009).

1.2 Human Trafficking and the Juncture of Wealth and Poverty in North America

North American patterns of human trafficking have been described as closely resembling trafficking patterns of developing countries with all identified forms of trafficking, except child soldiers, occurring in the region (Shelley, 2010). North America encompasses three sovereign states – Canada, Mexico, and the United States. The regions’ disparate junction of extreme wealth and extreme poverty contributes to the problem of trafficking in persons. For example, in Mexico, familial and provincial poverty in combination with a practically nonexistent social safety net pushes many to seek out precarious ways to meet basic survival needs (Acharya, 2010; Estes, Azaola, & Ives, 2005; Shelley, 2010). Near the Mexican-U.S. border, popular tourist destinations flourish, where organized groups profiting from the
commercial sex industry recruit displaced and vulnerable youth to fill the thriving demand for commercial sex (Acharya, 2009, 2010; Azaola, 2000).

Within Canada and the United States, sizeable economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized populations are commodified to supply the large demand for American trafficking victims (Deer, 2010; Shelley, 2010; Wheaton, Schauer, & Galli, 2010). Many of the young victims are from among the million or more runaway or throwaway children who end up homeless in American every year (Azaola, 2000; Estes et al., 2005; Reid & Jones, 2011; Saewyc, MacKay, Anderson, & Drozba, 2008; Shelley, 2010). In response to a growing awareness of the problem of human trafficking within their borders, the three countries of North American have intensified their efforts to combat trafficking, beginning with the passing of anti-trafficking legislation.

1.3 Anti-Trafficking Legislation in North America

In 2000, the U.S. Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Prior to the passing of the TVPA, no comprehensive Federal law protected trafficking victims and prosecuted traffickers in the United States. Assistance for victims of trafficking provided by the TVPA includes access to Federally-funded social service programs such as housing assistance, health care, education, and job training. The law also established a specific visa, the T-visa, which allows international victims of trafficking in the United States to become temporary residents.

In Canada, trafficking in persons was not specifically prohibited in the Criminal Code until in 2005 (Barrett, 2010; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2009). Section 279, added in 2005, prohibits trafficking in persons as well as the receipt of any financial or the material benefit from trafficking in persons. Prior to 2005, trafficking in persons was
criminalized in Canada under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* which came into force in 2002. Distinct from the TVPA (2000), Canadian anti-trafficking legislation does not include provisions for protection of victims (Barrett, 2010; Bruckert & Parent, 2004). As a result, within most areas of Canada trafficking victims only have access to standard services that may be provided by community victim service programs, only in British Columbia are specialized victim services tailored to trafficked persons available (Barrett, 2010).

In Mexico, the first anti-trafficking law, the *Law to Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons* was passed in 2007 (Acharya, 2010; UNODC, 2009). However, the law only officially came into effect in February 2009 (Garcia, 2010). More recently, in 2011, the Mexican president amended the Constitution by adding the crime of human trafficking to the list of crimes for which a judge can order precautionary detention of the alleged offender. In addition, the Constitution was amended to protect the identity of victims of human trafficking in order to increase victim safety if involved in criminal proceedings (Gutierrez, 2011). Protection of the identity of trafficked victims involved in criminal prosecutions, even minor victims of sex trafficking, is not yet provided by law in the United States (Reid & Jones, 2011). Although these countries have passed legislation criminalizing human trafficking, the use of such laws to prosecute traffickers and protect victims is limited due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the problem especially among criminal justice and law enforcement personnel encountering occurrences of domestic trafficking (DOS, 2011; Garcia, 2010; UNODC, 2009).

1.4 Classifying Child and Adult Victims of Sex Trafficking

Of the estimated 2.4 million persons trafficked worldwide, approximately two-thirds are women or children trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation (ILO, 2005). The U.S. TVPA (2000) assigned the term *severe form of trafficking* to “sex trafficking in which a commercial sex
act is induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such act is under 18 years of age” (TVPA, 2000, Sec. 103(8)). Commercial sexual activity may include prostitution, the production of pornography, stripping and nude dancing, or live sex shows.

According to the TVPA (2000), if an individual has not reached the age of 18, the use of force, fraud, or coercion is not required for any involvement in the commercial sex industry to be deemed sex trafficking. This age demarcation of childhood is in agreement with the definition of a child by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989) and in The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182, which was ratified by 169 member states of the ILO including Canada, Mexico, and the United States (ILO, n.d.). According to the ratified convention, this definition of a child is binding regardless of varied or distinct existing national legislation. Even if countries have legalized prostitution, they must prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of any individual under the age of 18 (ILO, n.d.).

Identifying and classifying adult victims of sex trafficking poses a special set of challenges because an element of “force, fraud or coercion” ((TVPA, Sec. 103(8)) must be proven\(^1\) (Kim, 2007; Rieger, 2007). However, the exploitive and complex dynamics typically present in all forms of human trafficking can affect victim behavior (Kim, 2007). Terrorized individuals may appear as amenable and compliant, not forced or coerced. In the case of sex trafficking, “brutalized by rape and violence, passed from trafficker to trafficker, and sold again and again in prostitution, these women are often broken by the force that has been used against them – it would be a grave injustice to mistake their submission for consent. It is not consent, but it makes force, fraud and coercion very difficult to prove” (Neuwirth, 2008, para. 3; see also Herman, 1992, 2003). Herman (1992, p. 75) states that the ultimate goal of sexually exploitive
perpetrators is “the creation of a willing victim,” which is how sex trafficking victims, both adult and child, can appear to the inexperienced onlooker.

1.5 Design and Purpose of Current Review

The status of research on human trafficking has been sorely criticized as methodologically inadequate and lacking the necessary theoretical foundation required for solution development (Bales, 2007; Goździak & Bump, 2008a; Goździak & Collett, 2005; Graycar & McCusker, 2007; Kelly, 2005; Lehti & Aromaa, 2007; Musto, 2009; Tyldum, & Brunovskis, 2005; Zhang, 2009). Goździak and Bump (2008a) concluded that has been “no attempt to develop a new theoretical framework in which to comprehensively analyze the phenomenon” (p. 9). Much of the scant research that has been collected regarding human trafficking has been primarily case study research that provided information on the individual entrapment experiences and commonly observed vulnerabilities among sex trafficking victims (Albanese, 2007; Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009; Estes & Weiner, 2005; Goździak & Bump, 2008b; Kennedy, Klein, Bristowe, Cooper, & Yuille, 2007; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

As a result of information gathered by these case studies, researchers have tentatively deduced that the entrapment process may differ across the various forms of exploitation and across the originating societal settings or environmental conditions of victims (Bales, 2007; Kelly, 2005; Williams & Frederick, 2009; Wilson & Dalton, 2008; Winterdyk & Reichel, 2010; Zhang, 2009). With specific application to sex trafficking, the routes to victimization traversed by international victims of sex trafficking may differ from the pathways commonly experienced by domestically trafficked victims (Wilson & Dalton, 2009; Zhang, 2009). Additionally, female victims of sex trafficking may be endangered due to vulnerabilities unique to women and girls, while boys or men may be entrapped due to distinctive set of conditions or risk factors. Boys
and girls may become vulnerable to exploitation in sex trafficking due to different combinations of age-related risk factors than those commonly observed with men and women. Therefore, more effective interventions targeting the problem of sex trafficking may be found by purposefully focusing on vulnerability factors or life course dynamics commonly experienced by specific types of victims.

