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SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

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DIVISION OF BUSINESS, ENGINEERING, AND
INFORMATION SCIENCES & TECHNOLOGY

Understanding the Sociological Factors that Impact POC in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking:
A Risk Assessment Proposal

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SPRING 2022

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree in Security and Risk Analysis
with interdisciplinary honors in Security and Risk Analysis and Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Data and research studies suggest that domestic minor sex trafficking disproportionately affects children of color in the United States. The aim of this thesis is to propose a risk framework that addresses the racial disparities within human trafficking victimization. To this end, we take a closer look at the historical trauma and current racism-informed social conditions that affect POC (people of color) communities, analyzing how racialized sexual stereotypes have a significant impact in making them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. We review some current studies that discuss common risk factors and emphasize the intersection of race and human trafficking. These studies served as building blocks in creating a risk framework that compares the level of risk and vulnerability different racial groups carry in order to illustrate the racial implications in domestic minor sex trafficking. We also propose that, to address the racial disparities within the human trafficking research community and the anti-human trafficking movement, steps should be taken to better understand the racial history of our country, how it ties directly to racist societal perceptions, and how it influences the supply and demand of the human trafficking industry today.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my thesis advisor, Dr. Karyn McKinney, who has mentored me since my sophomore year of college and who has been my biggest role model and inspiration at Penn State. She opened my eyes to the world of Sociology and introduced me to some of my biggest passions.

Thank you to my other thesis advisor, Dr. David Barnes, who has provided me the knowledge and resources to complete my risk framework, who has helped guide me through the SRA program, and who has shown me patience and understanding throughout my whole thesis writing process.

Thank you to my honors advisor, Dr. Laura Rotunno, for providing endless support, counsel, and kindness throughout my college experience, and for always advocating for me.

Thank you to Dr. Julia Coxen, who took the time to meet with me to answer any questions and address any concerns I had regarding human trafficking research.

Thank you to my race dialogue facilitation class for encouraging me to pursue race-related research and for providing me a space to grow, both academically and personally.

And finally, a special thanks to my family, whose unconditional love and comfort has kept me motivated, even in the worst of times. I owe all of my accomplishments to their invaluable support.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Human trafficking is the act of illegally transporting people from one area or country to another, typically for the purposes of labor or sexual exploitation. Also known as “modern slavery,” human trafficking earns global profits of roughly \$150 billion a year for traffickers, with two-thirds of that money coming from commercial sexual exploitation. It’s estimated that, internationally, there are currently between 20 million to 40 million people in modern slavery--71% of which are women and children.¹

Human sex trafficking is a widespread and complex issue, an issue that still only has a blurry understanding. The concept has been around for centuries, and with many technological advancements today, traffickers are finding new ways to stay untraceable. However, the issue has found a new spotlight in the American public’s eye in recent years with the increase of human trafficking cases on the news and social media. Consequently, this led to a paradigm shift—a shift from thinking it was just an overseas problem to recognizing it as a crisis affecting millions of Americans. With more awareness and pressure from the public, as well as more information coming to light, there is more fuel and motivation for research to be done that might help to combat human sex trafficking in the United States.

The issue of human trafficking is an intricate web that entangles so many different trafficking means and methods. Because of this, this paper will center its attention only on the domestic minor sex trafficking of children of color. Under the federal Trafficking Victim

¹ DoSomething. *11 Facts About Human Trafficking*.

Protection Act (TVPA), Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST) is the “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” within domestic borders in which the person is a US citizen or lawful permanent resident under the age of 18.² Commercial sex acts include prostitution, pornography, and erotic dancing/stripping. The TVPA also recognizes that all persons under the age of 18 who are engaged in commercial sex acts are victims of sex trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion is involved. Last reported by the Department of Justice, 200,000 to 300,000 minors are trafficked annually from and within the United States, but that number is steadily growing.³

Like all social issues, there are specific demographics, such as different nationalities and age groups, that may be affected by human sex trafficking more than others. This thesis is an attempt to provide a framework to assess the risk factors that affect the vulnerability of people of color in America. The hope is for the risk framework to be used as a tool to better understand how different racial and ethnic groups are more likely to experience certain risk factors, and to draw comparisons between these groups to effectively address societal influences. It also will potentially illustrate the connection between racialized sexual stereotypes and the structural racism rooted in American society, that may push children of color into high-risk profiles for domestic minor sex trafficking.

² “Rapid Assessment on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking | Virginia.” *Shared Hope International*. (2011)

³ Butler, Cheryl Nelson. “The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking.” *UCLA Law Review*. Vol. 62 (2015), p. 1466

Chapter 2

Motivation and Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to increase general awareness towards the issue of human trafficking as a whole, but more specifically, the issue of targeting children of color in the United States. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics determined that between 2008 and 2010, nonwhite children accounted for 77.8% of the cases (358 of 460) of child sex trafficking investigated, and a majority of these confirmed victims were reported to be Black and Latino.⁴ In contrast, in 2011, only 37% of the total number of children in the United States were in these two racial groups.⁵ Though the Bureau hasn't publicly released any updated statistics since 2010 on the characteristics of sex trafficking victims, it is safe to assume that those numbers have only increased since then.

The sexual exploitation and abuse of children of color is undeniable and can be traced throughout history, yet American society has framed them as criminals that deserve punishment rather than victims that need protection. When it comes to race, statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicate that over half of minors arrested on prostitution charges in America are Black.⁶ However, as minors, they cannot legally consent to prostitution or any commercial sex acts. The racial discrepancies within American society are clear, and it has translated into the justification of exploiting and criminalizing young people of color in regard to the sex trafficking industry. By acknowledging and studying the racial disparities across social

⁴ Banks, Duren, and Kyckelhahn, Tracey. *Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents 2008-2010*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

⁵ Kids Count Data Center. *Child population by race in the United States*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁶ Davey, Samantha. "Snapshot on the State of Black Women and Girls: Sex Trafficking in the U.S." *Congressional Black Caucus Foundation*.

and economic layers, the hope is for blame to be placed off the victims, and the larger structural implications will reveal themselves.

