

May 2023

Sex Trading, Exiting, and Interactions with Police: A Mixed Methods Study of Women Engaged in Street Level Sex Trading

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SEX TRADING, EXITING, AND INTERACTIONS WITH POLICE: A MIXED METHODS STUDY
OF WOMEN ENGAGED IN STREET LEVEL SEX TRADING

by

Daria J. Mueller

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Social Welfare

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2023

ABSTRACT

SEX TRADING, EXITING, AND INTERACTIONS WITH POLICE: A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF WOMEN ENGAGED IN STREET LEVEL SEX TRADING

by

Daria J. Mueller

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2023
Under the Supervision of Professor James Topitzes

Street level sex trading is associated with multiple risks to health, safety, and well-being, thus many individuals who are currently engaged would like to exit and/or have attempted to do so. Multiple facilitators and barriers at all levels of a person's ecology have been found to affect the exiting process, such as substance use, formal and informal social supports, and the collateral consequences of criminalization of sex trading. Yet, a more comprehensive examination of the complex interplay of these factors has been lacking. In addition, little attention has focused on women's encounters with police and the ensuing effects on their relationships with police and on the exiting process. This dissertation, grounded in an intersectional feminist and transformative framework, guided by the social ecological model, explores what factors facilitate and impede the exiting process. Further, this study describes the nature of police encounters among women who have traded sex on the street and how those encounters affect their perceptions of the police and the influence of those encounters on the process of exiting from street-based sex trading. This convergent parallel, fully integrated, mixed methods study used novel joint displays and centered the voices of women who have engaged in street level sex trading. Surveys (N=72) and in-depth interviews (N=16) were conducted with women currently or formerly engaged in street level sex trading. Survey participants ranged in age from 18 to 56, with 59.7% identifying as Black; 45.8% were unhoused or precariously

housed, 82% were food insecure, and 83.1% had ever been incarcerated for any offense. Descriptive and bivariate analyses combined with grounded theory methods and joint display analysis yielded differences between exiting outcome groups, demonstrating a complex web of interconnected factors across social-ecological levels that act as barriers to or facilitators of exiting from sex trading. Barriers to exiting included economic need, especially related to employment and housing status and child caregiving responsibilities, as well as stigma, trauma exposure, mental health, unhealthy substance use, access to quality social services, and consequences associated with criminal legal system involvement. Increased levels of social support, positive religious coping, and cognitive processes (e.g., positive thoughts and beliefs, readiness and motivation to change) appeared to facilitate exiting. Findings also distinguished positive, negative, and ambiguous police interactions. Negative perceptions of police were particularly common among women who had inappropriate and harmful police interactions in response to their own victimization, and/or who chose to avoid reporting victimization to police due to fear of being dismissed or disrespected. Findings revealed that police act as a barrier to exiting from sex trading (e.g., loss of help seeking) but can be a source of help or a catalyst for change. Participants offered recommendations for improved practices and policies to facilitate exiting, including a wide spectrum of services and resources offered with compassion and sensitivity. Recommendations also included ways to improve relationships with police and prevent police harm against women who trade sex on the street, such as increased professionalism and accountability and a less punitive approach to addressing street level sex trading. This research provides important insights into the need for comprehensive, integrated care for women who wish to exit from sex trading and ways to improve police relations, prevent police harm, and increase help-seeking behavior among women who trade sex on the street.

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To
my parents,
who instilled in me a passion for social justice
and a belief in treating others with dignity and respect
from an early age

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for all of their efforts to help me become a better researcher and a better writer, for all of their encouragement and feedback, time and energy. I especially want to thank Dimitri (James) Topitzes, who has served as my advisor, instructor, supervisor, and dissertation committee chair over these past 10 years. In every role, you have been fair and consistent as a mentor and teacher, helping me to grow in every skill that could be taught in a doctoral program, always with patience, compassion, positive and constructive feedback, encouragement, and a belief in my abilities. I met Corey Shdaimah a couple years before I began my doctoral program, and she has been a colleague and a mentor ever since. Your door has always been open to me, extending professional and personal connections, as well as opportunities to which I would not have otherwise been exposed. I am so grateful that you agreed to serve on my committee, as your subject matter knowledge, methodological expertise, and writing critiques have helped me immensely. I thank Tina Freiburger, who has provided insight and guidance, especially in regard to the field criminology, and has been responsive and helpful despite a busy schedule. I thank Colleen Janczewski, who graciously accepted to step in this year to serve on my committee as a quantitative methods expert, offering timely advice and encouragement. I also want to thank Michael Brondino, now retired, for initially serving on my committee and offering critical guidance with quantitative methods and analysis.

I would like to extend gratitude to faculty members who assisted me with costs associated with this dissertation, as I could not have completed this research without their help: Laura Otto-Salaj, Michael Brondino, and Dimitri Topitzes. This investment in my research felt like an investment in me as a student and a recognition of the importance of my study. I want to also thank Steven McMurtry (now retired), who served as the doctoral program coordinator, for welcoming me into the program and being a consistent and enthusiastic supporter from start to

finish. I am grateful for every instructor and other faculty members and staff within this program with whom I have worked or have come to know along the way.

I thank my doctoral program student colleagues—all those who have been part of this doctoral program over the past 10 years. I want to especially thank Lixia Zhang and Katelyn Franke. I would not have made it through four semesters of statistics courses without you! Your support in so many instrumental and emotional aspects of the program was key. Lixia, you have been my confidante and writing partner, and I am deeply grateful to have you in my life. Laura Voith and Rebekah Davis, I also need to extend thanks for your collegial support along the way. Another doctoral student, Valerie Esser, deserves a special thank you for her assistance with my dissertation: data entry, cleaning, and qualitative coding. I am grateful that you have a passion for this topic and eagerly jumped on board to learn and assist with my project. Though in a different doctoral program, I thank Nili Gesser, as I am so glad we could help each other work through ideas and dilemmas from afar as we completed our dissertations.

I am grateful for UWM's pilot Dissertation Completion Support Program in this last year of dissertation writing as well as the cross-university Social Work Doctoral Student Mom Mentoring Group in which I participated in 2021. These programs were helpful for advice, accountability, offering community in an otherwise isolating time, and so much more.

I especially want to thank all the women with lived experience with sex trading and/or sex trafficking that I have met, gotten to know, worked and advocated with, and befriended over my many years working on policy change in Chicago. In particular, Brenda Myers-Powell, Lucretia Clay, and (dearly departed) Leanna Majors, you shared so much with me, and I learned so much from you. You are the inspiration behind this research and why I continue to try to affect change.

Thank you to all the community-based social service providers and advocates with whom I connected for pilot testing of data collection instruments, feedback on materials, recruitment of participants, time and space to collect data, and insights into their work. You

made this research possible and I look forward to sharing and discussing the results and implications with you.

Next, perhaps most importantly, I thank the women who participated in this study. I am humbled, inspired, and deeply grateful that they shared their stories, their feelings, some of their best and worst moments, their recommendations to improve policies and practices, and their hopes for the future. Their voices matter. Their lives matter.

Finally, I want to thank my son, Pablo, and my dad, Fr. Tom. Pablo came into this world in 2015 and has been my ultimate source of joy and love. I cannot wait for him to have his mom back from the trenches of the dissertation process, where weekends and evenings will no longer be spent reviewing literature, analyzing data, and writing endlessly, but rather enjoying quality time, fun, and snuggles (for as long as he will accept them). My father has been my number one support in all things. There are not enough words to express my appreciation. The past 10 years, which began with the abrupt loss of my lovely mother just a few days before the start of my doctoral program, have been filled with many trials and tribulations, highs but also some of my worst lows, and he has gotten me through it all. There is no way I could have survived through it all without him, and this dissertation was only possible through his steadfast support and love.

To all my friends, colleagues, family members, and special people in my life, each of you has helped me in some way to achieve this goal. Thank you.

Introduction:

Sex Trading, Exiting, and Interactions with Police: A Mixed Methods Study of Women Engaged in Street Level Sex Trading

This dissertation focuses on the experiences of women who have traded sex on the street and what factors may influence the exiting process. This study also focuses on what interactions women who have traded sex on the street have had with police, and the influence of those interactions on their perception of the police and on exiting.

Street level sex trading, in which individuals exchange sex for something of value or make arrangements for a commercial sex transaction in outdoor public spaces, is a widespread phenomenon that is often perceived as a problem for communities in which it exists, as well as for those who wish to exit. A great deal of literature has investigated the risk factors for entry and experiences of women while involved (Choi, 2015; Clarke et al., 2012; Wilson & Widom, 2010). Research has also shown that, due to a host of negative consequences associated with involvement in street level sex trading, many of those involved would like to exit from street level sex trading or have attempted to do so (Baker et al., 2010; Cimino, 2012; Oselin, 2014). Multiple interconnected factors act as barriers to a successful exit from street sex trading (Baker et al., 2010). These include barriers at all levels of a person's ecology, such as unhealthy substance use, a lack of formal and informal social supports, and a criminal record for prostitution arrests that hinders individuals from obtaining legal employment (Hickle, 2017; Wiechelt & Shdaimah, 2011). While these factors are fairly well-known, there is little knowledge of what policies and practices promote a successful exit from sex trading.

Traditional criminal legal policies and practices are intended to deter street sex trading or cause those involved to desist, but are generally unsuccessful, as participants recidivate at high rates (Koeqler et al., 2019; Olson et al., 2011). The policing of prostitution does not address the underlying reasons that women engage in street prostitution, such as economic need (Cimino, 2013; Hickle, 2014). Criminal sanctions for prostitution are found to have both positive and

negative effects on the exiting process (Hickle, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014; Oselin, 2014). However, little attention has focused on how women engaged in street sex trading are treated by the police or how they are affected by their encounters, including effects on their perceptions of the police. The influence of these experiences on women's health and well-being as well as their motivation and ability to exit are largely unknown. This dissertation study aims to begin to fill these gaps in knowledge.