As suggested by human trafficking scholars (Bales, 2007; Kelly, 2005; Williams & Frederick, 2009; Wilson & Dalton, 2008; Winterdyk & Reichel, 2010; Zhang, 2009), this review of sex trafficking in North America examined prior research regarding victim vulnerabilities through the theoretical lens of life course theory endeavoring to expose varied life course dynamics resulting in exploitation in sex trafficking distinguishable by victim type. The current review examined documented victim vulnerabilities categorized by victim origin and route, international or domestic; by gender, male or female; and by life stage of the victim at age of onset, adult or child. Second, grounded in these observed vulnerabilities and circumspectly drawing from key propositions of life course theory, a summary of common life course dynamics known to increase the likelihood of exploitation in sex trafficking are presented differentiated by victim type. Lastly, pertinent information supplied by this review resulted in recommendations for intervening and obstructing the exploitation of individuals in sex trafficking. Theoretically-framed and empirically-based information on life course dynamics encountered by certain populations contains emerging and essential details needed for innovative policies and practices.

2. Life Course Perspective and Entrapment in Sex Trafficking

The emergence of the life course paradigm shifted the focus of social science research from a one-dimensional or snapshot view of human behavior by providing a fuller and multi-dimensional framework for exploring the dynamic and interactional processes and complexity of
human development (Elder, 1994). As shown in Figure 1, four paradigmatic factors influencing human development and life course were initially identified by life course researchers: (1) historical and geographical context, (2) social embeddedness, (3) timing, and (4) agency and personal control (Elder, 1994; Elder & Giele, 2009; Giele & Elder, 1998). These factors are considered key to understanding human diversity and adaptation during each developmental period – childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. First, LCT provides insight into the unique issues that arise as individuals are located and develop within particular communities and historical periods. Members of a birth cohort live through and are influenced by historical events. Residents of a particular geographical location possess similarly constrained life opportunities. Second, LCT defines life stages, not as ages, but as a prescribed sequence based on the reproductive cycle beginning with the birth of children, through their maturation, until they begin having children of their own (Elder & Giele, 2009). This life cycle based on reproduction is considered foundational to understanding social ties and intergenerational links termed social embeddedness.

Third, the timing of life events or transitions, whether they occur early or late relative to other people and normative expectations, is of particular interest in LCT as timing can significantly affect adaptation (Elder & Giele, 2009). Lastly, LCT includes human agency as “the process by which people select themselves into roles and situations” (Elder & Giele, 2009, p. 10). Within the given constraints of the historical, geographical, and social contexts, individuals make choices. This coupling of constrained social regulation and human agency is a distinctive aspect of LCT. These four essential elements of LCT are predicted to come together to mold and shape individual life trajectories.
The life course perspective when applied to the study of criminal behavior presents an opportunity for greater understanding of initiation into delinquency, persistence in such behaviors, and desistence of criminal behavior (Farrington, 2008; LeBlanc & Loeber, 1998). Although victimization in sex trafficking is not criminal behavior, it is expected that LCT will be useful in explaining victimization, particularly ongoing and longer-term forms of victimization such as exploitation in sex trafficking. In fact, many have argued that many theories useful for explaining crime and criminality should also be useful for explaining victims and victimization and that criminality cannot be fully understood in isolation from victimization and vice versa (Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Ousey, Wilcox, & Brummel, 2008; Schreck, Stewart, & Osgood, 2008).

2.1 Theory of Age-Graded Informal Social Control

Farrington (2006) described the eight leading developmental life course theories in criminology. Although Farrington combined these two types of theories, developmental and life course, together as one category; Elder and Giele (2009) note a clear distinction between developmental theory and LCT. The key difference lies in whether life course variation is assumed to be a potential source of behavior change (Elder & Giele, 2009). From the life course perspective, that variation is paramount and of primary interest. Developmental theories focus primarily on the continuity of experiences or the influence of deficits during an earlier life stage on later patterns or experiences. Based on that clear distinction, Sampson and Laub’s (1993) theory of age-graded informal social control, which emphasizes “change over time rather than consistency, and the poor ability of early childhood events to predict later life outcomes” (Farrington, 2006, p. 341), seems to best fit Elder and Giele’s (2009) conceptualization of LCT.
Sex Trafficking in North America

Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003) age-graded theory of informal social control is a theoretical integration of LCT and social control theory with three main propositions (Sampson & Laub, 1993). First, structural factors of an individual’s childhood background (e.g., poverty, family disruption, residential mobility, parental deviance) are predicted to be mediated by informal family and school social control or bonding (e.g., poor parental supervision, neglect, maltreatment, poor performance at school) that consequently influence childhood and adolescent delinquency. Differences in individual constitution (e.g., difficult temperament, conduct disorder) also influence childhood levels of informal social bonding in the family and at school. The potential delinquent influence of peers and siblings is also included in the model. Second, childhood and adolescent antisocial behaviors are theorized continue to impact individuals into adulthood. Third, social capital (e.g., job stability, marital attachment) are theorized to exert influence and changes patterns in adult criminal behavior regardless of prior differences in criminal propensity based in childhood or adolescent experiences (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

2.2 Gendered Pathways

Despite important advances of LCT within criminological research and although LCT was not intended to be gender specific in scope, the influence of gender has only intermittently been addressed in LCT research within criminology. This neglect of gender within life course research in criminology is particularly surprising given LCT key components (Elder, 1994; Elder & Giele, 2009; Giele & Elder, 1998). Underestimating the effects of gender within the dynamics of social embeddedness, intergenerational links, and the life cycle (from birth to birthing), in essence, suggests that these interrelational links influence offending across gender in the same manner and with similar intensity. This necessitates discounting even the most basic biological and reproductive differences between genders, even as women continue to carry the primary
responsibility in child rearing (Miller & Mullins, 2006; Simpson & Gibbs, 2006). To assume that institutional and cultural processes similarly affect offending across gender overlooks extensive research regarding their effects on gender (e.g., Adler, 1975; Lynch, 1996; Katz, 2000; Maher, Dunlap, Johnson, & Hamid, 2006; Messerschmidt, 1993; Miller & Mullins, 2006; White, 2009). Not accounting for disparity in choices available to men and women overlooks the effect that inequality has been shown to have over the life course, as women continue to struggle to gain economic equality with men (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002; Heimer, Wittrock, & Unal, 2006; Lynch, 1996; Widom, 2000). For example, research has shown that the combining of mothering, economic marginality, and domestic violence has led some women to choose crime to manage economic pressure and avoid homelessness (Ferraro & Moe, 2006).

Although missing from Farrington’s (2006) review of developmental life course theories, within feminist theories of criminology pathways theory and research has been providing a gendered contrast for LCT by highlighting contexts, events, developmental sequences, and choices over the life course that result in female delinquency and criminality (e.g., Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly, 1992; Morash, 2006; Heimer & Kruttschnitt, 2006; Miller & Mullins, 2006). According to pathways theory, female involvement in criminal activities may be the result of social and psychological pressures that are distinct from typical male pathways into crime (Alarid & Cromwell, 2006). Research conducted by Daly (1992) revealed in a set of distinct paths of female offenders into various types of crime. Childhood victimization, intimate partner violence, economic hardships or marginality, racial discrimination and violence, and relationships with those who facilitate criminal behavior are considered by pathways researchers as key gender-related criminogenic influences (Alarid & Cromwell, 2006; Morash, 2006). Other components of women’s and girls’ lives that have been found to increase risk of offending
include drug or alcohol use, family adversity, and difficult school experiences (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002; Katz, 2000; Widom, 2000).