This thesis is meant to serve as a proposal for the human trafficking research community and the anti-human trafficking movement to seek a better understanding and assessment of the racial history of our country, how it ties directly to the perceptions of different racial groups, and how it influences the human trafficking industry today.

Chapter 3

Historical Trauma

Historical trauma refers to oppressive, multigenerational traumas inflicted on specific communities. These traumatic events hold the ability to cause cumulative emotional and psychological impacts that are transferred across generations, and they have lingering and profound effects on today's society. As stated by Dr. Jessica Gourneau, "The effects of the traumas inflicted on groups of people because of their race, creed, and ethnicity linger on the souls of their descendants."⁷

In this chapter, we will look at the role that historical trauma plays in human trafficking, and more specifically, in the victimization of people of color (POC). On the one hand, we will analyze the impact of slavery and sexual colonization and how these systems of economic exploitation created myths, stereotypes, and biases that heavily influence societal perceptions. On the other hand, we will discuss how these perceptions have been systemically maintained throughout history, making people of color more vulnerable and at higher risk to experience sexual exploitation. We will argue that this vulnerability drives the human trafficking industry and makes it difficult for POC victims to escape their situation.

Slavery

To fully understand the complexities of human trafficking of Black people, we need to go back to the era of slavery and the sexual and commercial exploitation that was an inherent part of the slave experience. Black men and women were both subject to myths and stereotypes

⁷ *Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing*. University of Minnesota Extension. Reviewed in 2020.

carefully constructed by White society to justify the sexual abuse geared to serve as personal pleasure and economic benefit. Inescapably, Black children were also seen as suitable targets for sexual abuse and exploitation.

Black females were stigmatized as “Jezebels”⁸—a biblical symbol of lust, innate wickedness, and even “disobedience to God.” The Jezebel myth framed slave women as the very essence of sexual immorality, and slave owners perceived them as naturally oversexed and overly fertile. Slave owners characterized “Black women and girls as exhibiting an insatiable appetite for free and loose sex, thereby excusing White men’s unlimited sexual access to and abuse of Black women.”⁹ This myth considered Black women unworthy of protection from sexual exploitation, and it consistently worked towards dehumanizing them. At the same time, White society created the theory that “womanhood required whiteness: a 'lady' must be white”,¹⁰ recognizing White females as the ideal of womanhood while simultaneously denigrating Black womanhood. “To further perpetuate this system, the prostitution of Black women allowed White women to be the opposite: Black ‘whores’ make White ‘virgins’ possible.”¹¹ While White women were seen as pure and destined for marriage and protection from sexual exploitation, Black slave women, in contrast, were destined to be a White man’s prostitute. Essentially, Black women and young girls were systematically marked as sexual property.

Black men were also subject to extensive sexualization and abuse under the ownership of slave masters (men and women alike). Their bodies were sites of both “desire” and “horror”, and they were stereotyped as “particularly sexual, prone to sensual indulgence, and desiring white

⁸ Jezebel is an impudent, shameless, or morally unrestrained woman.

⁹ Butler, Cheryl Nelson. “The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking.” *UCLA Law Review*. Vol. 62 (2015), p. 1470.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 1471.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 1471.

women.”¹² These stereotypes were used as a strategy for racial subjugation as it demonized and defined them, and it helped White people justify the sexual abuse and exploitation they were committing. For example, forced breeding labeled Black male slaves as ‘stock men’ or ‘bulls’, which denied them “both a fatherly role to their biological offspring as well as the opportunity to commit to one woman.”¹³ Furthermore, slave marriages were not legally recognized, which further supported white sexual access to black bodies, and undermined long-term monogamous relationships and families amongst the African Americans.¹⁴

After Slavery

Once slavery ended, Black men, women, and children still had to face the consequences of racial stereotypes that ultimately bled into American law and societal structure. Different laws, policies, and customs that were created after slavery enforced and perpetuated the derogatory stereotypes about Black sexuality to continue their sexual exploitation. The sexual objectification of Black people went beyond just expressing stereotypes about them—they were systemically targeted and fraudulently coerced into engaging in prostitution. At the start of the 20th century, with the rise of the American commercial sex industry, Black communities were segregated and pushed into vice districts where “the lure of prostitution and illegal crime was ever present.”¹⁵ For reference, vice districts are areas in cities given over to licensed

¹² Ibid. p. 1473.

¹³ Ibid, p. 1473.

¹⁴ Washington, Reginald. *Sealing the Sacred Bonds of Holy Matrimony*. National Archives: Prologue Magazine.

¹⁵ Butler, Cheryl Nelson. “The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking.” *UCLA Law Review*. Vol. 62 (2015), p. 1476.

prostitution.¹⁶ In the study of “The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot” the authors acknowledged that one of the main causes for prostitution were unfavorable home conditions, such as overcrowding and poverty.¹⁷ While nothing was done about the rise of prostitution and related illegal activities within segregated Black neighborhoods, U.S. laws and customs targeted people of color and steered them into prostitution as a means of economic survival. White people stereotyped Black people as “being prone to crime based on moral deficiencies” rather than acknowledging the societal factors at play that excluded Black people from legal means of making money.¹⁸ Moreover, Black females in particular were often denied the same legal protections and social services offered to White women to shield them from sex traffickers when searching for work opportunities. Despite slavery ending, Black women were hooked onto the Jezebel myth that they were naturally suited and predisposed to engage in prostitution. Jim Crow laws further enforced these racialized notions of Black womanhood. For example, “laws justified the racial segregation of Black and White women in railroad cars on the grounds that Black women were too sexually deviant and morally inferior to sit in the same railroad cars as ‘real ladies’”.¹⁹ Similarly, Black men were also still seen as overly sexual and were often labeled as sexual predators towards White women, which formed the notion that Black men are the aggressive enemy. Therefore, these stereotypes, paired with the societal factors and structural racism that pushed minority populations into vice districts, laid the foundation for further marginalization of these groups.

¹⁶ Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias.

