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A Routine Activities Explanation of Sex Trafficking Victimization: A Content Analysis of Published Biographical Accounts

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Abstract:
Using a theoretical framework similar to that of Mustaine & Tewksbury's (1999) work on identifying lifestyle factors that serve as predictors for the likelihood of being a stalking victim, I will use routine activities and lifestyle theories to explore the context in which women become victims of sex trafficking. Much of the literature on sex trafficking is geared toward policy; there has been little focus on sex trafficking from a victimization standpoint. My goal is to fill this gap in the literature by identifying lifestyle and demographic characteristics that increase women's risk of falling victim to the modern day slavery of sex trafficking. The results of a preliminary qualitative content analysis suggested that routine activities theory might be a useful tool in better understanding sex trafficking victimization. This research seeks to further examine these presumptions through a quantitative analysis of trafficking victimization and the explanatory capacity of routine activities and lifestyle theories,

Keywords: human trafficking, sex trafficking, victimization, routine activities theory

1. Thinking outside the Data Mine

The study of some types of crimes and victimization has undoubtedly suffered due to the quantitative focus that ostensibly dominates the field of criminology. Research on human trafficking victimization, particularly sex trafficking, while often acknowledged as an issue in need of more attention from researchers, remains largely limited, due in part to the scant amount of quantitative data available to scholars. Human trafficking, like most elements of organized criminal activity, takes place in a criminal underworld that even experienced law enforcement officials sometimes fail to detect. Thus, the collection of data in such environments is perhaps beyond the means, or desire of most scholars. Rather than passing up the study of human trafficking victimization for crimes with more available quantitative data, criminologists should look to the possibilities that exist beyond datasets derived from rigid survey techniques and the like. A wealth of rich and readily available data does exist on such topics as sex trafficking victimization. As the following analysis of routine activities theory as it pertains to sex trafficking victimization demonstrates, through the content analysis of published autobiographic and biographic accounts of trafficking victims, a wealth of rich contextual sex trafficking data is readily available to researchers given they are willing to expand their horizons beyond the realm of ready-made quantified data sets.

2. Introduction

For the last 30 years, criminologists have used routine activities and lifestyle theories as a basis for the explanation of an individual's differential susceptibility to victimization (Hindelang, Gottfredson & Garofolo, 1978; Cohen, 1981; Gottfredson, 1986; Miethe & Meier, 1994). Such theories hypothesize that the activities and lifestyles of different individuals make them suitable targets for certain crimes. Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activities theory proposes that the risk of victimization is increased when three primary variables converge: (1) motivated offenders, (2) suitable targets, and (3) the absence of capable guardians of persons or property. Lifestyle theories go on to explain risk of victimization as being a utility of an individual's routine activities, which diminish exposure to capable guardians and/or increase exposure to motivated offenders (Maxfield, 1987; Schrek, Fisher, & Miller, 2004; Spano, Freilich, & Bolland, 2008). Miethe & Meier (1994), explaining that lifestyle (Hindelang et al., 1978) and routine activities theories are essentially the same, have identified the four key variables that have been used to explain the relationship between lifestyle and risk of victimization as being: (1) proximity to crime, (2) exposure to crime, (3) target attractiveness, and (4) guardianship.

Advancements in criminological theories of opportunity have emphasized the benefits of shifting focus from offender motivation to the context in which crimes take place (Groff, 2007; Weisburd, 2002; Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981). Such approaches center on the actual crime occurrence rather than the inherent motivations of the offender, which helps generate implementable strategies of policy and practice (Akers 2000; Felson 1987; Groff 2007). It is possible that such strategies, when implemented, can lead to timely reductions in crime rates. Routine activities theory has received much attention in regards to its crime reduction potential.