In addition, research suggests that pathways into crime are not only gendered but also age-graded, with different ages of onset of offending predicting different pathways into crime (Simpson, Yahner, & Dugan, 2008). For instance, a pathway into prostitution is predicted for younger girls who take to the street to escape childhood abuse and a pathway marred by intimate partner violence is more likely for women who begin offending as adults (Simpson et al., 2008). Although Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003) include developmental influences in their theory, the effect of age on life course components such as choice and personal determination has rarely been specifically addressed (Finkelhor, 2007). Children are physically, psychologically, and legally dependent on adults for their survival (Finkelhor, 1984, 2007; Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1985). Much like the historical subjugation and oppression of women, only in the last two centuries have children gained recognition as persons. Previously children were considered property, unprotected, and to be treated as their parents saw fit (Lenoir-Degoumois, 1983; Shelman & Lazoritz, 2005). Therefore, the agency of children of both genders is uniquely constrained by their status of dependency, although girls have been found to encounter higher levels of disadvantage and more severe choice constraints than boys (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Hanna, 2002; Miller & Mullins, 2006, 2009; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Based on social disadvantage and choice constraints due to gender and age, this review gave special emphasis to both gender and age at onset of victimization when applying life course dynamics to the problem of sex trafficking.
4. Review Methodology

This review examined the last decade of research focused on vulnerability factors or characteristics of those victimized in sex trafficking in North America. Articles published from 2000 until 2011 were identified by a search of leading journals in the social sciences through an EBSCOHost search using the key words *sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, prostitution, and juvenile prostitution* paired with the name of the country of interest – *Canada, Mexico, or United States*. Additional articles were located through a snowball search of cross references in articles identified through EBSCOHost. Additionally, reports on human trafficking generated by governmental agencies within the three countries of North America were identified through a Google search using the key words *human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children* paired with the country name – *Canada, Mexico, or United States*. Articles were incorporated in the review if they included research findings regarding characteristics of victims of sex trafficking or risk factors for exploitation in sex trafficking.

Data gathered from the articles were categorized by emphasis of the study findings. General information regarding time and place or period effects and social embeddedness (see Figure 1) were included in the review as factors related to victim route or origin, i.e., whether the victims were internationally trafficked into or within North America or domestically trafficked within their home country (see Table 1). Study findings related to vulnerability factors of male or female victims, primarily psychosocial factors or factors related to social embeddedness specific to male or female victims (see Figure 1) were included in the review as factors related to gender (see Table 2). Lastly, study findings regarding vulnerability factors related to age of onset of victimization were included in the review as age-graded factors (see Table 3).
5. Findings

5.1 General Vulnerability Factors Based on Victim Origin and Route

Due to the conventional meaning of the term trafficking, a widespread misconception is that sex trafficking always involves the clandestine movement of individuals across international borders (Logan, Walker, & Hunt, 2009). Although the movement of sex trafficking victims is commonly practiced to hamper detection of criminal activities by local law enforcement and to disorient the victims (Hepburn & Simon, 2010; Walters & Davis, 2011), it is not a necessary component of sex trafficking (Clawson et al., 2009). In reality, many victims “destined” for exploitation in sex trafficking in the North American are not trafficked into the region from other countries, but rather are trafficked domestically within their home country (Acharya, 2009, 2010; UNODC, 2009).

Different stages of the trafficking process – origin, transit, and destination – tend to be concentrated in areas with particular risk factors. Originating countries are apt to be rife with poverty, economic upheaval, war, and gender inequality (Bales, 2007; Kelly, 2005; Shlyk, 2007). Staging zones typically lie along trafficking transit routes, have accessible borders, and high levels of corruption or political disorganization and instability (Kelly 2005; Shlyk, 2007). Destination areas or countries – including many with respectable human rights records – tend to be wealthier, with high demand for labor and an expanding commercial sex industry (Kelly, 2005).

Within North America, the United States and Canada are primarily regarded as destination countries. The United States receives the second largest number of international victims of sex trafficking in the world (Mizus et al., 2003). Canada also is a transit country used by traffickers moving nationals from other countries into the United States (Barrett, 2010; Estes
et al., 2005). Mexico is primarily considered an originating and transiting country for trafficking persons into the United States (Goh, 2009), with an estimated 5,000 young women and children being trafficked across the U.S.-Mexican border each year (Acharya, 2009). Many children make the journey to the United States via Mexico in search of a better life, as coming to the United States has become “the only hope for ‘street children’ in Central America” (Barnett, 2004, p. 4; see also Azaola, 2000). However, Mexico also is a destination country with many urban areas economically supported by the sex industry including centers of sex tourism located near the U.S.-Mexican border (Acharya, 2009; Azaola, 2000; Zhang, Pacheco-McEvoy, & Campos, 2011; Hepburn & Simon, 2010). Studies have reported that a minimum of 16,000 children and 10,000 women are trafficked in Mexico’s commercial sex industry every year (Acharya, 2010; Estes et al., 2005).

As displayed in Table 1, studies that have investigated vulnerability factors for victimization by sex traffickers in North America have found both shared and distinct qualities in the psychosocial histories and environmental circumstances of internationally and domestically trafficked individuals. Commonalities across individual risk factors of both international and domestic victims include vulnerabilities such as familial poverty, homelessness, inadequate education, family violence, drug or alcohol use by caregiver, history of sexual abuse, and family member participation or complicity in trafficking or prostitution (see Table 1). In a three-year study investigating the commercial sexual exploitation of both foreign and native children in the North America, Estes and colleagues (2005) detailed risk markers such as family dysfunction, domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness in family members, history of child physical or sexual abuse, previous sexual assault, being a runaway or throwaway youth, drug
dependency, gang membership, immaturity, and poor sexual decision-making (see also Clawson et al., 2009; Estes & Wiener, 2005; Raphael, 2004).

No particular race or ethnicity has been found to be at greatest risk for entrapment in sex trafficking. Many studies reported that being a member of minority group or indigenous population increased risk in all three North American countries, particularly for domestic victims (Acharya, 2009, 2010; Clawson et al., 2009; Deer, 2010; Saewyc et al., 2008). White or light-skinned individuals were also reported to be at risk due to higher demand for such victims from buyers of sex (Flowers, 2001; Acharya, 2010; Tyler, 2009). In the United States, African American minors were reported as more likely to be arrested due to being prostituted than prostituted minors of other races and to have a more difficult time escaping (Clawson et al., 2009; Flowers, 2001). Also, for international victims, race or ethnicity may inflate risk as language and cultural barriers result in isolation, increasing vulnerability to exploitation by traffickers and decreasing possibilities for access to protection and support (Logan et al., 2009; Raymond & Hughes, 2001).

Individual risk markers unique to international victims involved tenuous immigration status such as being in a county without proper documentation, having travel documents or a visa that is supported by a trafficker or trafficker-sponsored agency, or having expired travel documents (Goh, 2009; Hepburn & Simon, 2010; Logan et al., 2009). Linked to these risks involving travel documents for international victims were community risks that exist in victims’ countries of origin including the prevalence of fraudulent travel agencies that deceived victims about the conditions of their travel or employment abroad (Acharya, 2010; Goh, 2009; Raymond & Hughes, 2001).
Beyond poverty and an acute lack of employment opportunities, other major community conditions that inflate vulnerability for entrapment into sex trafficking for both international and domestic victims include residing in an environment characterized by high crime and elevated levels of police corruption (Clawson et al., 2009; Deer, 2010; Dorias & Corriveau, 2009; Estes et al., 2005; Logan et al., 2009). Inadequate response by law enforcement and insufficient social services were also reported as community risks factors for both domestic and international victimization in sex trafficking (Clawson et al., 2009; Deer, 2010; Dorias & Corriveau, 2009; Estes et al., 2005; Schauer & Wheaton, 2006).