¹⁷ Butler, Cheryl Nelson. “The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking.” *UCLA Law Review*. Vol. 62 (2015), p. 1476.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 1477.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 1472.

Sexual Colonization

The role of race in human trafficking and the commercial sex industry goes beyond the binary of “black and white,” and it is important to realize the more extensive racial implications. As stated by the author, “America’s prostituted underclass has been formed not only by racialized gender stereotypes based in slavery but also through the historical sexual colonization of Native American, Asian, and Latino people.”²⁰

Similar to the Black American experience in slavery, indigenous children have historically been targeted for prostitution and sex trafficking in the United States. As part of their colonization by U.S. troops, they were subject to government sanctioned practices that involved sexual abuse and prostitution, aiming to forcefully assimilate them into American society. Indigenous minors were taken from their homes and lands and were placed in “boarding schools,” where sexual abuse was used to rob them of their native roots (such as their culture and religion). Like they did to Black female slaves, American settlers and troops maintained racialized sexual stereotypes for the justification of the sexual exploitation of Indigenous people.²¹

Other people of color have also been subject to systemic and state sanctioned abuse in the United States. Asians, for example, have been eroticized within American culture. In the late 19th century, women were trafficked from their homes in Asia to the west coast of the United States specifically to serve as prostitutes for the male gold mining community. Asian women were also forced to serve as sexual servants for American soldiers during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, thus creating a submissive and erotic racial stereotype that

²⁰ Ibid. p. 1478.

²¹ Ibid. p. 1479.

made young Asian American girls targets for grooming and prostitution.²² Latinos, also, have not been excluded from the systemic racial subordination of sexual colonization. Latina women in particular were often sexually exploited during their experience as agricultural workers. In the “reed camps” of San Diego, California, which were agriculture and home-based camps that supplied regular shipments of girls from Mexico City and poor towns in Mexico, Mexican girls as young as seven years old were forced to provide sexual services to the adult male agricultural workers for over a decade.²³ Their perceived exoticism, based on profound cultural differences, made them extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. Words such as “spicy” and “sexy” are often used to describe Latinas, depicting them as hypersexual and promiscuous.²⁴

The Start of Human Trafficking Reform

Efforts to ending prostitution and sex trafficking have been ongoing for decades, but despite their use of analogies to compare sex trafficking to forms of slavery, anti-trafficking campaigns and programs have failed to adequately protect or even acknowledge people of color.

For example, the Mann Act of the early 1900’s (originally referred to as the White Slave Traffic Act) was sponsored by lawmakers that claimed, “the white slave trade was the business of securing white women and girls and of selling them outright, or of exploiting them for immoral purposes.”²⁵ By coining the term “white slave” in the context of sexual exploitation,

²² Ibid. p. 1480.

²³ Cianciarulo, Marisa Silenzi. “Modern-Day Slavery and Cultural Bias: Proposals for Reforming the U.S. Visa System for Victims of International Human Trafficking.” *Nevada Law Review, Chapman University Law Research Paper*. No. 8-72.

²⁴ Reichard, Raquel. *7 Lies We Have to Stop Telling About Latina Women in America*. National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice.

²⁵ Butler, Cheryl Nelson. “The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking.” *UCLA Law Review*. Vol. 62 (2015), p. 1489.

racialized notions of who identified as a victim and who did not were formed, and it further perpetuated the idea that Black people always consent to sex. Furthermore, the law, which criminalized the transportation of women for prostitution or other immoral purposes, did very little to stop White perpetrators from sexually abusing Black women and other women of color, intentionally marginalizing them in U.S. society.²⁶ Instead, the Mann Act was used to prosecute Black men for having consensual interracial relations with White women, framing them as the ideal “pimp.”²⁷

The State’s legal response to sex trafficking and prostitution also upheld the marginalization of women and girls of color. Programs made to help victims of trafficking only shielded White women, reflecting the assumptions that “Black women are less capable of leading moral, respectable lives.”²⁸ Though there were attempts at providing women of color the same protections as their White counterparts, such as the White Rose Mission Working Girls Home in New York, they struggled to receive funding and were quickly discredited. White reformers warned American society of “the sexual threat that Black men and women posed for White womanhood and White racial purity,” and claimed that White women needed to be protected from Black influences.²⁹

Translation to Modern Day

The modern anti-trafficking movement still reflects many of the racial biases that reformers held from the start, undermining any significant progress in identifying and helping

²⁶ Ibid. p. 1490.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 1494.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 1491.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 1493.

victims of color. Media has a huge influence on what and who takes precedence in different social issues, and as it portrays prostituted youth as White and suburban, it causes victims of color to be ignored. White children and teens have been portrayed as “iconic” victims of human trafficking, and this has made scholars and advocates focus their attention on only a certain demographic. The media also continues to perpetuate racialized sexual stereotypes through movies, advertisements, and music videos, reinforcing the idea that POC are “sexual delinquents” that are not identified as victims. In addition to creating public apathy, racial stereotypes surrounding prostitution continue to be detrimental for children of color in the legal system. POC continue to be profiled as criminals, and these biases “undermine the ability of police and other stakeholders to properly recognize when minority youth have not consented to prostitution, and thus have been trafficked.”³⁰ The persistence of United States’ legal system in criminalizing POC victims of sexual abuse exploitation, combined with the serious lack of recognition made by the media and public, has constituted large racial disparities within human trafficking research and awareness.

Summary and Analysis

The historical sexualization of people of color and how this has affected these groups to this day is crucial in understanding the current risk children of color face in becoming victims of domestic minor sex trafficking. Though most stereotypes and biases about people of color were formed long ago, they have shaped U.S. society and have heavily influenced the development of POC (people of color) communities. Not only have the laws and customs in the U.S. generated a

³⁰ Ibid. p. 1499.

barrier for them to progress and have undermined effective legal and policy responses, but the social acceptance and complicity performed by White society has confined people of color to these racialized sexual stereotypes which keeps them in a cycle of victimization.