While there is literature about the exiting process among women in street level sex trading, as well as about the kinds of experiences they have with police, much of this research has been qualitative and has not delved into the effects or the relationship between the two. This particular study uses a very unique, fully integrated, convergent parallel mixed methods approach to present a richer, more comprehensive picture. Insights from this research will yield implications for policies and practices relevant to exiting from street level sex trading and provide evidence and insights to fields such as social work and criminal justice about how interactions between individuals who trade sex and law enforcement affect the exiting process.

My mixed methods study used surveys and in-depth interviews with individuals currently or formerly engaged in street sex trading to better understand their experiences with law enforcement and how these experiences acted on their motivation (if any) and/or ability to exit. This dissertation, grounded in an intersectional feminist and transformative framework, guided by the social ecological model, reviews relevant literature to date; describes the quantitative, quantitative, and mixed methods; explains the integrated results; and discusses the implications of these findings.

Literature Review

Terms and Definitions

Sex trading, commonly referred to as prostitution, is the exchange of sex for money or other goods or services of monetary value; it is one form of commercial sex or sex work. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, even though the term sex work is used to broadly depict a range of legal and illegal activities, including but not limited to prostitution, phone sex, exotic dancing, and pornography. Any of these terms may be value-loaded and reflective of the author's particular philosophical perspective or experience, thus I chose the term sex trading as a way to simply describe an activity that may or may not be thought of as work by those who engage in it. Street level sex trading denotes the place or venue in which individuals sell sex or make arrangements to sell sex. Street level sex trading is different from other venues in which sex is exchanged (e.g., online and/or indoor venues such as hotels, massage parlors, brothels, escort services, etc.) in that the price of sex acts tends to be lower and individuals engaged in selling sex are more likely to be homeless, actively misusing substances, and trading sex to meet basic survival needs such as shelter and food (Kurtz et al., 2005; Matthews, et al., 2014; Weitzer, 2012). Women trading sex on the streets are also more likely to experience acts of violence (Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Weitzer, 2005). In addition, street level sex trading is more visible and targeted by law enforcement than other sex trading venues (Scott & Dedel, 2006). Street sex trading can differ based on social context, such as geographic region (e.g., city, neighborhood, etc.), the characteristics of the setting in which it occurs (e.g., industrial area, motel strip, etc.), and personal characteristics, such as race or drug of choice (Porter & Bonilla, 2000).

Sex trafficking and prostitution or sex trading are sometimes conflated. Sex trafficking is differentiated from sex trading, in that it specifically entails force, fraud, or coercion by a third party, or any commercial sex acts of a minor, according to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA, 2000). Experiences of trafficking may sometimes also be misidentified due to

lack of police or provider training, misreporting, traffickers' techniques of control, or victims who may not perceive themselves as someone who is trafficked, e.g., due to trauma bonds with their trafficker (Nichols & Heil, 2015). This literature review addresses both sex trading and sex trafficking of adult cisgender women at street level, as both types of experiences are reflective of participants in this study. Many of the women in this study also had experiences with indoor/online sex trading, however the literature review will not focus on this type of sex trading.

It is important to note that individuals who trade sex (or are trafficked) are also male, transgender, and non-binary. While women may represent the majority of adults who sell sex on the street, as well as those arrested for prostitution in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), 2020), individuals who identify as transgender may be overrepresented among those who trade sex (Aggarwal et al., 2021; Nadal et al., 2014; Sausa et al., 2007). The experiences of men and transgender individuals involved in the sex trade are likely different in some respects from cisgender women, as different forms of intersecting stigma related to sexual orientation and gender identity may affect them (Baral et al., 2017; Lyons et al., 2017; Oldenburg et al., 2018). Examination of their interactions with police and the policies and practices that might affect their ability to exit from street level prostitution is warranted, but beyond the scope of this study.

Prevalence, Magnitude, and Scope of Sex Trading

The prevalence, magnitude, and scope of prostitution are unknown. It is virtually impossible to accurately count the number of individuals in the sex trade due to the illicit, hidden and stigmatized nature of sex trade activity and the transient nature of the population involved in street level sex trading. Some experts and advocates cite that one to two million people are engaged in prostitution in the U.S. (Fondation Scelles, 2012), but these numbers are contested and unreliable without probability sampling (Sawicki et al., 2019). Prostitution arrest statistics belie true numbers as many individuals engaged in street level prostitution are never or rarely arrested, while others may be re-arrested multiple times; and all prostitution-related arrests

(e.g., buyers, sellers, etc.) are included in one number in federal data. Also, reporting is inconsistent among jurisdictions and municipal arrests are not included in federal level reports, such as the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), e.g., in 2020, BJS reported 26,710 prostitution and other commercialized vice arrests in the U.S. (USDOJ, 2020).

Various studies have attempted to estimate the number of individuals who have been sex trafficked, but methodologies have been flawed (see Estes & Weiner, 2001) or samples have represented only a subset of cases (e.g., victims identified by law enforcement; see Mitchell, et al., 2010). Locally, a collaborative agency report estimated 340 individuals ages 25 and under as confirmed or believed to be victims of sex trafficking in Milwaukee within a three-year period (2013-2016) based on a study of police incident reports and municipal court data (Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission, 2018). These studies and reports provide some helpful insight into the scope and context of sex trafficking, but do not reveal the full picture.

A few recent prevalence studies of adolescents that have ever traded sex for money, drugs, or other goods offer estimates that range from 1.4% of Minnesota (Martin et al., 2021) and 2.47% of Wisconsin (Gerassi, 2020) high school students, respectively, to 3.5% of youth based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Edwards et al., 2006). While we do not know how many continue into adulthood or how many more exchange sex for the first time as adults, this information about youth engaged in sex trade activity is useful given the large number of adults who begin trading sex as youth.

Pathways into Street Sex Trading and Sex Trafficking

Many studies have examined risk factors that correlate with entry into the sex trade among youth and adults. Childhood maltreatment, especially sexual abuse, and running away were the most consistent risk factors for entry among U.S. minor sex trafficking victims (Choi, 2015). Many adults engaged in street-based sex trading have experienced childhood physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and/or neglect (McClanahan et al., 1999; Nadon, et al., 1998; Roe-Sepowitz, 2012; Silbert & Pines, 1982; Stoltz et al, 2007; Widom, 1995; Williamson &

Folaron, 2003; Wilson & Widom, 2010) and other household dysfunction in their families of origin, such as unhealthy substance use, domestic violence, and mental illness of caregivers (Clarke et al., 2012; Dalla et al., 2003; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Nadon et al., 1998).

Experiences of running away and homelessness are common among youth and adults involved in sex trading (Ferguson et al., 2011; Kurtz et al., 2005; McClanahan et al., 1999), and homelessness during adolescence is predictive of earlier age of entry into sex trading (Cronley et al., 2016). Economic hardship is an important reason cited for entry into street sex trading, as trading sex is a clear means to obtaining cash or other resources without delay, especially when other conventional options are not available (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Sanders, 2007; Silbert & Pines, 1982; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Unhealthy substance use is associated with street level sex trading, but studies vary in their findings as to whether substance use precedes entry into the sex trade (McClanahan et al., 1999; Nadon et al., 1998; Potterat et al., 1998; Wiechelt & Shdaimah, 2011). Therefore, pathways into street level sex trading vary, but often involve childhood maltreatment or other dysfunction in the family of origin along with economic factors that lead to trading sex to meet survival needs or to buy drugs due to an addiction.

Experiences and Outcomes Associated with Street Sex Trading

The experiences of women in street level commercial sex vary, but there are some commonly reported findings. The likelihood of victimization by means of sexual assault, battery, and other physical trauma is extraordinarily high among women engaged in street prostitution compared to the general population of women (Dalla et al., 2003; United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2013; Williamson & Folaron, 2001; Wilson & Widom, 2013), though one study indicated that these rates are similar to low income, substance using women in urban settings (Lutnick et al., 2015). Recent and lifetime intimate partner violence (IPV) is associated with sex trading, especially when coupled with a history of childhood abuse (Jiwatram-Negrón & El-Bassel, 2019). The murder rate of women who sell sex is nearly 18 times that of women with otherwise similar demographics who are not engaged in sex trading (Potterat, 2004). In

addition, many women and young people are controlled by traffickers through the use of force, fraud and coercion (Norton-Hawk, 2004; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). In some cases, women who trade sex on the street are exploited, harmed, and profited from by traffickers and customers alike (Dalla et al., 2003; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Raphael et al., 2010; Williamson & Folaron, 2001).

Women engaged in street level sex trade typically face a myriad of physical and mental health issues due to past and current traumatic experiences and multiple risk behaviors. Frequent sexual activity, often unprotected, results in high rates of sexually transmitted infections, HIV, pregnancies, and abortions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; Cohan et al., 2005; Farley & Kelly, 2000; UNAIDS, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2011). Women who trade sex also suffer from high rates of acute and chronic health problems, such as injuries, broken bones, burns, chronic headaches, insomnia and disrupted sleep patterns, gynecological infections, and self-injury (Baker et al., 2004; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Mellor & Lovell, 2011; Muftic & Finn, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2011). The unhealthy use of drugs and alcohol is typical among individuals engaged in street sex trade (Dalla, 2000; McClanahan et al., 1999; Nadon et al., 1998; Potterat et al., 1998; Sallman, 2010). Burnette and colleagues (2008) found that 50% of women in substance use treatment programs had ever traded sex for drugs or money. The cumulative effect of these issues increases the likelihood that women in the street level sex trade will present with depression, anxiety, mood and dissociative disorders, suicidal ideation and attempts, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Farley & Barkan, 1998; Muftic & Finn, 2013; Valera et al., 2001) and complex PTSD, a disorder associated with prolonged and repeated exposure to trauma and/or contexts where there is no viable escape (Herman, 1992).