The proliferation of local economies dependent on sex industry increases the likelihood of both domestic and international sex trafficking. These local economies may be built on supplying the burgeoning demand for the sexual services of either children or adults. Within these high-risk communities, the presence of various types of transient males including tourists, sex tourists, military personnel, or truckers heightens the demand for a supply of trafficking victims to provide sexual services (Estes et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2011). For example, along the Mexican-U.S. border, organized networks of gay men actively recruit boys for sex crime rings to meet the demand of U.S. sex tourists (Estes et al., 2005; see also Dorias, 2005). Women also buy sex, but only account for a small proportion of demand (Acharya, 2010; Dorias, 2005; Saewyc et al., 2008; Sánchez Taylor, 2001). As validation of the common occurrence of sex trafficking in prostitution at truck stops in the United States, Wilson and Dalton (2008) described a 20-mile section of Interstate near Hattiesburg, Pennsylvania that has a collection of truck stops that are known as the “Miracle Mile” (p. 306). Prostitution was so widespread at these stops that the local authorities recognized their ineffectiveness in combating the criminal activity and began
investigating the prostitution occurring as an organized crime problem, requesting and securing the help of federal law enforcement (Wilson & Dalton, 2008).

In summary, when contrasting individual vulnerabilities of international and domestic victims, more commonalities than dissimilarities were observed. As previously mentioned, dissimilarities were related to immigration and legal status (i.e., international victims were more vulnerable to exploitation due problems with travel documentation). Also, greater language and cultural barriers exist for international victims, heightening isolation which limits access to social services and to protection from traffickers. Abandonment, family violence, and caregiver dysfunction were commonly noted in the histories of both types of victims; however, international victims were more likely to report being pressured or sold into sex trafficking to provide economic support for family members than domestic victims (Acharya, 2009; Clawson et al, 2009; Schauer & Wheaton, 2006).

When contrasting the community risk factors, differences were noted between the risks for domestic victims in Canada and the United States when compared to international victims and domestic victims trafficked in Mexico. The community risk factors for the latter group included specific types of community crises are not currently occurring in Canada or the United States such as armed conflicts, political instability, and forced migration of Indigenous people (Acharya, 2009; Clawson et al., 2009; Schauer & Wheaton, 2006). Also, in general, fewer educational and employment opportunities, greater disparagement of women and children, and more widespread corruption of police increased vulnerability for victimization in sex trafficking for international victims and those trafficked domestically within Mexico (Clawson et al, 2009; Logan et al., 2009; Raymond & Hughes, 2001; Zhang et al., 2011).
Lastly, although not explicitly a vulnerability factor, numerous researchers noted determination, ambition, and strong motivation for a better life as positive personal qualities that commonly characterized international trafficking victims (Acharya, 2010; Goździak & Bump, 2008b). Resiliency and hopefulness, particularly hope for finding acceptance and love, were also recurrently noted among domestic victims (Azaola, 2000; Estes & Wiener, 2005; Hanna, 2002; Williams, 2010).

5.2 General Vulnerability Factors across Victim Gender

In general, reports revealed a higher prevalence of girls and women exploited in sex trafficking in comparison to the number of boys and men (Clawson et al., 2009; Estes & Weiner, 2005; UNODC, 2009). Studies of homeless, sheltered, or runaway youth have found an equal number of boys and girls involved in commercial sexual exploitation (Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski & Khan, 2008), as well as an equal percentage of male and female homeless young adults trading sex (Tyler, 2009). Azaola (2000) examined six localities in Mexico and found that the proportion of boys or girls sexually exploited varied considerably in each location based on the characteristics of the market demand. As previously mentioned, studies focused on human trafficking have primarily used non-probability sampling methods, decreasing the representativeness or reliability of descriptive statistics when providing estimates of the population demographics such as gender. Examining studies using representative samples, a recent survey of all classes of students in Grades 11 and 12 in Québec City found that 6% of girls and 2% of boys reported trading or selling sex (Lavoie, Thibodeau, Gagné, & Hébert, 2010). Additionally, based on aggregated regional estimates using standardized methodological guidelines to ensure comparability across countries and over time, available global figures
suggest 98% of all victims of forced commercial sexual exploitation are female, with 40-50% estimated to be minors (ILO, 2005).

As displayed in Table 2, studies exploring vulnerability factors for entrapment in commercial sexual exploitation or forced prostitution have found both shared and distinct qualities in the psychosocial histories of victims across gender. Both male and female homeless, throwaway, or runaway youth are at high risk for commercial sexual exploitation (Curtis et al., 2008; Estes & Weiner, 2005; Saewyc et al., 2008). Other similarities across gender include history of sexual or physical abuse, limited school involvement, family dysfunction, drug or alcohol use, and placement in foster care or group homes (Azaolo, 2000; Curtis et al., 2008; Saewyc et al., 2008).

Some differences across gender were also observed. Female victims were more likely to have experienced the death of a parent, abandonment, or being sold by a family member (Azaolo, 2000; Clawson et al, 2009; Flowers, 2001). In comparison to female victims, male victims left home and were entrapped in commercial sexual exploitation at younger ages (Azaolo, 2000, Curtis et al., 2008; Estes & Weiner, 2005). Other reported differences across gender included boy’s involvement in more serious types of delinquency than female victims (Flowers, 2001). In addition, male youth were more likely to be operating independent of a trafficker/pimp (Curtis et al., 2008; Flowers, 2001; Saewyc et al., 2008).

Although some researchers have reported that girls from lower socioeconomic status are more susceptible to entrapment and less likely to be able to escape the exploitive situation (Lloyd, 2005), Flowers (2001) reported that girls engaging in prostitution in the United States were not more likely to be from minority groups or poor families but instead they came from all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The commonality among the sexually exploited girls,
according to Flowers, was not economic disadvantage but rather psychosocial disadvantage. They shared negative childhood histories characterized by physical or sexual abuse, poor relationships with or the absence of caregivers, as well as early drug or alcohol use or other mental health problems (Flowers, 2001). Not unexpectedly, numerous studies highlighted that girls were more likely to become entrapped in commercial sexual exploitation through the romantic promises and manipulation of a trafficker/pimp posing as a rescuer or boyfriend (Curtis et al., 2008; Dorias & Corriveau, 2009; Farrow, 2005; Saewyc et al., 2008). Relatedly, girls often reported engaging in prostitution to support a family member or friend (Saewyc et al., 2008). Providing further information on the prevalence of trafficker/pimp involvement based on gender, a recent study investigating the characteristics of juvenile prostitution cases reported by law enforcement in 2005 found that 57% of the cases involved a third-party exploiter (Mitchell et al., 2010). Of those cases involving a third-party exploiter, the minor victims were almost exclusively female.

A key vulnerability for male victims seems to be related to sexual identity and sexual preference. Runaway, homeless boys who self-identify as gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual reported disproportionate rates of sexual exploitation (Clawson et al., 2009; Curtis et al., 2008; Dorias, 2005; Estes & Wiener, 2005). Many reported feeling misunderstood and rejected by family due sexual identity or preference (Azaolo, 2000). Similarly, other studies found that male victims often had experienced sexual and physical abuse as well as early negative, coercive same-sex experiences resulting in sexual identity confusion (Dorias, 2005; Farrow, 2005). However, these findings regarding the disproportionate risk for males who self-identify as gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual do not sufficiently explain
male victimization as research has found that the majority of male youth exploited in the commercial sex industry self-identify as heterosexual (Azaolo, 2000; Saewyc et al., 2008).