Chapter 4

Literature Review

Multiple reviews and studies have been written and published over the past decade focusing on how risk factors influence the vulnerability and victimization of human trafficking. This section will summarize and analyze different publications that relate to the topic of race and sex trafficking to provide more evidentiary support to validate common themes and important topics discussed in earlier chapters. The chosen publications attest to the claims made in this paper that people of color have not been taken into enough consideration within human trafficking research, that racialized sexual stereotypes and myths about minority groups create and motivate violence towards them, and that there is a serious need to consider the intersection between race and sex trafficking in order to address research and structural disparities.

Human Trafficking and Sex Industry: Does Ethnicity and Race Matter?
by Natividad Gutierrez Chong

In this study, the argument is made that racial and ethnic women are likely more exposed to trafficking due to structural poverty, marginalization, and sexual violence. Though this study focuses primarily on women and girls of color, it still demonstrates how racism and sexual stereotypes influence the supply and demand of the human sex trafficking industry. Chong explains that the demand of sexual services correlates with the invention of stereotypes based on race and ethnic origin. By paying for women from different races and nationalities, men are

given the illusion of experiencing the “exotic.”³¹ Chong also asserts that racism and ethnocentrism are ideologies expressed through various types of violence, one being symbolic. Symbolic violence is “cultural but invisible constructions, as opposed to physical violence, which is exercised with the compliance of those who do not know, are being subject to it, and also when they themselves exercise it.”³² Thus, race and ethnicity, and the stereotypes and societal perceptions that come along with it, mark people of color’s lives and their social roles. Further explaining the impact of racial stereotypes, the study reads, “A noteworthy characteristic of stereotypes is that they forge fixed and static ideas to describe others and by doing so, a predictable outcome is expected and carries the weight of prejudices and contempt from one social group to the others.”³³ In their conclusion, the author describes different aspects of how ethnicity and race matter in human trafficking research, and states that the exoticism of women, based on ethnicity or race, is a valuable asset in the market. Chong then goes on to say that being from an unprivileged ethnicity and race lowers the price of a woman, enabling the fast transaction between traffickers and their clients. Another aspect is that sexual exploitation goes hand in hand with male domination and violence against women of a certain ethnic and racial background as evidenced in video games that offer the rape of indigenous women as entertainment. Finally, Chong claims that structural poverty and social alienation affect mainly non-white women, ultimately making them more vulnerable.

The concept of symbolic violence is particularly notable and important because it alludes to the idea that race and sexuality are social constructions—constructions that originated from

³¹ Chong, Natividad Gutierrez. “Human Trafficking and Sex Industry: Does Ethnicity and Race Matter?” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. Vol. 35 (2014), p. 200.

³² *Ibid.* p. 199.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 200.

the beginnings of this country, such as the slavery and sexual colonization era. The term “invisible” is used in the definition to suggest that constructions formed around race and sexuality are imbedded in U.S. society, producing and exercising covert racism toward communities of color. Another important aspect to note is the compliance that enables symbolic violence to ensue. Not only is there complicity within the majority population (non-POCs), but there is also complicity practiced by those who are subject to symbolic violence that stems from the racial power dynamics that were formed throughout U.S. history. Chong also manages to point out one interesting advantage of having stereotypes—they create fixed ideas about certain groups of people that allows us the chance to expect predictable outcomes. By observing the different ways sexual and racial stereotypes are perpetuated in the United States, we can detect patterns and trends that help us better understand the intersection of sex trafficking and race. Considering the predictable nature of stereotypes, we can acknowledge the racial implications and societal factors within human trafficking research.

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Assessing and Reducing Risk
by Karen Countryman-Roswurm and Brien L. Bolin

In this exploratory study, the factors that may put youth at risk for DMST are examined through “psychoeducational group interventions” that were facilitated with 23 runaway, homeless, and street youth (RHSY). They argue that “there is a need for identification tools and intervention methods that help serve and protect marginalized populations of youth to end the growing human trafficking epidemic.”³⁴ Despite the focus not being on race, this study gives us

³⁴ Countryman-Roswurm, Karen, and Bolin, Brien L. “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Assessing and Reducing Risk.” *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. (2014), p. 522.

insights on how young people engage in risk behaviors and explains how risk factors can cluster to affect the early life experiences—often perpetuating a cycle of victimization in the lives of young people. The risk factors and behaviors identified in the study include poverty, familial abuse and neglect, problematic relationships with caregivers, drug and alcohol use, TRV (Teen Relationship Violence), and RHSY, which refers to unaccompanied youth without adequate stable housing and/or supervision, regardless of their reasoning – the missing support and stability is what often puts one at greatest risk for DMST. Their study concludes that Teen Relationship Violence stands out as one of the “notable risk factors” for DMST because in addition to being dependent upon the same risk factors as DMST, it can also be indicative of someone being groomed for and/or involved in DMST.³⁵

The argument is made by the authors that proper identification tools contribute to helping and protecting marginalized populations of youth. Because misidentification of victims is a significant limitation in human trafficking research, especially for people of color, it became imperative that a risk framework needed to be structured to measure multiple dimensions of human trafficking. By not only looking at individual risk factors but also the societal conditions and racial implications that contribute to risk and vulnerability, we can identify probable victims across all race groups as well as generating strong predictors for future circumstances. The authors identified risk factors and behaviors such as poverty and familial abuse, which contributed to the structure of the risk framework for this thesis.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 526.