Sex Trading and the Criminal Legal System

For many women engaged in street level sex trading in the U.S., their experiences include contact with the police and other criminal legal system involvement. Though laws vary

by jurisdiction, selling sex is illegal throughout the United States, excepting a few rural counties in Nevada where indoor regulated sex work is allowed. Street level sex trading is the most visible to the community and targeted by law enforcement. All parties involved may face penalties but policing of prostitution disproportionately targets women who trade sex rather than those who pay for sex (Pfeffer et al., 2018). Policing of prostitution also disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and women of color (BIWOC) and transgender women especially via enforcement of loitering laws that have been dubbed as “walking while trans” (Diaz, 2021). Those caught may be fined and/or arrested, prosecuted and sentenced. They may be incarcerated in a county jail or a state prison; some states may upgrade misdemeanor prostitution charges to a felony.

Incarcerating women for prostitution offenses as a means of deterrence may be viewed as ineffective and counterproductive as it does not address the underlying problems that lead women to sell sex (e.g., drug addiction, trauma, lack of sufficient income) and wastes a significant amount of taxpayer dollars (Norton-Hawk, 2001). The accumulation of municipal fines (which may lead to arrest warrants) and a criminal record limit a person’s chance of achieving self-sufficiency (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Cimino, 2013; Hickle, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014). High rates of recidivism are also common, indicating both substantial barriers to exiting sex trading and lack of deterrence effect of the criminal justice response (Blakey et al., 2017; Koegler et al., 2019; Updegrove & Muftic, 2019). Women may also take greater risks to their safety to avoid arrest (e.g., working in isolation, taking less time to evaluate a customer or their surroundings; Deering et al., 2014) and further immerse themselves in “deviant” subcultures and activities (Norton-Hawk, 2001).

Sex Trading, Sex Trafficking, and Police Interactions

The effects of criminalization of sex trading go beyond criminal sanctions and the collateral consequences of those sanctions. It is also important to consider the way women who are sex trafficked or engaged in street prostitution are treated by the police, and their overall

perceptions of the police as a result of these interactions. Along with being arrested, women who have traded sex commonly report the following negative interactions with police: verbal, physical, and sexual violence (SV) or harassment by the police; false arrest; use as an informant; police paying for sex; theft or destruction of property; condoms used as evidence of prostitution activity; and ridicule, disrespect, or dismissal by police upon women reporting their own victimization by another party (Dank et al., 2017; Fernandez, 2016; Footer et al., 2019; Oselin & Cobbina, 2017; Saunders & Kirby, 2010; Sherman et al., 2015; Sloss & Harper, 2010; Thukral & Ditmore, 2003; Williamson et al., 2007). In one U.S. city, found a relatively high prevalence and incidence of police violence against women who trade sex (Park et al., 2021). Many women report fears and distrust of the police due to negative interactions and may perceive the police as exploitative and lacking concern for their safety (Fernandez, 2016; Saunders & Kirby, 2010; Sherman et al., 2015; Sloss & Harper, 2010).

Police violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, or neglectful violence (based on domains of violence delineated by the World Health Organization (WHO; Devylder et al., 2017a), is associated with poor mental health outcomes (DeVylder et al., 2020) and disproportionately affects people of color (DeVylder et al., 2017b). Among those exposed to police violence in the general population, women, people of color, and persons who are younger, US born, have a lower educational level, and prior criminal involvement have a more negative perception of police in the domains of trust, legitimacy, effectiveness, and satisfaction (Jackson et al., 2021). Police violence also appears to contribute to increased risk to safety for women engaged in sex trading (e.g., increased risk of client perpetrated violence; Deering et al., 2014; Footer et al., 2019).

Neglectful violence, possibly the most common form of police violence, occurs by way of inadequate, careless/negligent, or abusive police responses to reports of victimization (including failure to respond; Devylder et al., 2017a; 2018), and frequently occurs among women who are victims of IPV and SV (Fedina, 2018; Jordan, 2004; Tasca et al., 2013), especially if engaged in

criminal activity, such as sex trading or illegal substance use (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2016). BIWOC and women with low income and lower education levels also experience more neglectful police violence compared to White women or women with higher socioeconomic status (Fedina, 2018). These negative experiences with police upon reporting victimization may impact future reporting of victimization, which is already low for incidents of SV and IPV (Morgan & Truman, 2020), especially when victims may feel ashamed and blameworthy due to their engagement in substance use and illegal activity (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2016).

Police also often fail to properly identify and respond to victims of sex trafficking, missing opportunities for connection to specialized services (Farrell et al., 2019). Fears and poor perceptions of police, along with the effects of complex trauma, may prevent some women from disclosing that they are being sex trafficked (Farrell et al., 2019). In some cases, police arrest and charge victims of sex trafficking in order to coerce disclosure and cooperation in criminal investigations of their traffickers and/or as a means to initiate services; these tactics cause further harm to victims of sex trafficking (Farrell et al., 2019).

Some women who trade sex also have positive experiences with police, such as receiving help or information, or even feeling that their arrest helped them escape their current circumstances or exit prostitution (Dank et al., 2017; Fernandez, 2016; Saunders & Kirby, 2010; Thukral & Ditmore, 2003; Williamson, et al., 2007). While negative experiences may be more common and frequent, positive interactions such as these reveal that women who trade sex may have divergent opinions about and complex relationships with the police (Fernandez, 2016) that may include a variety of police experiences and behaviors.

These police experiences influence whether police are perceived as fair, trustworthy, legitimate, and responsive to crises and victimization (Fedina et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2021), which may affect help-seeking behavior, and by extension, the motivation and ability of women to exit from sex trading. There is a need to further explore how interactions with the police may impact health, well-being, and exiting among women engaged in street level sex trading.

Exiting

This background knowledge is important in order to better understand some of the dynamics of street level sex trading and how those dynamics might affect exiting. Some literature points to different routes out of sex trading depending on how the individual entered into the sex trade (e.g., age of entry), length of time involved, or other factors (Oselin, 2014). The pathways into, experiences during, and outcomes of engaging in street level sex trading matter when examining what might facilitate or impede a person's path out of prostitution.

Exiting as a Process

Due to the numerous negative impacts of street level sex trading, many of those involved would like to exit, or have made multiple unsuccessful attempts to exit, but find it difficult to do so without a wide range of resources and systems of support (Baker et al., 2010; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Cimino, 2012; Bindel et al., 2012; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Oselin, 2010, 2014). Most evidence demonstrates that many women cycle in and out of sex trading or take multiple steps over the course of days, months, and years to effectively disengage; thus, exiting from prostitution is largely viewed as a process (Baker et al., 2010). However, one event, either positive or negative, can lead to a reactive exit without any systematic planning (Matthews et al., 2014; Sanders, 2007). These events include those that may be framed as positive such as pregnancy, a new romantic relationship, or obtaining a conventional job. In other cases, the events may be negative such as a violent/traumatic incident, criminal justice involvement (i.e. arrest, incarceration), hospitalization, or simply "hitting rock bottom," which can be any situation in which a person feels they have reached their lowest or worst point in their lives and feel that change is needed (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2006; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Matthews et al., 2014; Oselin, 2010, 2014; Valandra, 2007).

Several studies suggest that an event itself is not sufficient; "turning points," which may or may not accompany an event, are seen as a cognitive shift when a person decides to make a change either suddenly or gradually (Dalla, 2006; Hedin & Mansson, 2003). Turning points may

come from factors that “push” or “pull” a person out of sex trading or could simply be framed as reasons for exiting. Reasons that may pull a person away from sex trading are finding spirituality, a desire to reconnect with family and assume a parental role with children, or to follow the example of a role model who has been able to cease drug and prostitution activity. Reasons that may push a person out of sex trading are becoming disenchanted with the subculture associated with street sex trading, becoming increasingly disgusted with sex with men (e.g. due to sexual orientation), feeling as if one is tired, burnt out, or too old to continue trading sex, or simply needing a change (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2006; Oselin, 2010, 2014, Valandra, 2007).

Thus, the literature points to exiting prostitution as a process that includes events, reasons, or turning points that lead to a change, as well as a myriad of factors that either assist or act as barriers to leaving the sex trade and the lifestyle with which it is associated. Exiting may also be cyclical for many, as many women may return to trading sex many times before ending sex trade activity (Baker et al., 2010; Dalla, 2006; Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2011). There is also evidence that the exiting process is more complex than binary distinctions between exited and non-exited persons, especially when viewed over time as circumstances change (Gesser & Shdaimah, 2021).

The factors that contribute to or impede the process of exiting are discussed here, loosely organized within a three-level social ecological framework that distinguishes the structural, relational (interpersonal), and individual (intrapersonal) levels at play.

Structural Factors

Structural level factors are those which relate to how a person is affected by social structures, or by the societal circumstances that are usually beyond a person’s control. Women engaged in street sex trading are affected by a variety of structural factors including economic needs (e.g., employment), housing, structural violence, access to social services and other resources, structural/societal stigma and discrimination based on intersecting identities, and the

criminal legal system (e.g., prostitution laws and effects of a criminal record; Baker et al., 2010). Depending on the type of factor and specific circumstances, these factors may positively or negatively affect one's ability to exit from trading sex on the streets.

Economic Needs. Street level sex trading usually serves as a means to meet economic needs; those needs often extend to a woman's children or other family members (Hickle, 2014; Valandra, 2007). A lack of stable, living wage jobs or other sustaining resources is one of the main barriers to staying out of the sex trade (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Cimino, 2013; DeRiviere, 2006; Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014; Sanders, 2007; Valandra, 2007). Poverty is considered the leading factor in returning to prostitution (Williamson & Folaron, 2003), especially when a person feels that there are no other viable options but to sell sex (Cimino, 2013). There may be lifelong effects on labor market participation and income-earning potential (e.g., lack of legal work history) that make sustaining an exit difficult (DeRiviere, 2006). Women who are able to obtain employment to sustain themselves financially and/or pursue educational goals to further their career prospects have a greater chance of exiting sex trading successfully (Dalla, 2006; Mansson & Hedin, 1999).