5.3 General Vulnerability Factors across Victim Age or Developmental Life Stage at Onset

There currently exists very little research exploring the association between vulnerability factors and age of entrapment in sex trafficking or prostitution (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011). However, as shown in Table 3, the few studies that are available provide insight into distinct vulnerabilities which inflate risk based on victim age. For example, running away and homelessness were noted as risk markers among those who were first exploited as adolescents (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Saewyc et al., 2008). This finding concurs with numerous prior studies that have documented that runaway, homeless, and sheltered youth are at high risk of entrapment in sex trafficking (for reviews, see Clawson et al., 2009; Estes & Weiner, 2005). A review of research from the past decade assessing the proportion of homeless or sheltered youth in the United States who were involved in prostitution, pornography, or what is commonly labeled survival sex (i.e., trading sex for basic needs such as shelter or food) also corroborated that both male and female runaway, homeless, or sheltered youth in the United States are at heightened risk for commercial sexual exploitation (see review by Reid, 2012).

As displayed in Table 3, the comparison of vulnerabilities or risk factors across age revealed that early normalization of prostitution by observing family members, friends, or neighbors engaging in prostitution was associated with earlier age of initial involvement in prostitution (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Loza et al., 2010). In addition, adverse home environments and caregiver dysfunction had a greater effect on vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation during childhood or adolescence (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Loza et al., 2010). These findings regarding the detrimental effects of childhood abuse
and caregiver dysfunction support previous studies suggesting that youth who experienced an upbringing marred by psychological, sexual, and physical abuse, were at increased risk for commercial sexual exploitation and entrapment by traffickers (e.g., Farley & Kelly, 2000; Jankowski, Leitenberg, Henning, and Coffey, 2002; Saewyc & Edinburgh, 2010; Tyler & Johnson, 2006; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Yoder, Cauce, & Paradise, 2001).

Drug use or addiction was identified as a vulnerability factor across both life stages (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Loza et al., 2010). However, in one study, selling drugs was associated with later onset of involvement in prostitution (Maxwell & Maxwell, 2000), possibly indicating that selling drugs was the preferred manner of earning needed cash and a way of postponing involvement in prostitution. Also associated with later age of onset were lack of resources to provide for basic needs, pregnancy at an early age, and having dependent children (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Loza et al., 2010).

6. Discussion

Based upon the review of documented vulnerability factors for entrapment in sex trafficking in North America, predictable life course dynamics emerged corresponding to the key components of Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory of informal social control (see Figure 2). Also, as had been suggested by prior research, this review found both shared and distinctive victim vulnerabilities based on origin and route, on gender, and on life stage of the victim at age of onset.

6.1 Shared and Route-Specific Structural Background Factors

First, many shared structural factors or period effects were observed in the backgrounds of those trafficked domestically and internationally such as the presence of organized crime or networks facilitating recruitment into sex trafficking, poverty, lack of educational opportunities,
local economies reliant on sex trafficking, weak social safety net, machismo and pimping culture promoting sex trafficking, and the devaluation of women and children. The reoccurring reference to detrimental effects of the devaluation of women and children, the feminization of migration, along with frequent mention of the endangering effects of machismo and pimping culture (Acharya, 2010; Zhang et al., 2011) support prior feminist research detailing how patriarchal gender arrangements prominent in many cultures support the victimization of girls and women (Farr, 2005; Hotaling, Miller, & Trudeau, 2006; Jeffreys, 2009, 2010; Raymond et al., 2010). The devaluation of girls as economic burdens results in their abandonment by caregivers, even the selling of girls to sex traffickers (Azaola, 2000). As noted previously, the choice of children is often highly constrained by their status of dependency, being regarded as property and even marketed by parents (Lenoir-Degoumois, 1983; Shelman & Lazoritz, 2005). Also, severely limited availability of legitimate employment opportunities may force girls and women into sexually exploitive relationships as such arrangements may provide the only viable option for survival or escape from intolerable conditions (Farr, 2005; Miller & Mullins, 2009).

The findings of this review validate the concerns of feminist researchers regarding the globalization of the sex industry, which has been described as generating a new form of sexual colonization by sanctioning the transference of women and girls’ severe inequality “beyond national boundaries as the women of poor countries can be sexually bought by men from rich countries” (Jeffreys, 2009, p. 6).

As previously noted, those trafficked from other countries into North America and those trafficked domestically within Mexico shared structural factors distinct from those domestically trafficked in Canada and the United States such as outbreaks of armed conflicts, political instability, natural disasters, forced migration, elevated levels of police corruption, and
fraudulent international travel or employment agencies. Structural factors common to domestically trafficked victims were the presence of high numbers of transient males creating proximate market demand for commercial sex, lack of awareness or training for law enforcement regarding the problem, fraudulent employment agents who enticed individuals into sex trafficking with false promises of rewarding employment, and gang-operated sex rings.

As underscored by this segment of the review, various detrimental structural factors or period effects create an environment ripe for exploitation, yet not all individuals experiencing these conditions fall prey to sex traffickers. Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003) theorized that such structural factors are critical in terms of their negative effect on informal social control processes, such as parental supervision, school performance, and peer relationships. The next section of findings highlight the role of informal social control processes suggesting that these factors may be compounding the effects of deteriorating structural conditions commonly shared by victims of sex trafficking.

6.2 Shared, Route-Specific, and Gendered Indicators of Negative Informal Social Control Processes during Childhood and Adolescence

As with structural factors, a large number of shared vulnerabilities were noted in the childhood experiences of both boys and girls trafficked domestically and internationally (see Figure 2). Shared indicators of poor informal social control processes included a history of chronic childhood abuse, family or caregiver dysfunction such as drug or alcohol abuse, having a family member or peer involved in commercial sex activities or directly complicit in the recruitment of the child or adolescent into sex trafficking, and being homeless or on the streets after running away from home, being abandoned, or thrown out by caregivers. Children and adolescents trafficked from other countries into North America consistently reported familial
poverty, often had experienced a family crisis such as a death or serious illness in the family that amplified the family’s economic difficulty, and were commonly sold into sex trafficking by relatives in order to provide economic support for family remaining in their country of origin. Although selling a child appears extremely callous and uncaring, recruiters or traffickers mostly likely deceived caregivers about the conditions awaiting their child with promises of better educational and employment opportunities available abroad (Azaola, 2000; Goździak & Bump, 2008b).

Additional indicators of poor informal social control processes for domestically trafficked youth included poor school performance, placement in foster care or group homes, and early drug or alcohol use. Distinct factors for boys and girls were also noted. Boys were more likely to have reported experiencing rejection by their family due to sexual identity or preference and they also reported greater involvement in more serious types of delinquency (Flowers, 2001; Saewyc et al., 2008). Girls often reported that they had been drawn into sex trafficking by someone they considered to be a boyfriend (Curtis et al., 2008; Farrow, 2005; Saewyc et al., 2008).

Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003) highlighted the influence of informal social control processes during childhood and adolescence on the likelihood of involvement in juvenile delinquency. Broadening the application of age-graded informal social control theory, these findings of this review demonstrate the influence of informal social control processes on victimization during childhood and adolescence, specifically highlighting the negative role that caregiver problems such as drug use, dysfunctional upbringing, family violence, delinquent peers, and lack of school involvement may play in creating vulnerability for commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.
6.3 Shared and Route-Specific Social Bonds during Transition to Young Adulthood

Displayed in Figure 2 are vulnerability factors reported by those who initially became entrapped in sex trafficking or engaged in prostitution as young adults. These factors correspond to Sampson and Laub’s (1993, 2003) concept of social capital (e.g., job stability, marital attachment). Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003) theorized that the possession or lack of social capital greatly influence patterns in adult criminal behavior regardless of prior differences of informal social control based in childhood or adolescent experiences. Findings from this review support this proposition, as those who became entrapped later as adults were not as likely to report experiencing child maltreatment, running away, or observing family or peer involvement in prostitution as those who became entrapped at younger ages (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011).