No Youth Left Behind to Human Trafficking: Exploring Profiles of Risk
by Joan Reid, Alex Piquero, Michael Baglivio, Mark Greenwald, and Nathan Nepps

The objective of this paper was to analytically identify different risk profiles for juvenile human trafficking (JHT) based on health risk behaviors and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Using a sample of 913 male and female juvenile-justice-involved adolescents from Florida with either suspected or verified JHT reports, the authors examined which types of ACEs and health risk behaviors are most prevalent by comparing them to a matched group that have no previous reports of JHT abuse. They relied on the ACE framework, which identifies discouraging conditions that children may experience, so that prevention strategies can work to reduce the likelihood of their recurrence and mitigate their effects.³⁶ ACEs include three types of abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional), two types of neglect (physical and emotional), and five types of household dysfunction (parental mental health problems, parental separation/divorce, parental substance abuse, parental jail/prison history, and violent treatment toward mother/domestic violence). To have a more comprehensive depiction of various types of trafficked adolescents, this study also analyzed associations between JHT risk profiles and demographics. The findings suggested that one-fourth of JHT victims resemble the current predominantly featured risk profile of the highly vulnerable runaway adolescent with an extensive history of childhood involvement in foster care and engagement in multiple health risk behaviors, making it the largest risk profile in this study. In their conclusion, they recognize that “JHT victims who do not fit into society’s idealized depiction of human trafficking victims are systematically overlooked, even criminalized, and fail to receive needed behavioral and medical

³⁶ Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

health services.”³⁷ They stress the importance of understanding the range of distinctive risk profiles of trafficked youth to help prevent health, economic, and racial disparities.

The risk framework created for this thesis was inspired by the idea of exploring different profiles of risk, and more specifically, the ACE framework. Considering the different types of ACEs, such as forms of abuse and neglect, and other significant risk factors for domestic minor sex trafficking victimization named by other sources, it helped shape an appropriate framework. In addition, the conclusion recognizes that some victims of JHT do not fit into America’s idealized depiction of human trafficking victims, which is why they are systematically overlooked and are not given proper behavioral and health services. This is extremely important to note as it causes discrepancies in human trafficking data, and it upholds the American tendency to disregard POC as victims of sexual abuse and exploitation and labels them as consenting prostitutes, criminalizing them in the process. The racism and bias within the anti-human trafficking movement tries to direct attention away from POC victims towards White victims, a strategy that started with the White Slave Act of 1910 that only deemed White women worthy of rescue and protection.

Cultural Oppression and Human Trafficking: Exploring the Role of Racism and Ethnic Bias
by Them Bryant-Davis and Pratyusha Tummala-Nara

In this study, the authors argue that ending human trafficking will require the interruption of factors that increase vulnerability to human trafficking, including racism and ethnic bias. The

³⁷ Reid, Joan A., Piquero, Alex R., Baglivio, Michael T., Greenwald, Mark A., and Epps, Nathan. “No Youth Left Behind to Human Trafficking: Exploring Profiles of Risk.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Vol. 89 (2019), p. 712.

paper asserts that racial and ethnic stereotypes “facilitate the dehumanization process,” which makes it easier to dominate people of color through sexual abuse and exploitation.³⁸ They also point out the fact that ethnically marginalized women and girls are at increased risk of violence due to the extensive histories of colonial sex trafficking, exploitation, systematic prostitution, stereotypes, and social roles. The paper highlights the realities of sexual stereotypes as studies have shown that pornographic depictions of ethnically marginalized women are more likely to show violence as a form of erotica: “Racialized stereotypes of sexual availability, promiscuity, animalism, and eroticism based on pain and subjugation, and a belief that some subgroups of women and girls exist for the purpose of men’s sexual pleasure and/or domination over them, have informed the creation of pornography, promoted objectification, and proscribed sexual roles of ethnically diverse women.”³⁹ The authors state that institutionalized oppressive acts, whether conscious or unconscious, serve to consistently break down protective factors, such as income equality and educational equity, around marginalized communities who are left more vulnerable to violation. They also make sure to focus on how poverty is a crucial risk factor for both domestic and international trafficking. They state, “It is important to note the inextricable links between race, ethnicity, and poverty. Ethnically marginalized persons are more likely to live in poverty and more likely to live with intergenerational poverty.”⁴⁰ In the conclusion, the authors call for a multi-sector response in order to combat human trafficking. “There is the need for increased public awareness about human trafficking, and within that education there is a need for much greater attention to the ways racial discrimination and gender discrimination intersect to

³⁸ Bryant-Davis, Thema, and Tummala-Narra, Pratyusha. “Cultural Oppression and Human Trafficking: Exploring the Role of Racism and Ethnic Bias.” *Women & Therapy*. Vol. 40 (2017), p. 154.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 157.

intensify risk to exploitation through human trafficking.”⁴¹ The authors acknowledge that researchers in this area have also utilized related terms such as cultural trauma, intergenerational trauma, post-traumatic slave syndrome, hate crimes, and racism-based traumatic stress. However, they state that psychologically focused human trafficking research is pretty minimal, and that within this limited literature there is a lack of attention to the intersection of racism, ethnic bias, and human trafficking.

This study explores the role that racism and ethnic bias play in human trafficking, and the assertions made throughout solidify the idea that historical trauma is a fundamental factor when trying to understand how children of color are victimized through domestic minor sex trafficking. The authors bring up the dehumanizing effects of ethnic and racial stereotypes and the inseparable links between race and poverty to strengthen their argument that there needs to be greater attention given to the intersection of racism, ethnic bias, and human trafficking. One outstanding point they make is that institutionalized oppressive acts are consistently breaking down protective factors, such as income equality and educational equity, making POC communities more vulnerable to negative outcomes. This claim made by the authors reinforces the notion that U.S. laws and customs are still influenced by discriminative perceptions formed in early history, further preserving the historical traumas that different race groups face today.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 164

Risk Factors for Domestic Child Sex Trafficking in the United States
by Lisa Fedina, Celia Williamson, and Tasha Perdue

In this study, the authors retrospectively examine relations between risk factors and domestic child sex trafficking through a cross-sectional survey administered to a sample of individuals aged sixteen and older currently involved in the commercial sex industry. The authors explain how few studies have examined the interrelationship among risk factors and their occurrence prior to entering the commercial sex industry, so doing so can highlight appropriate entry points for prevention intervention during childhood. To measure risk factors, participants were asked to endorse whether a series of statements applied to them during two timeframes: less than one year before entering the commercial sex industry and/or more than one year before entering the commercial sex industry. Statements in the survey included phrases like “I ran away from home more than once” and “I was worried about how I would eat or where I would sleep.” Out of the 273 participants in this study, 115 of them (roughly 42%) recalled that they started selling sexual services when they were under the age of 18.⁴² All participants in the sample reported high rates of runaway behaviors, childhood abuse, and experiences of rape prior to entering the commercial sex industry. Results from the survey indicate that POC participants have more than twice the odds of being trafficked as minors when compared with non-POC because “Social, educational, and economic disadvantages disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority girls and women in the United States.”⁴³ Bivariate results suggest that childhood emotional and sexual abuse, rape, running away from home, having family members in sex work, and having friends who purchased sex were significantly associated with domestic child