Housing. Access to adequate, safe, affordable housing, a factor related to poverty and economic insecurity, affects exiting from sex trading (Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Matthews et al., 2014; McNaughton & Sanders, 2007). Homelessness and unstable housing is common among women in street level prostitution (Kurtz et al., 2005). Without stable housing, leaving prostitution may be an unattainable goal, and finding appropriate housing is layered with challenges. The most affordable housing may be located in areas where drugs and prostitution are in high volume, and new housing can become a magnet for peers still involved with drugs and prostitution (Matthews et al., 2014; McNaughton & Sanders, 2007). Women exiting prostitution are best served when there is access to residential services, including substance use treatment, and safe, affordable housing (Dalla, 2006), but residential services and affordable housing are in high demand with low supply.

Social Services. Social services assist many women leaving prostitution to achieve greater health, well-being, and stability. Substance use treatment and other programs, especially when prostitution-specific and combined with safe housing, can help women meet their basic economic needs as well as structure, safety, and security needs (Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2014). However, many factors affect access to social services, including whether resources are distributed equitably and to where the greatest need exists or if resources are based on racist, sexist, classist, heterosexist, or ableist priorities. More specifically for women trading sex on the street, access may be affected by lack of capacity, services that do not exist (e.g., a place to shower, residential services), or programs that do not assist persons who are actively trading sex or using drugs (Kurtz et al., 2005).

Social service programs also represent a social institution that may pose problems due to policies and practices that are coercive, punitive, or not well-designed for this population. Social services (mandated and voluntary) can be sources of support but can also lead to re-entry into prostitution when sanctions are in place for failing to comply with rigid appointments, conservative protocols, etc. (McNaughton & Sanders, 2007). Similarly, social service and health care practitioners that exhibit incompetence and lack of training (e.g., judgmental and dismissive attitudes, naïve comments), or programs that do not offer services that match the needs of the service population, may inhibit help-seeking and hinder the exiting process (Bailey-Kloch et al., 2015; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Hedin & Mansson, 2003). Quality, culturally responsive services provided by professionals with shared identities who understand the experiences and cultures of specific groups of women engaged in prostitution may be lacking, such as having Black professionals providing culturally competent services to Black women who trade sex (Valandra, 2007). The social service industry, when unable to adequately meet the physical, emotional, and material needs of women exiting the sex trade, can act as a barrier to a successful exit.

Valandra (2007) identified court-ordered or otherwise non-voluntary substance use treatment and child welfare programs as particularly problematic and unhelpful due to unrealistic

expectations and case plans, lack of individualized approaches, and disrespectful program staff. While the removal of children through child protective services may lead to motivation to change or exit from prostitution to avoid termination of parental rights (Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2014), this can have dire consequences within a system that sets poor BIWOC and their children up to fail (Detlaff et al., 2020). Similarly, specialty court and arrest diversion programs that hold punitive consequences for those that fail to meet the requirements of the program, despite offering social services, may be both inadequate and detrimental to some women (e.g., prostitution court programs that show no statistical difference or effect in rates of re-arrest among participants vs. non-participants; Koegler et al., 2019; Updegrave & Muftic, 2019).

Structural Violence. Violence against women in prostitution is part of gender-based violence that exists at a systemic level. Misogynistic attitudes toward women and persistence of rape culture, which normalizes SV against women, coupled with intersectional factors (e.g., race), poverty, and stigma associated with street prostitution, create an environment whereby perpetrators may easily target women engaged in street level prostitution without consequence. This is exemplified by accounts from women about the nature of the violence they experience (Miller & Schwarz, 1995) and the disproportionate rate of violence against women in street level prostitution (e.g., high rate of homicide among women active in street prostitution; Potterat et al., 2004). About one-third of all U.S. cases of serial killers of solely female victims between 1970-2009 have targeted women engaged in prostitution as their victims; on average, serial killers of women in prostitution kill more victims over a longer period of time than other serial killers (Quinet, 2011). Rates of non-fatal violence vary across studies, but tend to be disproportionately high compared to the general population (Decker et al., 2015, 2021; Park et al., 2021; Shannon et al., 2009); one study of sex trafficked victims found that 88.9% had experienced physical violence and 83.3% experienced SV (Muftic & Finn, 2013). Studies point to this ubiquitous violence as a barrier to exiting prostitution (Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2014; Saphira &

Herbert, 2003; Valandra, 2007), e.g., by constraining women's perception of agency and sense of power or control over their lives (Nestadt et al., 2022).

Structural Stigma and Discrimination. Societal and structural stigma and discrimination undergird many of the factors discussed. The literature tends to discuss stigma and discrimination on an individual or relational level, pointing to how friends, family, and even social service providers treat women with a history of prostitution poorly by judging or ostracizing them, leading to internalized feelings of shame (Hickle, 2014; Mansson & Hedin, 1999, McNaughton & Sanders, 2007; Valandra, 2007). Yet, stigma at a macro level is exclusionary and even contributes to a culture of violence toward women who trade sex (Grittner & Walsh, 2020). Women who trade sex live with societal stigma that labels and dehumanizes them (e.g., they are disposable) and limits their legal rights (Sallman, 2010). For instance, there are rape myths that contend that women who trade sex are unrapeable or deserve to be raped; police (and others) convey this message explicitly or implicitly when women report (or confide about) their own victimization (Sallman, 2010). Subsequently, their efforts to pursue legal recourse against a perpetrator of violence are often impeded or dismissed, or they choose never to report to avoid a discriminatory response (Sallman, 2010).

Rules, policies, and practices within social service, criminal justice, employment, housing, and educational settings limit and deny opportunities to women who have traded sex based on negative attitudes and beliefs about women who trade sex (e.g., as deviant, immoral, vectors of disease; Grittner & Walsh, 2020). One study discussed the stigmatizing policies of a program serving women who have traded sex, whereby women were prohibited from wearing certain clothing, having contact with men, or connecting with their own family members or children based on assumptions about "ex-prostitutes," e.g., their ability to have healthy relationships (Blakey & Gunn, 2018). Disclosure of sex trading to health care providers has been met with discrimination and substandard care (Benoit et al., 2018). Stigma and discrimination toward women who trade sex intersects with racism and sexism, and ultimately

affects their decisions to seek help and use services (Benoit et al., 2018; Sallman, 2010; Valandra, 2007).

Criminal Legal System. Police disproportionately target women and African Americans for prostitution arrests (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2017; Pfefferet al., 2017; Snyder, 2012) and the criminalization of prostitution creates several barriers to a successful exit (Matthews et al, 2014). In the short term, municipal fines and fees, restitution, old warrants, and the like create financial pressure that promote continued prostitution (Hickle, 2014). In the long term, a criminal record can create lifetime barriers to achieving self-sufficiency, as it limits employment, housing, and educational opportunities (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Cimino, 2013; Hickle, 2014). Arrest itself may dispose a person to further punitive police response, as prior arrest for prostitution has been strongly associated with or predictive of recidivism in several studies examining prostitution diversion or court-based interventions (Koegler et al., 2019; Muftic & Updegrave, 2019; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2011). Rate of re-arrest for prostitution offenses may be worse than for other types of offenses among women (Olson et al., 2011).

The literature also suggests that arrest and incarceration can serve as a motivating force to make changes and cease sex trade activity due to the fear of consequences associated with criminal sanctions for prostitution. Additionally, being removed from one's environment through incarceration can offer a chance to stop using substances and think more clearly about making a change (Hickle, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014; Oselin, 2014). These benefits seem to be offset, however, due to the ways in which criminal legal system involvement keeps women entangled in sex trading through exclusion from resources and opportunities (McNaughton & Sanders, 2007). Appropriate services that offer encouragement and support to leave prostitution are more effective than systems that dole out punishment (Valandra, 2007).

Relational and Individual Factors

Numerous studies have identified a range of factors related to health and well-being that serve as impediments to exiting. These include mental health problems, effects of adverse

childhood experiences, injuries due to violence, physical health problems, low self-esteem, guilt or shame, and interpersonal violence (Baker et al., 2010; Cimino, 2013; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Specifically, trauma symptoms, substance use, and childhood physical abuse have been found to be associated with re-arrest for prostitution or non-completion of a prostitution-exiting program (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2012; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2011). Conversely, factors such as formal and prosocial informal social supports, religion and spirituality, and other measures of resilience and positive coping have been attributed to successful exiting (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2006; Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2014; Oselin, 2014; Prince, 2008; Shdaimah & Leon, 2015; Valandra, 2007).

The following factors, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, are organized according to the literature's exploration of these themes as positively or negatively affecting health, well-being, and exiting among women who trade sex on the streets. I begin with factors that tend to be discussed as negatively affecting exiting: sex trafficking; trauma exposure, PTSD, and mental health; substance use; and relational and internalized stigma. I then discuss factors that the literature tends to address as positively affecting exiting, including social support; relationships with children; faith/spirituality; and motivation and readiness to change and role of agency. Each of these factors is complex, thus there is some overlap between relational and individual levels, as well as both positive and negative effects, in some cases.

