



Northeastern University

Effective Strategies to Disrupt Recruitment of Human Trafficking Victims

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Assistant Professor Kayse Lee Maass (Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, COE) and Professor Amy Farrell (School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, CSSH) are co-principal investigators on a \$759k National Institute of Justice grant titled “Identification of Effective Strategies to Disrupt Recruitment of Victims in Human Trafficking: Qualitative Data, Systems Modeling, Survivors and Law Enforcement.” The interdisciplinary award is in collaboration with human trafficking survivors, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and researchers at the University of Minnesota (lead), Clemson University, and RTI International.

This research seeks to better understand how trafficking operations within commercial sex markets recruit, obtain, and replace victims so that effective strategies to disrupt recruitment can be identified. Building on existing research on human trafficking by combining qualitative research, operations research, and a community based participatory approach, we will develop survivor-informed definitions of what constitutes an effective or successful disruption and identify potential unintended consequences of disruptions to avoid further harming victims and survivors. These insights will be incorporated into a network systems model that will enable us to study how various disruption strategies affect how people at risk of being trafficked transition between different stages of exploitation. Ultimately, this will help ensure disruption efforts are trauma-informed and victim-centered.

Abstract: (Source [NIJ](#))

Sex trafficking operations rely on recruiting and retaining potential victims. More research is needed on recruitment, specifically networks, flows of people, goods and money, and cascading impacts of interventions on the operation, victims, the marketplace, and society. The proposed study will build on a previously funded National Science Foundation study. They will gather data in Minnesota from (1) detailed sex trafficking investigation case file reviews (N=8 networks including single pimp, pimp networks, large family-based operations, massage parlors, and brothel types) expected to be more than 8,000 pages; and (2) key informant interviews with law enforcement, service providers and survivors (N=50). This mixed-methods study combines qualitative research, operations research, and a community-based participatory approach to develop mathematical models that will inform criminal justice related decision-making in the field.

The design includes:

- (1) qualitative data collection,
- (2) transformation of data into a data file of node/arc relationships and characteristics,
- (3) mathematical modelling using the data file, and
- (4) outputs of visualization of recruitment networks and dynamics of interventions and disruptions.

This project has the potential to contribute to the field’s ability to inform practitioners where interventions can be used not only to interrupt recruitment strategies in one portion of a network, but the innovative methods may reduce the likelihood of victim replacement and ultimately reduce the number of victims of trafficking overall.

Note: This project contains a research and/or development component, as defined in applicable law, and complies with Part 200 Uniform Requirements - 2 CFR 200.210(a)(14). CANCF