Instead of reporting negative childhood or adolescent experiences, these young adults, whether they were trafficked internationally or domestically, frequently found it necessary to support themselves and their dependents amidst negative relational experiences such as domestic violence, abandonment or death of spouse, or having a boyfriend or partner who pressured them into engaging in prostitution (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011, Loza et al., 2010). Trafficked adults reported few sources of social capital as they were commonly unemployed with little education, yet needed to provide for a drug addiction or had a dependent child from an early-in-life pregnancy (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011, Loza et al., 2010). In addition, young adults trafficked internationally possessed reduced levels of social capital as they were more likely to be isolated by cultural and language barriers as well as marginalizing legal or immigration issues (Goh, 2009; Logan et al., 2010).
6.4 Individual and Age-Graded Differences

Sampson and Laub’s (1993, 2003) also predicted that individual differences or temperament, such as aggression or conduct disorder, would impact informal social control processes during childhood and adolescence. Although data from standardized personality measures were not collected from trafficking victims in the studies reviewed, numerous studies included information regarding the personal characteristics of trafficking victims that may have influenced informal social control processes resulting in heightened vulnerability to sex trafficking. For example, a disproportionate number of homeless youth who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered/transsexual disclosed involvement in commercial sexual exploitation (Saewyc et al, 2008). As predicted by Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003), individual characteristics of these youth appeared to negatively impact informal social control processes, elevating the likelihood of rejection by family and peers and resulting in homelessness (Azaola, 2000; Farrow, 2005; Saewyc et al, 2008). Isolation from family and friends heightened these youth’s emotional need for belonging and acceptance, which some youth naively tried to fulfill by engaging in commercial sex (Azaolo, 2000; Farrow, 2005). Similarly, numerous researchers reported that the strong need for love and belonging commonly felt by previously abused girls prompted them to acquiesce to the demands of sex traffickers in hopes of gaining their approval and acceptance (Dorias & Corriveau, 2009; Hanna, 2002).

Researchers also noted that teenagers of both genders were often initially curious and fascinated by the idea of selling sex and were drawn to the idea of quickly making large amounts of cash (Curtis et al., 2008; Flowers, 2001). These qualities correlate with normal developmental characteristics of adolescents. During adolescence, the majority of youth engage in sensation-seeking behavior, highly valuing the newness or intensity of an experience (Gardner
& Scott, 2005; Steinberg & Scott, 2003). Sensation-seeking or curiosity can lead youth to experiment with dangerous or risky activities. Additionally, adolescents are remarkably impressionable, easily influenced by peers, and preoccupied with a strong desire for acceptance or social status (Cauffman & Steinberg, 1995). Accordingly, adolescents may be greatly impacted by negative peer influences that older individuals could more easily withstand (Steinberg & Scott, 2003).

Both internationally and domestically trafficked individuals were described as ambitious, motivated by a strong desire to build a better life for themselves and their families. Ambition and a strong desire for something better are considered positive qualities that are reflective of the innate need in all humans “to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world” (Pink, 2009, p. 10). Although these individual differences in motivation may be preyed upon by traffickers, heightening youth and young adults’ susceptibility to manipulation and exploitation in sex trafficking; these positive qualities also produce resiliency and enduring hopefulness in survivors of sex trafficking, sustaining them as they rebuild their lives when given the opportunity (Goździak & Bump, 2008b).

6.5 Limitations of Review and Directions for Future Research

Although this review of research provides useful insight into the life course dynamics which might impact vulnerability to exploitation in sex trafficking, several limitations should be noted. Indisputably, scholarly research in the area of sex trafficking is severely lacking (Goździak & Bump, 2008a; Zhang, 2009). Therefore, this review of research on the topic of sex trafficking in North America was limited by the quality and quantity of studies currently available. For example, a clear distinction between adult-aged and child-aged male victims of sex trafficking is not yet discernible, as research on age-graded vulnerability factors for males in
sex trafficking in North America was not available. All prior studies specifically focused on age-graded vulnerability factors were based on female samples (see Table 3). In addition, this review was limited in scope as only studies focused on sex trafficking in North American were included, preventing the generalization of these findings beyond that region. However, based on the studies reviewed it is possible to identify patterns within the life course dynamics affecting sex trafficking victims in North America, while acknowledging that the information reviewed only reflects a portion of the total population of sex trafficking victims.

A further limitation of this review is related to the rapidly changing perceptions of the issue resulting in numerous and varied terms used to describe the problem. The changing terminology (e.g., sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, sex tourism, forced prostitution, juvenile prostitution, trading sex) used by researchers investigating the topic necessitated increasing the number of key words that were used to identify previous research on the topic. Additional steps were taken to compensate for this limitation. For example, previous research on the topic was not only identified through an EBSCOHost search, but also by conducting a snowball search of the references within identified articles to ensure the inclusion of the greatest number of relevant articles as possible. In addition, due to the changing terminology and the inclusion of studies with mixed samples of minors and young adults, some studies reviewed most likely included individuals who were not victims of sex trafficking but were involved in prostitution.

This review of research on sex trafficking in North America elucidated the many complexities of the problem and the urgent need for solutions. Most evident is the crucial need for empirically-based information to enlighten the public and potentially at-risk youth about the dangers of sex trafficking and expose inaccuracies within popular culture that glamorize the
pimp/ho relationship (Dorias & Corriveau, 2009; Farley, 2003; Kreston, 2005; Dalla, 2000). Accurate facts are necessary for the preparation of prevention education targeting at-risk minors, warning them about the tactics used by sex traffickers or their recruiters to entrap victims. Additionally, research focused on understanding the psychological stronghold that traffickers maintain over minor victims is needed to ensure the implementation of effective therapeutic interventions for trafficking victims. As previously mentioned, research on age-graded vulnerability factors for males in sex trafficking in North America is not available, as prior studies specifically focused on age-graded vulnerability factors were based on female samples.

6.6 Implications for Prevention and Intervention

Beyond exposing the need for greater involvement by scholarly researchers in the efforts to understand and combat sex trafficking, an objective of this review was to consider whether specific types of victims of sex trafficking may be vulnerable due to distinct risk factors, allowing for more targeted prevention efforts. As anticipated, this review did reveal particular risks based on route or origin, gender, and age at onset of victimization. For example, those who become entrapped in young adulthood commonly were without work with little education, yet needed to provide for young children. Others reported drug addiction and domestic violence as precipitating factors. Based on this review of the typical disadvantaged histories of victims of sex trafficking initially entrapped as young adults, “wrap-around” services including health care, mental health treatment, childcare, vocational training, and life skill development are needed. These recommendations are aligned with prior research documenting the protective effects of certain life events in the lives of young women, such as regaining custody of children, a good job, affordable housing, and a supportive, nonabusive relationship (Giordano, Deines, & Cernkovich, 2006; Morash, 2006). Providing these needed services necessitates involvement
from a range of providers such as substance abuse counselors, psychotherapists, social workers, and vocational counselors.

The review of common vulnerability factors indicates that abused and abandoned children and adolescents are at greater risk for further victimization and exploitation. Runaways and homeless youth are at critically elevated risk for sexual exploitation. On the streets, where options for obtaining shelter or other basic necessities are limited, susceptibility to exploitation is greatest. Safe shelter seems to be vitally important in preventing the entrapment of runaways and homeless youth in commercial sexual exploitation. Safety planning may also be useful for at-risk and sheltered youth regarding secure options, such as contacting a relative or reliable adult, should they be in need of shelter.