This paper will use the theoretical framework of the closely related routine activities and lifestyle theories to identify risk factors for sex trafficking victimization among females living in Eastern Europe. The primary forms of human trafficking involve the sex

industry or other types of forced labor, with sex trafficking being the largest subcategory (TIP Report, 2009). The most common victims of trafficking are women and children who are lured by traffickers with promises of jobs, education, marriage, and a better life. Sex traffickers may subject victims to starvation, forced drug addiction, rape, sexual abuse, torture, and psychological abuse in efforts to force the victims to work in brothels or other outlets of the sex industry (TVPA, 2000). The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that some 17,500 victims are trafficked into the U.S. annually, but it acknowledges that this estimate is likely low given the difficulties in obtaining accurate data on trafficking victims (Overbaugh, 2009). On a global scale, the sex trafficking industry is on the rise. For 2006, there were an estimated 1.2 million trafficked sex slaves worldwide, and more than 500,000 new victims in 2007 (Kara, 2009). Regardless of the exact numbers, sex trafficking continues to pose a great danger to women throughout the world.

Following a framework similar to that of Mustaine & Tewksbury's (1999) work on identifying lifestyle factors that serve as predictors for the likelihood of being a stalking victim, I will use routine activities and lifestyle theories to explore the context in which women become victims of sex trafficking. Most literature on sex trafficking is geared toward policy; there has been little focus on sex trafficking from a victimization standpoint. My goal is to fill this gap in the literature by identifying lifestyle and demographic characteristics that increase women's risk of falling victim to the modern day slavery of sex trafficking.

3. Sex Trafficking Research

The trafficking of women for commercial exploitation in the global sex industry has been practiced for centuries and has long been recognized as a formidable problem. Formal research can be traced back to 1928, when the League of Nations completed a three-year study of global sex trafficking (Harris, 1928). Despite this early attention, the problem of sex trafficking lingered under the radar of both the public and researchers alike until the early 1990s when the issue rose to the forefront of human rights agendas at an international level (UN, 1999; TVPA, 2000, 2003, 2005). The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also known as the Palermo Protocol) of 2000 and the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) and its subsequent reauthorizations in 2003 and 2005 have been the primary driving force behind the more recent international efforts to combat human trafficking. The TVPA essentially acted as a national and international declaration of war on trafficking while deeming US foreign aid contingent upon compliance with mandated TVPA guidelines that all nations take parallel steps to thwart trafficking.

Following the TVPA and the Palermo Protocol came increased governmental attention, which led the media to take notice of the problem. Since the 1990s, various media outlets around the world have worked aggressively to inform the international community of the horrific human rights abuses that accompany human trafficking and particularly, sex trafficking (Guinn, 2008). Sex trafficking is a pressing political issue for two key reasons. First, the victims are often forced to endure both horrific physical and mental abuse, essentially being stripped of their fundamental freedom and self-esteem. The estimated scope and brutality of this cruel exploitation has made the issue a top priority for many governments. Second, human trafficking—particularly for purposes of sexual exploitation—is an ever-present and growing business among organized crime networks (Morehouse, 2009).

Sex trafficking has received attention from researchers in a variety of disciplines over the last decade. Despite an increasing level of scholarly interest, the body of academic works on the topic remains quite small. Legal research is most prevalent among the nascent academic research on sex trafficking. Janie Chuang's (1998) article, published prior to the passage of the TVPA or UN Palermo Protocol, analyzed the scope and effectiveness of proposed legislation aimed at assisting and protecting trafficking victims. Since the passage of the TVPA of 2000 and its reauthorizations of 2003 and 2005, a growing body of legal research has been conducted to analyze the effectiveness of the act's provisions (Overbaugh, 2009; Chapkis, 2003; Ryf, 2002; Hyland, 2001).