⁴² Fedina, Lisa, Williamson, Celia, and Perdue, Tasha. “Risk Factors for Domestic Child Sex Trafficking in the United States.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Vol. 34 (2019), p. 2663.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 2668.

sex trafficking. On the other hand, multivariate results indicate that domestic child sex trafficking victims were significantly more likely to have ever run away and to be a racial/ethnic minority than non-trafficked adults engaged in the commercial sex industry. It is also important to note that approximately 21% of former and current child sex trafficking victims in this study were males, which suggests the need for prevention strategies to also include male minors.⁴⁴

The biggest takeaway in this study was the comprehension of interrelationships among risk factors. The authors explain how very few studies examine the impact that risk factors have on each other and how it affects victims. Risk factors have the ability of interacting with one another, and if someone were to report on experiencing multiple risk factors, the likelihood of becoming a victim of human trafficking would instantly intensify. Results from the study show that racial and ethnic minorities are twice as likely of being trafficked when compared with non-POC participants because of social, educational, and economic disadvantages. These disadvantages contribute to multiple risk factors, and as the risk factors work together, they disproportionately affect different race communities and pushes them into the commercial sex industry.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 2668.

Chapter 5

Limitations

There are very clear challenges and limitations when it comes to researching human trafficking. One of the biggest obstacles in preventing human trafficking is the inability to correctly identify victims of human trafficking due to the lack of accurate identification tools.⁴⁵ There is also a prevalence of victim misidentification within police departments, and law enforcement's inability to properly recognize minority victims—whether it be because of bias or prejudice—disconnects their perception of trafficking from the existing reality.⁴⁶ Consequently, there are significant quantitative data discrepancies, and estimating the scope of human trafficking is nearly impossible. In regard to domestic minor sex trafficking, very little empirical research has been conducted, leaving significant gaps in available data. However, the empirical research that does exist cannot be labeled as representative of all sex trafficking victims in the U.S. There is always the possibility of selection bias at the hands of shelters or other assistance programs, findings could differ dramatically depending on location (i.e., rural vs. urban areas), making it hard to define populations, and even the hesitancy of some victims to reveal certain truths about their experience for fear that they will be prosecuted as criminals will produce misleading results.⁴⁷ Also, within the anti-human trafficking movement and research circles, differences of definitions and the lack of definitional clarity can cause unintentional inconsistencies that hinder any sort of progress or improvements.⁴⁸ Finally, as shown in numerous

⁴⁵ Tyldum, Guri. "Limitations in Research on Human Trafficking." *International Migration*. Vol. 48 (5) (2010), p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

studies, the lack of male representation in sex trafficking research leaves them invisible to proper attention and intervention, insinuating that the sexual abuse of men and boys is not a problem in the U.S.

Chapter 6

Risk Framework

Risk management frameworks are templates and guidelines used to identify both existing and potential risks and to assess how to mitigate the risks to minimize the impacts and losses. Though risk frameworks were originally developed to help protect information systems, they have evolved to manage risks in almost all aspects of life. In the context of this thesis, a risk framework was created to compare the level of risk and vulnerability that different racial groups carry, aiming to demonstrate racial implications in domestic minor sex trafficking and highlight the importance of framing risk in a social context. The combination of risk management and sociological concepts is fundamental and will help illustrate the different societal influences that play a significant role in creating and maintaining certain risks. Ideally, drawing these connections will then contribute to finding effective preventive and protective measures to aid domestic minor sex trafficking victims, both current and potential.

The ACE framework, previously mentioned in Chapter 4, was the main source of inspiration for the domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) risk framework. The ACE framework focuses on identifying “discouraging” conditions that children may experience that effect their development and socialization, causing them to experience negative outcomes as they grow older. With this in mind, the goal was to create a similar risk framework that takes into account the historical trauma experienced by POC in America, together with current racism-informed social conditions, in order to assess the risks and vulnerabilities of DMST that children of color

face. Once the risks and vulnerabilities are identified and assessed, strategies can be developed to reduce the likelihood of them recurring and mitigate their harmful consequences.

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the new DMST Risk Framework. The interrelationship between risk factors is shown by the addition signs in between each factor, and the implementation of social conditions and vulnerabilities that impact different groups helps recognize how everything works together to victimize people.