Sex Trafficking. Sex trafficking is often a source of ongoing interpersonal violence and trauma exposure with complex dynamics that further complicate exiting. Traffickers' coercion and control tactics, high rates of physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated by traffickers and customers, and mental health consequences (e.g., depression, PTSD) for trafficked women (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002; Gerassi, 2015; Hossain et al., 2010; Muftic & Finn, 2013; Raphael et al., 2010; Roe-Sepowitz, 2012) combine to make exiting dangerous and unlikely without support and protective measures. In some cases, leaving a trafficker without risk of extreme violence is only possible in the case of leaving for another trafficker (due to the

associated protection). Trafficking victims, once they have disengaged from all traffickers, may or may not continue to sell sex independently. Those that continue independently tend to experience the same factors that either challenge or facilitate exit as non-trafficked women who have traded sex on the street, such as economic struggle and stigma (challenges) or access to formal social services, employment opportunities, and social support (facilitators; Ferrari, 2021; Hickle, 2017). In addition, due to prolonged and repeated exposure to trauma, sexually exploited women face challenges in coping with a more complex form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Herman, 1992; Gerassi, 2015).

Trauma Exposure, Trauma Symptoms, and Mental Health. Evidence suggests that high rates of trauma exposure, PTSD, and other mental health issues are barriers to exiting from sex trading (Baker et al., 2010). Limited research suggests a direct association between level of trauma exposure or mental health symptoms and greater difficulty in exiting from sex trade activity. Roe-Sepowitz (2012) found that women in a prostitution diversion program who did not complete the program were more likely to report clinically significant trauma symptoms than women who had completed the program. However, ongoing trauma exposure and mental health issues that culminate in burn out, hospitalization, or similar life events are also reported in the literature as turning points or reasons to exit (Oselin, 2010; Mansson & Hedin, 1999). The implication is that while new or progressive trauma exposure or mental health problems may motivate or precipitate change, unaddressed trauma and other mental health symptoms are an impediment to developing healthy coping skills and new behaviors that would enable a long-term exit from sex trading. Traumatic experiences and symptoms may also be intertwined with unhealthy substance use, further complicating pathways to exiting (Wiechelt & Shdaimah, 2011).

Substance Use. For many women involved in street sex trading, unhealthy substance use or addiction is a critical barrier to exiting because it is an integral part of their lifestyle as either a reason to trade sex or a means of coping with sex trading (Wiechelt & Shdaimah,

2011). Substance use and prostitution are often mutually reinforcing and inextricably tied, thus an exit from sex trading may not be possible without sobriety, and vice versa (Cusick & Hickman, 2005). Barriers to effective treatment and recovery resources abound (e.g., negative social support, lack of available treatment options, treatment admission requirements and wait times, lack of child care or accommodation of children in treatment setting) and there are high rates of return to use (Rapp, 2006; Taylor, 2010). These barriers to treatment initiation are compounded for BIWOC due to additional cultural barriers (e.g., providers who do not understand or identify with the cultures of participants), increased perception of substance use disorder (SUD) stigma among family, friends, and community (e.g., fear of being outed and subsequently shunned), and lack of social support related to seeking treatment for SUD (Pinedo et al., 2020). Studies have found similar barriers to SUD treatment specifically among women who trade sex, including wait times to access detoxification programs, sobriety requirements to access treatment programs, and returning to substance use and sex trading when forced to leave residential programs due to relapse (Gerassi, 2018). Evidence also suggests that having traded sex for drugs is associated with being unable to access SUD treatment (Fisher et al., 2017). From many years of professional experience with women whose substance use was tied to sex trading, exiting involved motivation, readiness, and ongoing external support to cease both types of activity. Simultaneous access to SUD treatment and material support such as shelter or stable housing (among other resources and supports) is warranted in order to effectively disengage from substance use and sex trading. Further, additional barriers to exiting exist for women who have a criminal record for substance use related offenses (e.g., employment and housing barriers).

Relational and Internalized Stigma. Experiences of stigmatization are pervasive among women who trade sex and contribute to difficulties with exiting from sex trading. The sources of relational stigma may be significant others, family members, friends, social service and health professionals, criminal justice system actors, and men who pay for sex (Blakey &

Gunn, 2018; Gerassi et al., 2021; Sallman, 2010). Women who trade sex confront negative labeling on a regular basis and thus try to hide their sex trading activity to avoid labeling and judgment from others (Blakey & Gunn, 2018; Sallman, 2010; Tomura, 2009). In addition, women who trade sex may be impacted by intersectional forms of stigma related to race and ethnicity, class, substance use and mental health disorders, HIV status, sexual orientation and transgender identity, etc. (Blakey & Gunn, 2018; Sallman, 2010), which may compound the effects of stigma.

Societal and relational forms of stigma often lead to self-stigma, whereby individuals internalize negative views about themselves, causing feelings of low self-worth or self-esteem, shame, and hopelessness (Corrigan, 2004). Self-stigma along with anticipated and enacted stigma from others affect help-seeking behavior and contribute to a range of poor health and wellness outcomes, including poor mental health and negative coping behaviors (Birtel et al., 2017; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013). Relational and self-stigma are barriers to exiting from sex trading as they impact access to resources and social supports and can undermine substance use recovery and healing processes (Blakey & Gunn, 2018; Benoit et al., 2018).

To counteract the effects of stigma and enhance feelings of empowerment, women who trade sex also actively resist stigma in a variety of ways (Benoit et al., 2018; Blakey & Gunn, 2018; Gritman & Walsh, 2020; Gunn et al., 2018; Sallman, 2010; Shdaimah & Leon, 2015, 2016; Tomura, 2009), for example:

- control disclosure about their sex trading activities;
- question and reject the underlying beliefs and stereotypes that drive stigma and the conditions that facilitate it (e.g., criminalization of prostitution);
- re-frame their self-perception by focusing on the skills, qualities, and values they possess that they feel are positive and valuable (including those related to sex trading);
- engage in mutual (peer) support;
- extend empathy and compassion toward others who are stigmatized;

- seek out non-judgmental social services;
- engage in collective action.

These stigma resistance practices may facilitate exiting from sex trading for those who wish to do so.

Social Support. Social support, extensively shown to confer health benefits, consists of informal interpersonal relationships, such as with family members, friends/peers, and significant others, who offer various forms of support (e.g., emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal) and enable individuals to feel socially integrated and connected (Langford et al., 1997). Social support has been demonstrated as either a barrier or facilitator to exiting from trading sex, depending on whether the social support network is seen as positive or negative, i.e., whether or not the social support comes from those who are currently engaged in sex trading, substance use, or are abusive or exploitative (Baker et al., 2010; Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2017; Oselin, 2010). Examples of negative social support included traffickers, customers whose offers to help are tied to the exchange of sex, friends and partners whose drug use is contingent on their continued sex trading or who wish to continue using drugs together (Baker et al., 2010; Cimino, 2021; Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2014, 2017). Lack of social support, including relationships with family, children, and intimate partners that were strained or severed, was a source of difficulty for those attempting to exit (Hickle, 2014). Traffickers (and abusive partners) also use isolation from positive social support as a control tactic (Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Cutting off connections with a social support network engaged in old behaviors is challenging, and women attempting to exit sex trading may need assistance in rebuilding old relationships or establishing new relationships with a “positive” support network (Dalla et al., 2003; Hedin & Mansson, 2003). The development or restoration of healthy relationships can be a motivating force to exit (Hedin & Mansson, 2003).

Social support that facilitated exiting was tied to connectedness, belonging, and acceptance with parents, family members, children, friends, staff of community-based organizations, and peers/friends who had exited from sex trading and/or were in recovery from SUD (Hickle, 2017). These facets of social support are particularly important among networks with whom women share a cultural or racial/ethnic identity (Prince, 2008). These connections may provide practical and/or emotional support, help to decrease feelings of isolation, shame, stigma, and increase motivation to achieve their goals (Dalla et al., 2003; Hickle, 2017). In some cases, family and friends also directly assist in connecting women to formal supports to help them exit from sex trading (Oselin, 2010).

Recent scholarship on social support among women with a history of sex trading indicates a more complex dynamic as relationships change and evolve over time. Social support that was once positive may become a negative source of interaction and vice versa, and the need for certain relationships and forms of social support may vary depending on their stage of exiting from trading sex (Gesser & Shdaimah, 2021). In addition, women may encounter issues such as learning to trust or communicate with others and difficulties with intimate partners and physical touch that may affect the exiting process over time (Hickle, 2014).

The role of peers and mutual aid in the exiting process should be underscored. Women currently and formerly engaged in selling sex often engage in practical assistance (e.g., sharing food) and mentorship, offering trustworthy advice, empathy, encouragement, role modeling, a source of hope, and a safe, non-judgmental space to share and normalize their experiences; the benefits are reciprocal as either the giver or receiver of peer support (Gesser, 2022; Shdaimah & Leon, 2016). This support is balanced by some level of self-preservation in which the risks of helping (e.g., jeopardizing their own recovery or risking criminal justice consequences) are balanced against the benefit to the person they wish to help (Shdaimah & Leon, 2016). Programs that employ or link women trading sex to supportive peer relationships may have

tremendous benefit for women navigating the process of exiting from sex trading (Gesser, 2022).

Relationships with Children/Motherhood. For many women attempting to exit sex trading, their role as mothers and their relationship with their children is a complex factor in the exiting process. Pregnancy and motherhood may occur within a coercive or abusive context that constrains their ability to exit, such as when the father is a trafficker, customer, or partner reliant on the woman's sex trading to procure drugs (Dalla, 2004). Caregiving mothers may rely on sex trading to provide for their children (Nestadt et al., 2021; Sloss & Harper, 2004), but sex trading may also create risks to their children's environment (e.g., due to additional risks of violence, criminalization, or substance use) or be a source of guilt or shame for some in their identities as mothers (Dalla, 2004; Dodsworth, 2012; Ma et al., 2018; McClelland & Newell, 2008).

Relationships with children may be strained or damaged as a result of factors associated with sex trading, such as unhealthy substance use, especially in cases where mothers have lost custody or are unable to care for their children on a regular basis. Under these circumstances, mothers may feel shame and heartache, which may exacerbate or worsen their mental health and substance use, thereby impeding their success in exiting (Hickle, 2014; McClelland & Newell, 2008; Murnan & Holowacz, 2020; Williamson & Folaron, 2003).