Within the field of criminology, much of the research on sex trafficking has focused on trafficking networks within the realm of organized transnational crime (Turner & Kelly, 2009; Shelley, 1998, 2003; Bruckert & Parent, 2002). This is not surprising given that human trafficking is estimated to be the third most profitable source of income globally for organized crime, with drugs and firearms trafficking taking the number one and two spots (Morehouse, 2009). Most human trafficking research has not advanced beyond "estimating the scale of the problem; mapping routes and relationships between countries of origin, transit, and destinations; and reviewing legal frame-works and policy responses," which provides for numerous gaps in the current body of pertinent literature (Gozdziak & Collett, 2005). Very few scholarly studies—particularly empirical—on trafficking have been carried out and published in academic outlets. Frank Laczko and Elzibeta Gozdziak (2005) edited the comprehensive work, Data and Research on Human Trafficking: A Global Survey for the International Organization for Migration. They found two central approaches to academic research on human trafficking; the first being a labor framework employed mainly by journalists and "activist researchers" (p. 121), the second, a migration framework employed primarily by academics.

Despite increased public awareness and the combating efforts of many federal governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the comprehensive knowledge base about human trafficking remains weak, particularly in regards to victimization. Reliable data on the characteristics of both perpetrators and victims is scarce, and the methodologies used to estimate the scope of the problem lack transparency, making it difficult to assess the reliability of the available data. "There is a need for both qualitative and quantitative research that would provide macro- and micro-level understanding of the trafficking phenomenon. . . . Ethnographic and sociological studies based on in-depth interviews with trafficking survivors would provide baseline data on trafficking victims and their characteristics" (Gozdziak & Collett, 2005, p. 122).

4. Routine Activities Theory

Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979) developed a routine activities theory of crime with the basic elements of persons, objects, time, and place. The theory proposes that crime is the product of the convergence of three main categories of variables: (1) motivated

offenders, (2) suitable targets of criminal victimization, and (3) the absence of guardians capable of preventing the crime. The central proposition in routine activities theory is that criminal victimization rates increase when there is a "convergence in time and space of suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians can lead to large increases in crime rates without any increase or change in the structural conditions that motivate individuals to engage in crime" (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 589). In other words, the likelihood of criminal events increases when a potential victim or suitable target is in the presence of a person or persons motivated to commit an offense, and there is an absence of a formal or informal guardian who could dissuade the potential offender. Cohen and Felson (1979) further contended that increasing social problems were not to blame for spiking crime rates, but rather "substantial increases in the opportunity to carry out predatory violations [had] undermined society's mechanisms for social control" (p. 605). Opportunity involves the elements of a suitable victim and the absence of a capable guardian. Shifting focus from the offender to the opportunity structures in the offender's environment provides for a focus on the victim as a variable of criminal events. The role of opportunity is a reminder that "offenders are but one element in a crime, and perhaps not even the most important" (Felson, 1998, p. 73).

Researchers have used routine activities theory to seek an understanding of when, why, how, to whom, and under what circumstances certain crimes occur. In addition to aiding the exploration of criminal events, routine activities theory allows researchers to focus both on subgroups within a community (Akers & Sellers, 2009; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995), and the specific domains in which offenses are committed (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999; Lynch, 1987; Wooldredge, Cullen, & Letessa, 1992). Routine activities theory established its presence in the research literature in the 1980s. Since then, it has offered a simple, seemingly straightforward rationalization for many crimes as well as elucidated several disjointed and perplexing patterns of victimization. Despite theoretical advancements, scrupulous tests of routine activities theory are scarce.

In regard to the testing of routine activities theory, one area deserving of more attention is the measurement of the theory's ability to predict victimization for specific offenses, and for victimization among specific subgroups within larger communities. Further research in these areas will provide for a more accurate categorization of statuses as well as a more thorough understanding of how victims' lifestyles and activities within particular contexts relate to their victimization risk for specific crimes. Although there are numerous commonalities shared by specific offense types regardless of their commission locale (Miethe & Meier, 1994), a collection of findings on particular crimes committed in multiple similar locations can provide keen insight as to how the combination of capable guardians, suitable targets, and motivated offenders facilitates or hinders victimization (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999).