Regarding gendered differences, girls often indicated that they became entrapped in prostitution through the influence of a trafficker or pimp who they considered to be a boyfriend. Certain sexually exploited boys reported a history of rejection by family and peers due to sexual preference or identity. Treatment for at-risk youth, particularly those with a history of abuse and neglect, should involve strategies centered on reprocessing cognitions of not being worthy of healthy relationships, altering ideas of being undeserving of love, and shaping new beliefs about possessing intrinsic value and having equal importance relative to others. Maltreated minors also would benefit from information on how the psychological effects of childhood neglect or abuse (e.g., residual feelings of worthlessness in relation to others or resulting propensity to expect and acquiescence to further abuse) may place them at an elevated risk for revictimization or involvement in exploitive relationships. To facilitate such treatment, the development of training materials and treatment strategies for therapists and child advocates are needed to assist professionals in identifying and resolving these vulnerabilities in abused or neglected minors.
6.7 Contributions of this Review and Concluding Comments

A key criticism of human trafficking research is the lack of theoretical explanations developed to explain the problem (Goździak & Bump, 2008a). Understanding that vulnerability factors may only be indicators of spurious correlates of causes (Farrington, 2000), clarifying processes by which vulnerability markers are bringing about certain outcomes based upon sound theoretical framework becomes critically important (Wikström & Sampson, 2006; Wikström, 2008). Prior research on human trafficking has predominately explained human trafficking as a product of economic disparity, naming poverty and the aspiration for a better life as the “push” and “pull” factors explaining vulnerability for exploitation in trafficking (Goździak & Bump, 2008a). Relatedly, economic theorists have presented economic models of human trafficking, explaining the problem as a result of an overabundance of vulnerable populations and the relatively risk-free profits that can be gained by trafficking humans (Wheaton et al., 2010). Beyond economic explanations, feminist theories have offered additional explanations for the sex trafficking of women and girls, arguing that patriarchal gender arrangements prominent in many cultures support the victimization of girls and women (Farr, 2005; Goździak & Bump, 2008a; Hotaling et al., 2006; Jeffreys, 2009 2010; Raymond et al., 2010). However, these theoretical explanations fall short of explaining why certain individuals living in poverty or disadvantage by patriarchal, machismo cultures are exploited in sex trafficking while others are not.

Although the findings of the current review of vulnerability factors for victimization in sex trafficking in North America support these epidemiological or social structure theories, the exploratory application of Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory of informal social control added further information regarding the more proximal or individual factors leading to
exploitation. Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003) argued that structural influences, such as poverty or disadvantage, are largely mediated by intervening informal social control processes operating during childhood and adolescence, which in turn directly impact the likelihood of a child or adolescent becoming involved in criminal environments. Negative structural factors are considered important and linked to risk; however, structural effects are predicted to directly and adversely affect informal social control processes that subsequently have a direct impact on risk.

Importantly, support for Sampson and Laub’s (1993, 2003) explanation of the pivotal effects of informal social control processes was evidenced by the large proportion of indicators that were universally shared across domestically and internationally trafficked victims of both genders, such as negative family environments, lack of school engagement, and peer toxicity. In addition, limited social capital was common among those who were first entrapped in sex trafficking as young adults. The advancement of a theoretical framework useful for explaining victimization in sex trafficking that can be repeatedly applied and evaluated in future research was a key objective of this review. Unlike many forms of victimization, exploitation in sex trafficking reflects a long-term, possibly chronic form of victimization. By applying an empirically-supported theory explaining delinquency to the problem of victimization in sex trafficking, this review presents an innovative way of understanding vulnerability to victimization in sex trafficking at the individual level. Making the shift from viewing sex trafficking as a one-dimensional problem to accepting a fuller and multi-dimensional life course framework opens new avenues for exploring solutions so that greater progress can be made toward abating and ultimately preventing the problem.
References


Zhang, S. X. (2009). Beyond the 'Natasha' story - a review and critique of current research on sex trafficking. *Global Crime, 10*, 178-190. doi:10.1080/17440570903079899

Footnotes

1 The most universally accepted definition of trafficking is “the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception ‘for the purpose of exploitation’. Exploitation includes, as a minimum, ‘the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs’” (ILO, 2005, p. 7).

2 The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] defines force, fraud, and coercion as follows:

*Force* involves the use of rape, beatings and confinement to control victims. Forceful violence is used especially during the early stages of victimization, known as the “seasoning process,” which is used to break victims’ resistance to make them easier to control.

*Fraud* often involves false offers that induce people into trafficking situations. For example, women and children will reply to advertisements promising jobs as waitresses, maids, and dancers in other countries and are then trafficked for purposes of prostitution once they arrive at their destinations.