Working toward restoring mother/child relationships can be a powerful motivating force toward exiting for mothers, in part due to their desire to improve their children's well-being and interrupt negative intergenerational experiences (Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Murnan & Holowacz, 2020). Reconnecting with children may be associated with substance use treatment initiation and a decrease in substance use and mental health symptoms (Murnan & Holowacz, 2020); this combination of motivation and improved health and wellness may facilitate a reduction in or exit from trading sex and any associated harms. Yet, mothers of minor children face barriers to accessing help due to elevated levels of stigma toward mothers who trade sex, barriers related to childcare needs, and valid fears of having their children taken away by child protective

services (Duff et al., 2015; Murnan & Holowacz, 2020; Sloss & Harper, 2004). While pressure to exit related to child protective services requirements may precipitate exiting, this result may only be temporary when enforced in this manner (Williamson & Folaron, 2003). The literature highlights the lack of and need for resources and non-stigmatizing programs for mothers that provide the economic means to care for minor children, facilitate parenting responsibilities, and enable appropriate mother-child relationships (Duff et al., 2015; Nestad et al., 2021).

Spirituality/Faith. Research suggests that spirituality, faith in a higher power, and support through religious communities serves as a motivating force toward exiting for some women (Dalla, 2006; Hall, 2022; Hickle, 2014; Oselin, 2010; Prince, 2008). Seeking strength, inspiration, comfort, and guidance through prayer, religious texts, and friends/family members involved in church or other faith communities was important for some women as a means to initiate and sustain an exit from sex trading (Dalla, 2006). Some women may exit due to a desire to follow the “right” path according to their faith’s teachings (Oselin, 2010). This faith and support can serve as a source of hope and meaning, a feeling that a higher power “has your back” and can help one overcome or get through difficult experiences, and as a culturally significant aspect of their upbringing or worldview (Hall, 2022; Hickle, 2014; Prince, 2008).

Motivation and Readiness to Exit and the Role of Agency. A final crucial factor in exiting from trading sex is personal motivation and readiness to change. While research suggests that this drive to change must also come with other supports (e.g., formal services, social support), cognitive transformation (through motivation and readiness to change) seems to be a requisite to make an initial exit or to sustain an exit as motivation grows over time (Baker et al., 2010; Dalla, 2006; Gesser & Shdaimah, 2021; Oselin, 2010). This cognitive shift has been described as a reason for exiting combined with a turning point event that leads to a desire to change (Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Oselin, 2010), yet may also occur due to disillusionment with various aspects of sex trading (Hickle, 2014; Sanders, 2007; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Motivation to exit may come from external factors such as fear of incarceration or

pregnancy/childbirth, but ultimately internal motivation to change must be built to sustain the exit (Gesser & Shdaimah, 2021).

Cimino (2021) examined the cognitive processes of change related to exiting sex trading in her “intentions to exit prostitution” model based on the integrative model of behavioral prediction (Fishbein, 2009). An individual’s attitudes, norms, and efficacy beliefs reflect the various influences that combine to determine a person’s readiness to exit prostitution (Cimino, 2021). In the field of criminology, a cognitive transformation whereby a person is motivated to change is also central to desistance from criminal activity, in general, but must be linked to opportunities within a person’s environment that a person can use to make change (Giordano et al., 2002, 2016). This cognitive shift includes a change in the way they perceive themselves and the criminal activity in which they were engaged in order to maintain desistance (Giordano et al., 2002, 2016).

An individual’s motivation or readiness to exit sex trading may be offset by their perceived ability to exit. Several scholars have described the role of agency, or a sense of control over one’s actions, in the process of exiting from prostitution (Cimino, 2013; Hickie, 2014; McCray et al., 2011; Sanders, 2007). In addition, a review of 44 studies on female desistance, agency is found to be a critical component of leaving a life of crime (Rodermond et al., 2016). Sense of agency is a critical concept in relation to trading sex, as a person who is trafficked lacks choice in their decision to trade sex or not. Given the context and spectrum of circumstances of a woman engaged in street-level sex trading, such as economic deprivation and homelessness, choices may be limited or circumscribed, sometimes referred to as “bounded agency” (Baylson, 2017; Rosen & Venkatesh, 2008; Showden & Majic, 2018).

A person’s level of structural advantage is a factor that interacts with the role of agency in choosing to engage in sex work (Benoit et al., 2017). Structural advantages lead to more agentic options, as agency implicates “both actual capacities/resources and individuals’ perceptions of those capacities/resources” (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015, p. 3). Social vulnerability

appears to be strongly associated to engagement in sex trading, which may influence not only entry into but the ability to exit from trading sex (Gerassi, 2015; Henriksen, 2021). It follows then that agency, as well as motivation and readiness to exit, can be thought of as acting upon a person's spectrum of social and economic advantage to influence an exit from prostitution.

Interconnecting Exiting Factors

The factors reviewed here across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural/societal levels are interconnected and overlapping. Many of these factors occur simultaneously and interact with one another to influence a person's decision and ability to exit from sex trading or extricate oneself from sex trafficking. There are many scenarios in which various combinations of factors interplay. For instance, a woman's children may provide external motivation to exit without the intrinsic desire to exit or the economic means to provide for them if she stopped trading sex. A woman may strongly desire to exit but may lack access to treatment needed for SUD or be unable to secure conventional employment or housing. A woman may face additional challenges due to her intersecting social identities (e.g., race and ethnicity) and forms of stigma. Exiting from sex trading is a multi-faceted and multi-layered process that calls for a myriad of facilitating factors and resources to come together, as well as the motivation and agency to do so.

Previous research has not addressed the process of exiting or women's interactions with police using the unique methodology in this study. The fully integrated, mixed methods design with novel joint displays and centering of the voices of women who have engaged in street level sex trading (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Fetters et al., 2013, Mertens, 2007) offers an important contribution to the literature that underscores the complexity of women's experiences with police and the exiting process.

Methods

The methodology and specific methods used in this study were purposely chosen for several reasons. First, there is a dearth of knowledge about women's experiences with exiting from sex trading, experiences with the police among women who trade sex on the street, and how their experiences with the police may influence exiting. I wanted to gain a rich, complex understanding of these experiences by integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Second, my professional background and personal perspective called for a transformative methodological approach that can be used to influence positive change in policy and practice. Thus, this mixed methods study is both exploratory and emancipatory or advocacy-oriented (e.g., seeking and producing knowledge for the purpose of exposing and eliminating oppressive conditions; Mertens, 2007; Sweetman et al., 2010).

Research questions gave direction to the study's mixed methodological framework, design, data collection, and analyses. The first main research question was: "What facilitates or impedes exiting from street level sex trading?" The second main research question was: "Among women who sell sex on the streets, what is the nature of their encounters with police and how do these encounters influence exiting?" These research questions allowed for an integrated mixed methods research design, data collection, and analyses. The refinement of research questions that occurred during the research process aligns with the methodological approach (i.e., mixed methods-grounded theory) in this study.

Methodological Framework

This study's intersectional feminist theoretical framework, which explores the multiple ways that a person's different social identities interact with and are affected by oppressive systems and processes (Crenshaw, 1989), also calls for the methodology and mixed methods design of this study. In alignment with my values and professional background, the study's methodological approach addresses injustice, particularly in the lives of BIWOC with low socioeconomic status, and pursues the goal of social and systemic change. I chose a

transformative (Mertens, 2007, 2010), mixed methods design to examine the lived experiences of women who have traded sex on the street—a highly marginalized and stigmatized group—focusing on the process of exiting from selling sex and the ways that the police may influence exiting. The transformative methodological perspective serves to identify and challenge existing inequities and forms of systemic oppression, amplify the voices of those who have been marginalized, and advance potential solutions to societal problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This paradigm or perspective focuses on power relations and privilege, cultural responsiveness and humility, trust building, participatory methods, prioritization of voices of disadvantaged groups, and promotion of human rights (Mertens, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2016).

I applied this methodology in this study in various ways. For instance, my professional background of direct engagement and advocacy efforts with women who have traded sex on the street and/or were sex trafficked provided me with a lot of knowledge and empathy concerning their lives and experiences. I established rapport and trust among community-based providers and participants and sought guidance from community-based providers with lived experience in data collection and recruitment tools and practices. I intentionally attended to the broader structural context and power imbalances between women who trade sex and police, and asked research participants to give their own recommendations for practice and policy changes. These transformative framework-inspired methods and others will be described in greater detail throughout this chapter.