The majority of victimization applications of routine activities theory focus on offenses and domains centered around youths, college students, or college campuses (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2003, 2002, 1999; Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2002; Henson & Stone, 1999). In addition to locale and offense types, the victimization realm of routine activities theory has lent itself well to status category victims. Most prominent in this area are gender-specific models for specific offenses or within particular locales. Predictors of victimization for most offenses vary by gender. Men have a greater risk of victimization than do women, and women usually fall victim to different types of offenses than do men. Overall, victimization for men and women differs greatly.

Offenders often view women as suitable targets, and such a view fits with the common male perception that women are vulnerable. While routine activities theory requires that a target be "suitable," in an offenders mind, a "suitable" target is one that appears vulnerable. Many male offenders find women's' vulnerability, which is based solely on sex, as qualifying for suitableness (Schwartz & Pitts, 1995). This vulnerability is what makes some women particularly at risk of sex trafficking. Although a measurement of deterrence is not included in routine activities theory, it is important to remember that many men who commit crimes against women are never caught and do not receive serious punishment (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999). This predicament holds true for women who are victims of sex trafficking. Due to the illegal nature of prostitution in many countries, sex trafficking victims who are forced into the occupation are sometimes overlooked as possible victims (Morehouse, 2009). Often society, and even the criminal justice system does not take women's victimization of certain crimes as seriously as that of others, which could play a role in the offender's assessment of target suitability. That is, some offenders may view women as more suitable targets because of society's sometimes-lackadaisical attitude toward their victimization (Schwartz & Pitts, 1995).

Individuals' activities can be defined by their statuses, which in turn, can explain their potential for presence in public settings. Statuses, therefore, can act as informing agents as to target suitability. Unemployed people are less likely to be victimized than those who are employed, but unemployed people are more likely to be victimized than people who stay at home (Cohen & Cantor, 1981). Similarly, routine activities research on college victimization has found that full-time college students are more often victimized than are individuals who are working full-time (Maxfield, 1987). As Mustaine & Tewksbury (1999) pointed out, it seems that homogamy (individuals who share similar characteristics with offenders) plays a large role in this finding. Individuals that have common characteristics with offenders are more likely to be in the presence of offenders, and therefore, are more likely to be victimized. The presence of homogamy only adds to a target's suitability.

College students have received much attention in victimization studies based on routine activities theory because they lend themselves well to such an analysis. Students have several characteristics that are similar to offenders such as, age, social class, place of residence, and employment status. These same similarities exist between many sex traffickers and their victims. Perhaps the most profound similarity between sex trafficking victims and offenders is their struggle to survive in poor economic conditions. "Poverty is the driving force behind much of men's as well as women's involvement in sex trafficking" (Farr, 2005, p. 137). Women, of course, are usually the victims, but both women and men who are unemployed and poor may act as recruiters for trafficking organizations. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) explains: "Trafficking is inextricably linked to poverty. Wherever privatization and economic hardship prevail, there will be those destitute and desperate enough to enter into the fraudulent employment schemes that are the most common intake systems in the world of trafficking" (Loconto, 2001, p. 3).

Since the late 1990s, most women working in developing, sex trafficking-prone countries found employment in the informal sector of the labor market (UN, 1999). Those in the formal sector have primarily worked in non-union manufacturing jobs, which provide conditions similar to those found in the informal market (Lockwood, 2001). The majority of formal employment in developing countries is unstable, unorganized, and involves bad working conditions. For example, in India, a developing country and a sex trafficking hub, some 70 percent of all manufacturing jobs are unorganized, a fact which provides little comfort for employee working conditions or employment stability (Loconto, 2001; Lockwood, 2001).