*Coercion* involves threats of serious harm to, or physical restraint of, any person; any scheme, plan or pattern intended to cause a person to believe that failure to perform an act would result in serious harm to or physical restraint against any person; or the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process (HHS, n.d., para. 7-9).
Table 1. *Vulnerability to Sex Trafficking in North America by Origin and Route (Domestic or International)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Author (Date)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Community Risk Factors</th>
<th>Individual Vulnerabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acharya (2009, 2010)</td>
<td>Domestic/ Mexico</td>
<td>Political instability, natural disasters, ethnic conflict, forced migration, poverty, unemployment, gender discrimination, corruption, fictitious employment agencies</td>
<td>Indigenous national, illiteracy, agricultural family, large family size, daughters sold by family, family violence, deserted by husband, under 25 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clawson (2009)</td>
<td>Domestic/ United States</td>
<td>Lack of awareness/training of law enforcement, lack of age-appropriate or culturally-appropriate services, inability to establish trust with social service providers due to high staff turnover, lack of adequate resources to provide emotional, financial, and other required supports</td>
<td>Low-income families, chronic abuse, sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators, caregiver with drug/alcohol addiction, domestic violence, learning disability, school failure, low self-esteem, loss of parent, placement in foster care, running away, homelessness, substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorias (2009)</td>
<td>Domestic/ Canada</td>
<td>Gangs profiting from prostitution, machismo culture, poorly regulated nude dancing clubs, societal objectification of girls and women, positive mass-media depictions of the world of prostitution</td>
<td>Peers involved in prostitution, boyfriend in gang, isolation from external social ties such as family, history of abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estes (2005)</td>
<td>Domestic/ Canada</td>
<td>Organized crime groups, networks of gay men actively recruiting for sex crime rings</td>
<td>Prior history of sexual abuse, family dysfunction, poverty, drug use, poor school performance, homelessness, minority, gay or transgendered, confusion about sexual identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estes (2005)</td>
<td>Domestic/ Mexico</td>
<td>Organized criminal networks, migration to urban cities of those with few job skills, demand for sexual services from children by locals and tourists, inadequate human service and law enforcement infrastructures</td>
<td>Familial poverty, prior history of exploitation by family member, homelessness, abandonment, drug use or addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estes (2005)</td>
<td>Domestic/ United States</td>
<td>Adult prostitution market, transient males, organized criminal networks, gangs, lack of attention by law enforcement, lack of allocated governmental funds to address domestic trafficking</td>
<td>Family dysfunction, caregiver with mental illness or drug/alcohol addiction, prior history of physical or sexual abuse, promotion of prostitution by family member or peers, immaturity and poor decision making, delinquent behavior, familial poverty, runaways from middle class and affluent families, gay/transgendered youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang (2011)</td>
<td>Domestic/Mexico</td>
<td>Machismo culture, social tolerance, pimping as culture, community economic reliance on sex industry, feminization of migration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clawson (2009)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Poverty, few employment opportunities, high rates of organized crime, violence against women and children, discrimination against women, government corruption, political instability, armed conflict Unable to meet basic needs, young age, limited education, orphaned, runaway/throwaway, homeless, family members collaborating with traffickers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goździak (2008b)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Poverty, lack of social and economic safety net, few educational opportunities, small trafficking networks with ties to local community/family Family involvement or encouragement in trafficking, child trafficked to support family/parents, family crisis or illness, trafficked by boyfriend upon arrival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estes (2005)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Poor enforcement of anti-trafficking laws, poverty, links between law enforcement and organized crime groups, organized sex tourism involving boys, tour operators selling children for sex Abandoned and destitute children from less developed countries of Central America, abuse history, at-risk status, violence in home, alcoholic caregiver, family member promoting prostitution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goh (2009)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Little employment or educational opportunity, fraudulent travel agencies Obtained “trafficker” supported U.S. visa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepburn (2010)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Hold employer specific visa (supported by trafficker)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan (2009)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Poverty, government and police corruption, cultural factors, crime and violence Language and cultural barriers, separation from family by distance or abandonment, undocumented or expired documentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond (2001)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Limited educational opportunities Low language proficiency, past sexual victimization, prior work in sex industry (i.e., night clubs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schauer (2006)</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Economic, political, cultural instability, armed conflict, gender discrimination, poverty, lack of employment and educational opportunity, social and economic inequalities Female, youthfulness, family pressure to provide economic support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. *Vulnerability to Sex Trafficking in North America by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Author (Date)</th>
<th>Vulnerabilities of Females</th>
<th>Vulnerabilities of Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azaolo (2000)</td>
<td>Abandoned or thrown out by family, family violence, prior sexual abuse, low self-esteem, drug addiction, family in sex trade, sold by family member</td>
<td>Lack of employment, homelessness, left home at young age (i.e., 8-10 years old), low income family, prior sexual abuse, rejection due to sexual preference, unresolved conflicts of sexual identity, living in sex tourism zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clawson (2009)</td>
<td>Loss of mother by death, past trauma, abandonment, family disruption, feelings of isolation and separation, lack of connectedness</td>
<td>Feel unwanted or misunderstood due to sexual orientation, throwaway due to sexual identity issues, less likely to be formally coerced by a trafficker/pimp and therefore treated as offender by law enforcement, self-identify as gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis (2008)</td>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homelessness, history of sexual abuse, dysfunctional family, precarious living conditions, curiosity and attraction to fast money, limited schooling, living in group homes/foster care, race – equally divided by Black, White, Hispanic, multi-racial</td>
<td>More likely to report living with family, or friends, more likely to report recruitment by pimp/trafficker or boyfriends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History of sexual abuse, older male boyfriend acting as trafficker/pimp, more likely than boys to turn over earnings to a pimp/trafficker</td>
<td>History of physical or sexual abuse, early coercive or negative same-sex experiences resulting in sexual identity confusion and poor self-image, seeking social acceptance and interaction with gay men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrow (2005)</td>
<td>History of sexual or physical abuse, running away, early initiation into sexual activities by older youth, gang involvement, boyfriend in gang, low self-esteem, foster care, peer recruitment</td>
<td>History of sexual abuse, relational difficulties with primary caregiver, rejected by family, foster care, running away, from low income families, dropped out of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorias (2005, 2009)</td>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History of sexual or physical abuse, running away, early initiation into sexual activities by older youth, gang involvement, boyfriend in gang, low self-esteem, foster care, peer recruitment</td>
<td>History of sexual abuse, relational difficulties with primary caregiver, rejected by family, foster care, running away, from low income families, dropped out of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More likely motivated by money, more likely to be operating independent of pimp/trafficker, from dysfunctional home, history of child maltreatment, poor school achievement, delinquent behavior with involvement more serious crimes than girls, self-identify as gay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers (2001)</td>
<td>From both lower and middle socio-economic classes, dysfunctional home, absence of parent, family stress including poor relationship with caregiver, runaway, history of sexual or physical abuse, drug/alcohol use, mental health problems</td>
<td>More likely motivated by money, more likely to be operating independent of pimp/trafficker, from dysfunctional home, history of child maltreatment, poor school achievement, delinquent behavior with involvement more serious crimes than girls, self-identify as gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Running away, homelessness, Aboriginal, physical or mental disability, low school involvement, physical and sexual abuse, foster care</td>
<td>More likely than boys to report trading sex for a pimp/trafficker or to support a friend or relative, more likely to trade sex for drugs/alcohol, 34% reported being lesbian or bisexual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. *Vulnerability to Sex Trafficking* in North America by Age (Child or Adult)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Author (Date)</th>
<th>Vulnerabilities of Children</th>
<th>Vulnerabilities of Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cobbina (2011)</td>
<td>History of physical or sexual abuse, runaway behavior to escape abusive home, perception of prostitution as empowering or giving them control over body/sexuality after childhood molestation, influenced and exploited by pimp/trafficker, early exposure or modeling of prostitution by family, peer, or neighbor</td>
<td>Drug habit, lack of resources to meet basic needs such as housing for self and children, unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kramer (2003)</td>
<td>Minority status, limited education, sexual and physical abuse, and parental substance abuse all predicted <strong>younger-aged</strong> entry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loza (2010)</td>
<td>Need money for basic needs, relative in sex work, drug(inhalant)/alcohol use, child abuse, new parent/partner in home</td>
<td>Need money for basic needs, little education, pregnancy at early age, dependent children, displacement or migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell (2000)</td>
<td>Earlier age of initial use and higher frequency use of crack cocaine associated with earlier age of involvement in prostitution, engaging in property crimes associated with earlier age of initial involvement in prostitution</td>
<td>Selling drugs associated with older age of initial involvement in prostitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saewyc (2008)</td>
<td>More likely to be homeless or living on the streets than adult-aged youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Not all subjects included in studies were confirmed victims of sex trafficking, but were involved in prostitution.*
Figure 1. Four Key Elements of the Life Course Paradigm

- **Period Effects**
  - Geographic location
  - History
  - Economic patterns
  - Cultural norms

- **Social Embeddedness**
  - Linked lives
  - From "birth to birthing"
  - Intergenerational family ties
  - Peer influences

- **Timing**
  - Early or late life transitions

- **Human Agency**
  - Individual choices are made within constraints of historical, geographical, and social contexts
Figure 2. Framework of Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control Applied to Vulnerability to Sex Trafficking in North America

**Structural Factors**
- Shared
  - Organized Crime
  - Poverty
  - Economy Reliant on Sex Industry
  - Lack of Educational Opportunities
  - Weak Social Safety Net
  - Machismo Culture
  - Pimping Culture
  - Devaluation of Women and Children
- International
  - Armed Conflict
  - Political Instability
  - Natural Disasters
  - Forced Migration
  - Police Corruption
  - Fraudulent Travel and Employment Agencies
- Domestic
  - Fraudulent Employment Agencies
  - Transient Males
  - Poor Police Training
  - Gangs

**Informal Social Control Processes of Childhood**
- Shared
  - Child Maltreatment
  - Family Dysfunction
  - Family/Peer in Sex Work/Trafficking
  - Family Violence
  - Runaway/Throwaway
- International
  - Familial Poverty
  - Family Crisis
  - Sold by Family
- Domestic
  - Poor School Performance
  - Foster Care
  - Drug/Alcohol Use

**Social Capital in Young Adulthood**
- Shared
  - Family/Child to Support
  - Domestic Violence
  - Deserted by Husband
  - Boyfriend/Partner Trafficker
- International
  - Language and Cultural Barriers
  - Undocumented or Expired Travel Documents
  - Travel Documents Supported by Trafficker
- Domestic
  - Unemployed
  - Little Education
  - Drug Addiction
  - Teen Pregnancy

**Traits Impacting Choices within Given Constraints**
- Boys and Girls
  - Desire for Love and Belonging
  - Need for Acceptance
  - Curiosity about Sex Work
  - Attracted to Fast Cash

**Minor Exploited in Sex Trafficking**
- Young Adult Exploited in Sex Trafficking
- Boys
  - Rejection Due to Sexual Identity or Preference
  - Delinquent Behavior
- Girls
  - Recruited by "Boyfriend"