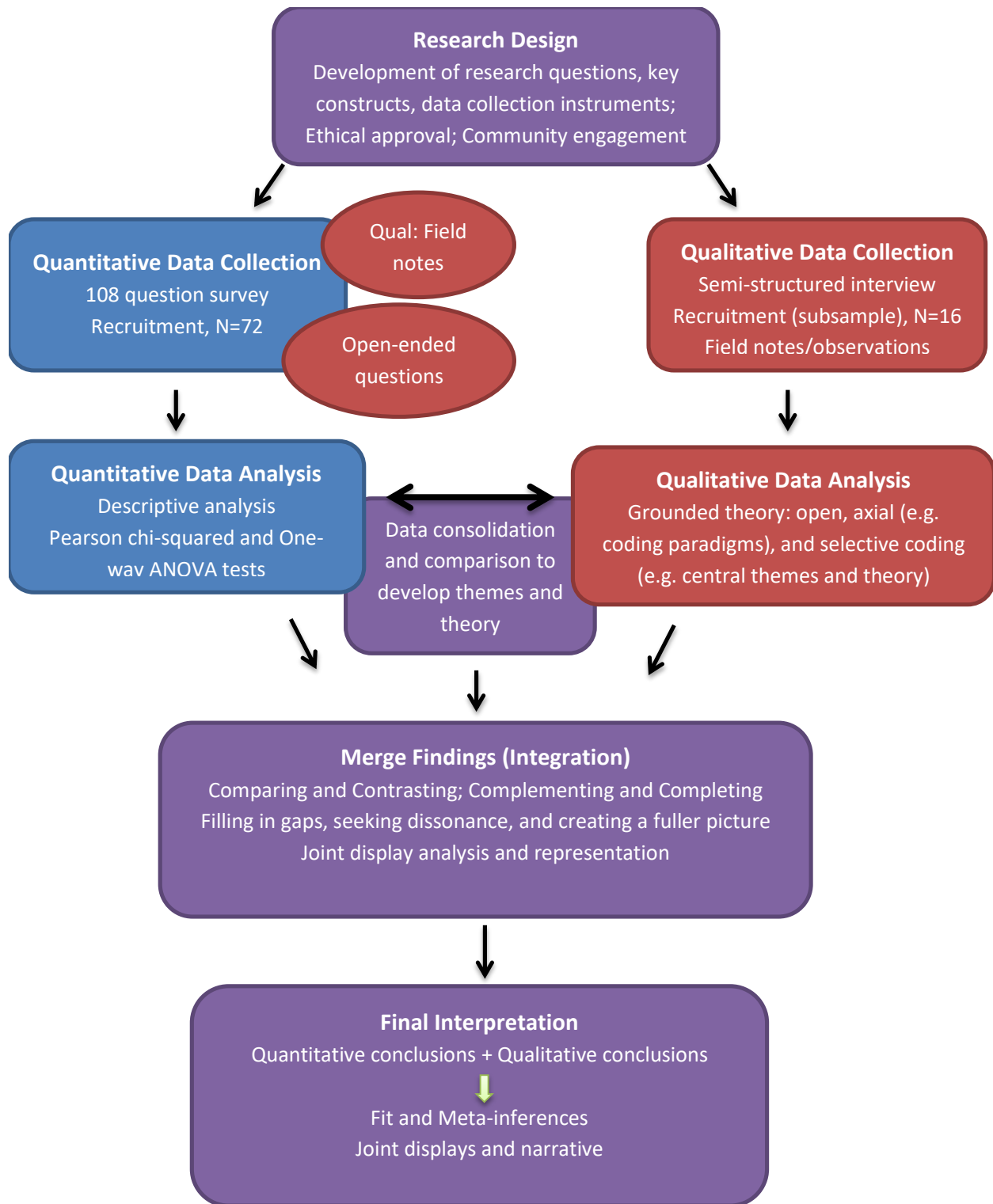
Research Design

Mixed methods research allows for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a richer, fuller picture of a complex and under-researched phenomenon. The transformative methodological perspective fits with any of the four types of mixed methods design (Mertens, 2003). I chose a convergent parallel design to best answer my research questions. Quantitative and qualitative methods were given equal priority; a convergent parallel design allowed for simultaneous collection of both surveys and interview

data, with each set of data informing the other, filling in gaps, and creating a more complete story (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This meaningful integration of data also serves to better contextualize the lives of women who trade sex on the street. Figure 1 illustrates the methodological process involved in this transformative, convergent parallel, fully integrated mixed methods research design.

Figure 1

Transformative, Convergent Parallel, Fully Integrated Methodological Process



The convergent parallel mixed methods design also followed a grounded theory methodology, which is suited to both qualitative and quantitative methods, separately or combined (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Johnson et al., 2010). Grounded theory methodology was

chosen because of the exploratory nature of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967); the phenomena of interest (sex trade exiting and experiences with police) are not yet widely understood. Grounded theory uses constant comparative analysis to develop codes and categories in an iterative manner (beginning during data collection), exploring similarities and differences, and constantly refining concepts, ultimately uncovering an explanatory process or emergent theory grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Chun Tie et al., 2019). As a mixed methods approach, grounded theory was applied throughout the design, data collection and analysis, and interpretation of results.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical and safety considerations were paramount in this study, given that individuals who sell sex and/or who are sex trafficked are stigmatized, criminalized, and vulnerable to violence and victimization. Study protocols were developed to ensure safety, privacy, and confidentiality (e.g., data was de-identified and stored securely, private spaces within community-based facilities were used for data collection). To minimize risk of distress as a result of survey/interview questions or study protocols, I drew from past professional experience with women who trade sex, utilizing judgment-free, compassionate interviewing skills, neutral language related to selling sex, resource lists, and a grounding exercise, if necessary. The informed consent forms discussed the potential risks and benefits, and specifically asked for permission for audio recording and follow up contact. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the human subjects protections with these and other considerations in mind (IRB# 19.141).

Data Collection: Survey

The survey consisted of 108 items. Questions included demographic, socioeconomic, sex trading or trafficking-related experiences, health and well-being, and police and other criminal justice experiences. I asked about reasons for starting, continuing, and stopping sex trade activity, with a nearly exhaustive list of options; participants could endorse multiple

reasons and also were encouraged to give reasons in their own words. A few other questions allowed for open-ended responses. Space was made throughout the survey to include notes for any additional open-ended information or stories that the women wished to share.

The survey was comprised of a combination of validated measures, items extracted from validated measures, other standard ways of asking for relevant information, and self-developed questions when no validated questions or scales appeared to exist. Measures were chosen based on relevance to the research questions, but brevity and ease of administration were crucial considerations due to the breadth of topics covered in the survey.

Survey questions capturing personal, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics and prostitution experiences were measured via items 1-24 (pages 1-5 in Appendix A). These included standard ways of asking for information, such as age, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, income, biological children, and marital status. Two questions about food security and two questions related to housing and income security (e.g., current housing situation, threat of utilities being shut off) were used. These questions were drawn from the ten item Health-Related Social Needs Screening Tool developed by a panel of experts from around the country to be used in clinical settings; the tool was subjected to cognitive testing (Billieux et al., 2017), but I was unable to locate any psychometric data on this measure.

Survey questions representing indicators of health and well-being were measured via items 25-70 (pages 6-12, Appendix A). All health and well-being survey items were drawn from validated scales of depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms (PTSD), trauma exposure, physical health, substance use, social support, and religious coping (except for item 63: "Are there any medical conditions that you are currently dealing with?").

Four items from the Patient Reported Outcomes Measurement Information system (PROMIS-29 Profile V2; Ader, 2007) were used to assess for physical health while maintaining brevity; the full scale includes both physical and mental health domains. Items included in the survey pertained to physical functioning, fatigue, and pain intensity. For instance, one of the four

items asked, using a 10-point scale, “In the past 7 days, how would you rate your (physical) pain on average?” The physical health domain of the 29-item scale showed reliability and validity with a Cronbach’s alpha of .98 and strong correlation with a similar validated physical health scale (SF-36 physical health domain; Hays et al., 2018). The Medical Outcomes Study-Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS-4) assessed level of social support with 4 items, including “How often do you feel that you have someone to help with daily chores if you were sick?” This abbreviated scale was found to be a good fit with the full MOS-SSS scale and had good internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .83; the four-item scale maintained concurrent validity (Gjesfjeld et al., 2008).

The CAGE–Adapted to Include Drugs¹ (CAGE-AID) is a four-item screening tool to assess for possible SUD, with questions such as “Have you ever felt you ought to cut down on your drinking or drug use?” (Brown & Rounds, 1995). The CAGE-AID has demonstrated good diagnostic accuracy with 70.9% sensitivity and 75.7% specificity (Brown et al., 1998). The full CAGE scale has shown strong test-retest reliability (Cronbach’s alpha of 0.80-0.95) and correlations of 0.48-0.70 with other similar screening instruments. CAGE-AID has demonstrated reliability among different groups, including Native Americans in a medical setting (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.92; Leonardson et al., 2005). I added a question to distinguish between past only and current unhealthy substance use. The Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4) screens for depression and anxiety (two items each; Kroenke et al., 2009), and has been shown to accurately diagnose for both with area under the curve (AUC) of 0.835 and 0.787 for depression and anxiety, respectively (Khubchandani et al., 2016). The PHQ-4 has good internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.81 and the confirmatory factor analysis demonstrates

¹ This acronym was created from words that come from within the first 3 items of the measure: Cut, Annoyed, Guilty, and then the fourth item is considered an “Eye opener.”

that the four-item scale is a unidimensional construct with good model fit with two distinct components (GAD-2 for anxiety and PHQ-2 for depression; Materu et al., 2020).

An abbreviated measure of lifetime adversity and trauma exposure, the Lifetime Experiences Scale (LES), developed by James Topitzes and Joshua Mersky, was also used (instrument not yet validated). The PC-PTSD-5 screens for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and has shown excellent diagnostic accuracy (AUC = 0.941; 95 % C.I.: 0.912–0.969), good test-retest reliability ($r=.83$) and predictive validity against the Clinician Administered PTSD Scale ($r = 0.83$; Prins et al., 2016).

The Brief Religious Coping Scale's (RCOPE) Positive Religious Coping (PRC) Subscale has seven items and was used to better understand how spirituality and religion may help participants' cope with major life stressors and trauma; the median alpha across studies for the PRC scale was 0.92, demonstrating internal consistency (Pargament et al., 2011). The Brief RCOPE has demonstrated concurrent validity and has shown initial evidence of predictive and incremental validity. Some language was adapted; for instance, I re-worded sentences with "God" to "God or a higher power" to be more inclusive of other religions or forms of spirituality and omitted the word "sins" in one item to avoid language that might be perceived as shaming or cause distress to participants. I did not use the negative religious coping subscale (NRC) of the Brief RCOPE (Pargament et al., 2011) due to language that I deemed insensitive and potentially harmful to women who trade sex (e.g., "feeling abandoned or punished by God").