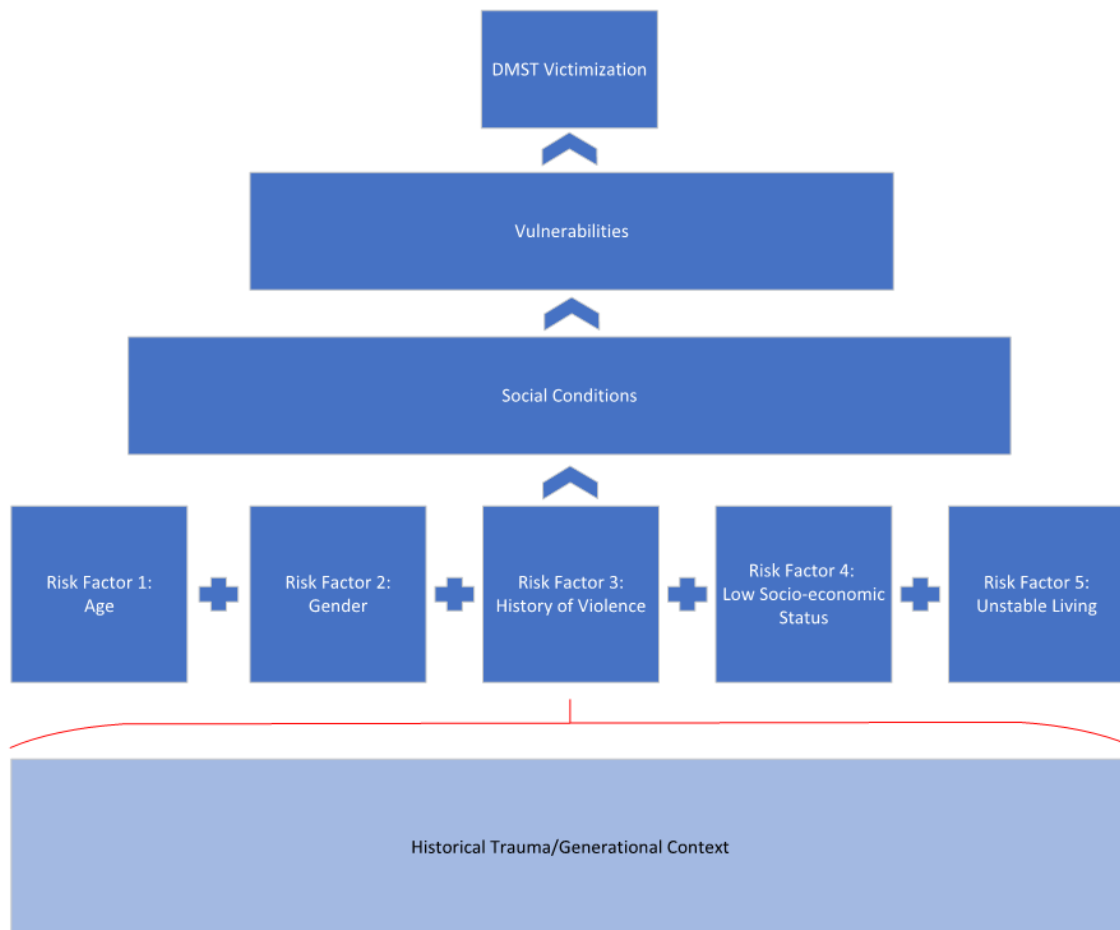


Figure 1: DMST Risk Framework

Risk Factors

The risk framework centers around the top 5 most significant risk factors for domestic minor sex trafficking. Relying on the information collected from the literature review, and the statistics provided by the National Human Trafficking Statistics Report, the risk factors were narrowed down to age, gender, history of violence, low socio-economic status, and unstable living. Though age and gender were not mentioned as top risk factors, the choice to include them in the risk framework was based on supportive findings. Because this paper centers around domestic minor sex trafficking specifically, age was a necessary risk factor to include to stay within the scope of this research. As for gender, in addition to acknowledging that sexual abuse and exploitation is generally targeted more towards women and girls, the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) states that girls between the ages of 9 to 17 make up roughly 75% of all victims being sex trafficked in that age group.⁴⁹ For the purpose of this thesis, and based on available data, we were only able to consider the binary gender breakdown and not include other identities, such as non-binary and transgender. The remaining risk factors are a bit more complex as they incorporate several risk profiles and behaviors. History of violence includes familial domestic abuse (including emotional, verbal, or physical abuse), relationship violence (including emotional, verbal, or physical abuse), history of criminal record (either their own or family member), emotional neglect, and physical neglect. Unstable living includes homeless youth, runaway youth, history of drug abuse (either their own or family member), history of alcohol abuse (either their own or family member), and any foster care experience. Finally, low socio-economic status includes two options: poverty and low-income. Poverty is determined if the

⁴⁹ *Human Trafficking and Gender: Differences, Similarities, and Trends*. The Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC).

household income is less than or equal to one-third of the federal median household income while low-income is determined if the household income is less than or equal to two-thirds of the federal median household income. (It's important to note that the federal median household income varies depending on which state they are living in and how many people are in the household).⁵⁰

Social Conditions and Historical Trauma

Historical trauma has emerged as a critical area of study in understanding and addressing long-term safety and health issues in specific communities. It's important in illustrating sources of risk and the impact it has on societal perceptions on marginalized/racial groups. It's crucial to point out that historical trauma is not directly inserted into my risk framework. It is simply there to serve as a reminder that historical trauma and generational context is fundamental in understanding its influence on the risk factors and in emphasizing the differences between POC and non-POC. By understanding this, researchers are able to better identify the root causes of these risks and address them accordingly.

In sociology, social conditions refer to the state of society as it exists or as it fluctuates. They are the elements of life shaped by society or societal-informed perceptions, and this can be viewed at the national level or just at the level of community. The social conditions, which also have racial and economic implications, help us understand the unmet needs of different communities of color, and in turn, it allows us to pinpoint certain disparities that influence the risk factors. When asking how children of color become vulnerable to domestic minor sex

⁵⁰ ASPE. *2021 Poverty Guidelines*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

trafficking victimization, the risk factors answer the “Why?” while the social conditions answer the “How?” By addressing the specific social conditions, the mitigation of risk factors will follow soon after. Examples of different social conditions that affect people of color in America include: 1) Legal and social barriers to healthcare, food, and housing security, 2) lack of protective policies for POC against sexual abuse and exploitation, and 3) discrimination in school environments, the workplace, and in public settings.

Weighting System

Figure 2 illustrates how each risk factor is broken down and quantified.