With such destitute working conditions, even women who have jobs are suitable targets of recruitment for seemingly better employment in larger cities of more developed foreign countries. This holds especially true for young women from poor families in rural areas; the façade of opportunities described by sex trafficking recruiters sound too good to pass up. Sometimes parents even encourage, arrange, and pay for their daughters' travel to these supposed opportunities at a better life, only to later learn that they have been duped into the underworld of sex trafficking (Kara, 2009; Farr, 2005). Using routine activities theory to examine sex trafficking victimization will both test the theory and help identify predictors for victimization. The routine activities of young women living in the poverty of developing countries are likely to place them in close proximity to potential sex trafficking offenders. Guardians, such as parents, are often fooled into believing the stories of a better life for their daughters; therefore, the parents are incapable of preventing their daughters' victimization. This study will be unique in analyzing sex trafficking in the context of a criminological theory, and also an important contribution to the limited, almost non-existent literature on sex trafficking victimization.

5. Methodology
The data in this study come from published materials in the form of books, journals, and transcribed interviews from 2000 to 2010. All of the sex trafficking accounts are, or stem from, primary sources, the majority being autobiographies or transcribed interviews. The biographical content of seven female trafficking victims is qualitatively analyzed in order to identify common characteristics in relation to routine activities and life-style patterns. Patton (2002) defined qualitative content analysis as "any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings (p. 453). Qualitative content analysis is a worthy alternative to more traditional quantitative methods when working in an interpretive paradigm. Such analysis seeks to identify important themes or categories within a body of content, in this study, texts, and "to provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 11).

5.1. Selection of Trafficking Victims
The accounts of trafficking victims were selected for inclusion based on their geographic dispersion to ensure focus on Eastern Europe/Eurasia region, which is considered an international sex trafficking hub. In addition to geographical concern, victim accounts used in this study were also selected based on the depth of information. Victim characteristics of interest are individual demographics, education, community characteristics, employment, and family socio-economic status. Community characteristics assessed by examining community economic status, social class, victims' housing arrangements. A measurement of social activity is not included due to the limited information contained in the available data concerning this area of interest. Most of the available trafficking victim accounts focus primarily on how the victim was trafficked, thus, details of daily social activity are left to speculation.

The unit of analysis in this study is defined as a theme or grouping. "An instance of a theme might be expressed in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire document" (Zhang & Wildmuth, 2009, p. 3). Given the broad basis for "themes," units of analysis vary depending on the layout of each account. Differing elements of the texts are assigned loose-codes, which represent the given themes of interest to victim characteristics. After checking the coding scheme for consistency, relationships and patterns are identified between categories, from which predictors of trafficking victimization can be drawn. "Qualitative content analysis does not produce counts and statistical significance; instead, it uncovers patterns, themes, and categories important to social reality," (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 5) in this case, the social reality of human trafficking victims.

Name Age Country	Lack of Capable Guardian	Away from Home when contacted by trafficker.	Seeking work abroad	Employed	Family Socio-Economic Status
Olga, 14 Moldova	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low
Anna, 17 Moldova	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low
Dana, 16 Moldova	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Low
Pira, 17 Albania	Yes	Yes	No	No	Low
Ines, 13 Albania	Yes	Yes	No	No	Low
Katia, 15 Moldova	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Low
Sveta, 13 Russia	Yes	Yes	No	No	Low

Table 1: Groupings for Trafficking Victims

6. Findings

Through a qualitative content analysis, several common groupings were found among human trafficking victims that fell in line with routine activities theory. Groupings were limited to information available in the victim accounts. The first and foremost key element of human trafficking victimization that is explained through rational choice theory is the absence of a capable guardian. All the victims examined in this study were without guardians that would be defined as capable at the time of their victimization. Like many of the victims, Olga, from Moldova grew up with an abusive and alcoholic father. She left home at the age of fourteen; thus, she was without guardianship at all when she became a victim of human trafficking. Olga's psychologist explained that a lack of capable guardianship is a virtual norm for much of the former Soviet Union: "The drinking is severe and the physical and sexual violence has become so common, especially within families, that it is considered almost normal in our society (Waugh, 2006, p. 16). The lack of capable guardians fits easily with sex trafficking victimization due to the deceptive nature of the crime. All but one of the victims in this study were coerced into the sex trafficking underworld with promises of legitimate employment, or through false marriages in which their new husbands sold them to brothel owners. One victim was forcefully abducted.