<p><u>Age:</u></p> <p>Children between the ages of 9 and 17 _____ (If yes, add three points)</p> <p>Children between the ages of 12 and 14 _____ (If yes, add four points)</p> <p>Highest Weight of Risk Possible: 7</p>	<p><u>Gender:</u></p> <p>Girl _____ (If yes, add thirteen points)</p> <p>Boy _____ (If yes, add one point)</p> <p>Highest Weight of Risk Possible: 13</p>	<p><u>History of Violence:</u></p> <p>Familial Domestic Abuse (including emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse) _____ (if yes, add one point)</p> <p>Relationship Violence (including emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse) _____ (if yes, add one point)</p> <p>Criminal Record History (either your own or family member) _____ (if yes, add one point)</p> <p>Emotional Neglect _____ (if yes, add one point)</p> <p>Physical Neglect _____ (if yes, add one point)</p> <p>Highest Weight of Risk Possible: 5</p>	<p><u>Low Socio-Economic Status:</u></p> <p>Household income is less than or equal to 1/3 of the federal median household income (poverty) _____ (if yes, add three points)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Household income is less than or equal to 2/3 of the federal median household income (low-income) _____ (if yes, add two points)</p> <p>Highest Weight of Risk Possible: 3</p>	<p><u>Unstable Living:</u></p> <p>Homeless Youth _____ (If yes, add one point)</p> <p>Runaway Youth _____ (If yes, add one point)</p> <p>History of Drug Abuse (either you or family member) _____ (If yes, add one point)</p> <p>History of Alcohol Abuse (either you or family member) _____ (if yes, add one point)</p> <p>Foster Care Experience _____ (If yes, add one point)</p> <p>Highest Weight of Risk Possible: 5</p>
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Figure 2: Weighted Risk Factors

In an attempt to quantify the risk within the DMST risk framework, different weights are assigned to the individual risk factors. The purpose of the weighting system is to help us classify, in order of impact, the various risk factors involved in domestic minor sex trafficking. They are to be added together so that total scores/weights can be used to compare different racial groups. The weights are not meant to be indicative of the real-world statistics and data on human trafficking but rather they serve as a tool to compare the scores of different social/race groups. To efficiently keep track of how many points someone has, the risk factors are formatted into a questionnaire/check list.

Unfortunately, for undergraduate students, there is very limited access to human trafficking data, making it very difficult to assign weights that are representative of the actual impact that these risk factors have. Of the top 5 factors that are included in the framework, gender is the one with definite statistical evidence that allowed accurate assignment of weight. According to the CTDC, among children between the ages of 9 to 17 that are victims of domestic sex trafficking, girls make up 74.34% of them—regardless of the other risk factors.⁵¹ For the purpose of our weighting system, this statistic will be rounded up to 75%. With that being said, if

x = weight assigned to boys

y = weight assigned to girls

w = maximum average weight of the other factors

then for the ratio of boys to girls to reflect the data, we assume that, under equal circumstances, the score of a boy should be 1/3 of the score of a girl. In other words, we want

$$(x + w)/(y + w) = 1/3.$$

⁵¹ *Human Trafficking and Gender: Differences, Similarities, and Trends*. The Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC).

For history of violence and unstable living, specific data was not readily available to determine weights reflective on realities, so they were weighted as only one point. However, it's important to acknowledge that experiences of violence and unstable living are unique to each individual and family, and the assignment of one point is solely by default. For low socio-economic status, less than or equal 1/3 of the median household income constitutes on or below the poverty line, which is given a weight of 3, while 2/3 of it constitutes on or below the low-income line, and this is given a weight of 2. These weight assignments reflect the assumption that people in poverty are more vulnerable. This is consistent with census data and should be applied, considering the number of people within the household and which state the household is in.⁵² For age, research shows that the average age of children victims is 12-14 years old, so assuming normal distribution and following the empirical rule, the average age group is placed in the first standard deviation—68% of all minor victims.⁵³ Once again, this statistic is rounded to 70% so that the weight is a whole number. Based on that, if a person's age falls into the 9-17 years old bracket, 3 points are given, and if the person is between 12 and 14 years old, 4 extra points are added to reflect a 3:7 ratio.

Vulnerabilities

Social vulnerability is defined as the inability of people, organizations, and societies to withstand adverse impacts from multiple stressors to which they are exposed.⁵⁴ In this case, the

⁵² ASPE. *2021 Poverty Guidelines*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁵³ *Human Trafficking and Gender: Differences, Similarities, and Trends*. The Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC).

⁵⁴ Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. *CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

multiple stressors include both the risk factors and the social conditions while the adverse impact is domestic minor sex trafficking victimization.

By examining both the individual risk factors and the social conditions brought on by the historical traumas of racial groups in the U.S., we can then determine the level of vulnerability that different communities face in order to recommend appropriate and effective protective and preventive measures.

Risk Framework in Practice

While this framework is a reference model, it does take into account supporting research and data found in various studies that identify the most significant risk factors in human trafficking, together with the impact of historical trauma and social conditions. However, for it to be properly tested, the next step would be to conduct a sample study containing people from all racial groups (for comparison) that specifically addresses each of the risk factors mentioned in the framework. In addition, the weighting system could be further improved by incorporating more accurate and representative statistical data on the breakdown of gender, age, history of violence, socio-economic status, and unstable living among current and potential victims.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main goal of this thesis was to provide convincing arguments of two aspects: First, the extensive history of POC in the United States, and the influence it has had on social perceptions, laws, and customs, makes children of color more vulnerable to domestic minor sex trafficking victimization than non-POC. Second, we argue that acknowledging these conditions is necessary to accurately assess the compounding effects of general risk factors and race, hoping that a better assessment will provide a more effective response on how to mitigate and prevent such effects.

As first steps in addressing the aforementioned aspects, we recommend:

1. Promoting more discussions about race in human trafficking research and the anti-human trafficking movement in order to raise awareness, practice inclusivity, and destigmatize profiles of POC victims.
2. Finding ways to educate and influence the different components of the criminal justice system, such as the policing systems and legal process, to protect POC victims from wrongful persecution.
3. Expanding on programs that work towards dismantling racist and discriminatory barriers that disproportionately push POC into the commercial sex industry.
4. Focusing on more state and local level studies that center on the intersection of sex trafficking and race, so we can identify and differentiate how race groups are affected depending on location. Nation-level studies has its limits since the distribution of race groups in the U.S. varies greatly.

5. As for the framework, it could either be expanded or narrowed to fit specific race populations, as well as manipulated to assess other marginalized groups that hold historical trauma and have been influenced by societal factors, like the LGBTQ+ community.

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- Analyzed and maintained different project data for monthly project reports
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- Tutored other students at my university with their precalculus and statistics courses throughout the semesters

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- Supported the Risk Appetite team by creating presentation templates to maintain a consistent team culture
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