Pira, an Albanian trafficking victim explained her false marriage which amounts to the lack of the presence of a capable guardian: "This man named Alban proposed marriage when I was seventeen. . . . After the wedding when I moved to my husband's home, he sold me for one hundred thousand leke to another man. . . . I was forced for sex in a club for one year before a police raid. When I returned home, I learned Alban married two other women and sold them also. The same priest conducted the ceremonies (Kara, 2009, p. 132).

The most horrific victim account representing the lack of a capable guardian comes from Ines, who was abducted at the age of thirteen. She describes what happened one day as she walked to her aunt's house to iron clothes: ". . . I was kidnapped by three men. They closed my eyes, gagged my mouth, and threw me in their car. They said if I try to escape they will kill me (Kara, 2009, p. 135). Soon after being abducted, Ines was transported across international borders and forced to work in the sex industry.

Routine activities research suggests that being out in public creates an increased exposure to potential offenders and therefore, increases the likelihood of victimization (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2003). This suggestion is supported through the victim accounts in this study as all of the victims were away from their homes when they came into contact with their perpetrators. It must be noted however, that victims who unknowingly responded to false job adds in the newspaper often spoke with their perpetrators on the telephone from their homes prior to actually coming into contact with them.

The grouping, "seeking work abroad" fits into the "out in public" assumption of routine activities theory given that individuals who are willing to work abroad will undoubtedly be out in public and therefore be at a higher risk of coming in contact with human traffickers. For example, a Moldovan girl referred to as Anna, contacted a travel agent add in a local Moldovan newspaper. The travel agent explained that if Anna could come up with $500 to pay half of the airfare to Italy, the travel agency would cover the other half. The travel agent explained that upon arrival in Italy, they would find work for Anna and she could slowly repay the $500 debt. The travel agency was simply a front for a sex trafficking ring (Waugh, 2006).

Employment status alone is not a significant predictor for victimization based on the victim accounts in this study. While being employed in the Eurasian region is little indicator of actually earning a life sustaining salary. Anna for example, was working for low wages in a sausage factory at the time she contacted the travel agency about work in Italy. A better measure for sex trafficking victimization would require a more precise level of income; such information was not available in the data used in this study.

All of the victims in this study were trafficked from home countries in Eastern Europe with four from Moldova, two from Albania, and one from Russia. The victims' communities shared common characteristics that make contributed to contact with possible human traffickers. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1990 left most of Eastern Europe in economic shambles (Kushen & Neier, 1991).

7. Conclusion

Based on this analysis, it appears that routine activities theory has some explanatory potential in regards to the risk of sex trafficking victimization. Incidents of sex trafficking victimization among women in the Eurasia region of the world appear to be contingent on lifestyle factors such as parents or guardians, family socio-economic status, employment status, searching for employment abroad, or willingness to actually leave their home country. These factors as found in this study provide general support for a routine activities explanation of sex trafficking victimization.

Also important to note are factors that do not provide support for victimization (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2003). As previous research on stalking victimization has demonstrated, demographic factors are not significant predictors of susceptibility to being stalked (Coleman, 1997). The same appears to be true for sex trafficking victims. As Mustaine & Tewksbury (2003) note, this is of importance because routine activities theorists contend "that the effects of a person's status on his or her risk of victimization will be negated when personal lifestyle characteristics and activities are considered" (p. 57). This qualitative analysis suggests that the risk of sex trafficking victimization is determined not by whom a person is, but rather by where they are, whom they come in contact with, and what they do. All of the victims in this study were in their native countries, away from their homes, in contact with perpetrators, and away from capable guardians.

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