Survey items 71-91 (pages 12-15, Appendix A) consisted of homegrown questions related to arrest, incarceration, a range of different kinds of interactions (both harmful and helpful) a person trading sex on the street might have with the police, strategies for avoiding police, and perception of the police. Examples of police interaction included questions such as: "Have you ever been paid for a sex act with someone you knew was a police officer?" and "Has a police officer ever helped by offering encouragement to make a change?" These questions were from drawn from literature related to women engaged in trading sex on the street and their

encounters with police, other related literature (e.g., procedural justice and police legitimacy), as well as previous professional experience.

The next set of questions (survey items 92-100, Appendix A) pertained to desire or attempts to quit, reasons for continuing or returning to trading sex, and, if a participant ever stopped trading sex, when and for what reasons. Included in this section of the survey was Miller & Johnson's (2008) three-item motivation to change scale adapted for quitting sex trade activity, e.g. "I am trying to quit trading sex". This measure had a lower internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha between 0.39 to 0.69) due to the brevity of the scale but was strongly correlated with the original 12-item scale ($r=0.902$, $p < .0001$) and accounted for 81% of variance of the longer scale, which was found to be reliable (Cronbach's alpha of 0.85; Miller & Johnson, 2008).

The survey concluded with the General Self-Efficacy scale (GSE-6; Romppel et al., 2013), which included items such as, "I can usually handle whatever comes my way." The GSE-6 was found to be reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha between 0.79 and 0.88 and demonstrated concurrent validity (e.g., negatively associated with depression and anxiety, positively associated with social support and mental health) and predictive validity (Romppel et al., 2013). One final open-ended question asked: "Could you tell me one thing that gives you hope or makes you laugh?" These questions (survey items 101-108, Appendix A) were intentionally asked at the end of the survey in order to end on a positive or hopeful note and alleviate any distressing feelings that may have arisen during the survey.

Data collection: Semi-structured interview

The interview guide (see Appendix B) was semi-structured, with questions intended to obtain specific data relatively consistently across participants, but also allowing for flexibility and adaptability; participants could share stories and experiences in an organic way. I developed the interview guide to gain more in-depth narrative about the women's reasons for and experiences with trading sex or exiting from trading sex. Questions pertaining to changes or challenges encountered throughout their sex trading history and during the exiting process were included.

The interview guide also elicited women's experiences with police, the effects of their interactions with police, and how those interactions may influence exiting from trading sex. For instance, one question asked: "What do you think makes it hard to quit selling sex?" Another set of questions asked: "Have your experiences with the police helped in some way to make getting out of prostitution easier? Have your experiences with the police made it more difficult to get out of prostitution?" These questions could be followed by a probe: "In what ways?" Probes were used throughout the interview where elaboration was needed. Questions also elicited the women's own recommendations for practice and policy concerning individuals who trade sex, such as: what help is needed to improve their lives or exit from prostitution, how the police should respond to prostitution, and what laws or policies should be in place or changed.

Though the interview guide used the word "prostitution," in practice I used the term "sex trading" or matched the term that the interviewee chose to use, avoiding terms such as prostitute or sex worker, choosing to focus on the action versus an identity. I used the term prostitution when asking questions (both in the interview guide and survey) that asked about arrests or municipal fines (e.g., "arrested for a prostitution offense") as that corresponds with the legal language used to describe it as a criminal offense.

Sampling and Recruitment

Due to the criminalization and stigmatization of people who sell sex, and the potential of trafficking circumstances or other coercive control, there are challenges in the recruitment of women who trade sex on the street to participate in research. In addition, there are safety issues and potential for harm for both participants and researcher in outreach and engagement efforts, if not done with caution and awareness. I decided that engagement with existing community-based programs was an appropriate means of recruiting women who have ever traded sex on the street. Thus, I spent several months building relationships with a variety of community-based partners who provide services to women engaged in street level sex trading or who have been sex trafficked; a few of these providers had lived experience. Community

partner engagement included introducing myself and my professional and academic background, learning about their programs, sharing research materials, and requesting access to program participants through a variety of means. Community partners included programs offering trafficking-specific and street sex trade-specific services, like drop in, mobile outreach, case management, legal assistance, and residential program services. Other programs provided services specific to intimate partner violence, substance use, health, and youth services.

Though not all twelve community partners led to recruitment of participants, most accepted and distributed recruitment flyers (see Appendix C), one provided an opportunity to present about the research to a trafficking survivor support group, some mentioned the research with individual participants of their programs or discussed with me which individuals might be most interested to participate; many offered on-site, private spaces to talk with study participants. One social service provider allowed me to spend time at the program during their drop-in center hours to facilitate rapport-building and ongoing engagement with potential study participants. In this manner, I recruited participants through purposive sampling, a common sampling strategy for mixed methods research (Maxwell, 2008).

I also recruited participants via snowball sampling, typically used with “hidden” populations (Padgett, 2017), as respondents who were recruited via community-based organizations also referred potential study participants out of their own social networks. These community engagement efforts and sampling strategies also built legitimacy and trust with me as a researcher, an important aspect of recruitment with marginalized groups of people.

I listed a phone number and email address on recruitment flyers in order to receive calls or texts from potential study participants (using a free phone and text messaging app and university email address). Potential participants contacted me to set up appointments for surveys or interviews, and I asked women during face-to-face interactions at the drop-in center if they wanted to participate in a survey or interview. A critical aspect of recruitment involved

compensation for their time; study participants received a \$25 gift card to Walmart for the survey and the interview, respectively. A safe, compassionate, judgment-free relational approach was also an essential component of recruitment efforts (e.g., neutral language, body language that conveyed warmth and friendliness, eye contact, active listening with empathetic responses).

I recruited interview participants from the sample of survey participants, based on a variety of factors, including their interest in telling their story during the survey, my perception of their level of contact with police (based on their self-reported experiences), and amount of time engaged in street level sex trading. In alignment with grounded theory methods, I employed theoretical sampling whereby survey participants with certain characteristics and experiences were recruited for follow-up interviews to maximize variation, fill in gaps, and enrich and expand the developing patterns or themes (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For instance, I considered variation in age, race and ethnicity, trafficking experiences or lack thereof. After consideration of the data I was collecting via surveys, I sought interview participants who had minimal contact with the police related to selling sex, as this experience represented a larger proportion of survey respondents than I anticipated. Limits to variation in sampling were present given logistical constraints and inability to reach many survey participants for a follow up interview (e.g., inability to find a mutually convenient time to meet, phone number was no longer working).

Procedures

Once a potential study participant made contact with me via text, phone call, or email, or verbally expressed interest in participating while I was at a program site describing my study, I inquired as to whether the individual met the eligibility criteria, i.e., adult, female-identified, English-speaking, and any current or former street level sex trading. If the criteria were met, we made an appointment at a mutually convenient time and place. All survey and interview appointments occurred during day or early evening hours. Survey and interview spaces included private rooms at various community-based program sites and public libraries. A

handful of participants strongly preferred to meet at fast food restaurants or coffee shops, when this was the most comfortable and practical space for the participant. In these cases, we met toward the back of the establishment or outside where no other customers were sitting, and I paused the conversation if anyone passed near us.

After face-to-face introductions were made and eligibility criteria were double checked, I reviewed the informed consent. The participant then signed and initialed the additional permissions (e.g., follow up contact). Each person filled out a contact information form, which was kept separate from the survey or interview data. A resource list of programs serving individuals who trade sex or have been trafficked was given to each participant. I administered the survey orally and wrote in the responses to avoid literacy barriers and to help build rapport, which was an important precursor to follow up interviews. Administration time for the survey averaged about an hour, ranging from about 30 to 90 minutes.

Every survey participant gave permission for follow up contact for an interview, but not all survey participants were selected for a follow up interview. Recruitment for interviews occurred in person either immediately after the survey or via text, email, phone call, or in person contact from me within a month or two after the survey. Post-survey in person contact occurred if I saw the survey participant at a program site that I frequented for surveys and interviews. At that point, we agreed upon a mutually convenient time and place to meet; the interview never occurred on the same day as the survey.

I followed the same procedures for interviews, with a few additional steps. When conducting interviews, I let participants know that the audio recording was starting and stopping. Two digital audio recorders were used in case one failed to record. Administration of the interview typically lasted about 90 minutes, ranging from about 45 to 120 minutes. After each survey and interview, the participant received a \$25 gift card and signed a gift card distribution log.

I asked each participant how they felt after the survey. One participant indicated that her heart was beating fast, indicating some mild distress, and agreed to do the grounding exercise—an evidence-based breathing technique; she said she felt much better after the exercise and showed no visible signs of distress. The vast majority of participants stated or demonstrated that they felt relieved or grateful after the survey or interview, sometimes thanking me for the opportunity to share and feel heard, and mentioning that they felt as if a weight had been lifted. Some participants said that they wished that more women in similar circumstances could speak to a compassionate person about their sex trading or trafficking experiences. Some expressed hope that they could affect change with their stories.

Participants

Seventy-two participants completed surveys from February through December of 2019. All participants identified as women, with one known transgender woman. They ranged in age from 18 to 56 years old, with a mean age of 35. They identified their race as Black or African American (59.7%), White (19.4%), Native American (8.3%), or other (12.5%), and 16.9% identified as Latina/Hispanic. In terms of educational attainment, 34.8% attained less than a high school diploma or GED, 30.6% attained a high school diploma or GED, 26.4% had earned some college credit, but no degree, and another 8.3% attained a 2- or 4-year degree. When asked about legal employment status, 45.8% were unemployed, 31.9% were unable to work, 11.1% were employed full time, while another 11.1% were employed part time. Over 90% had an annual income of less than \$20,000, with 37.5% endorsing \$0-\$4,999 per year, 26.4% with \$5,000-\$9,999, 26.4% with \$10,000-\$19,999, and only 9.7% with an income over \$20,000 annually. In terms of relationship status, 47.2% were single and never married, 20.8% were in a committed relationship but not living together, 15.3% were divorced, separated, or widowed, 9.7% were living with a partner, and 6.9% were married. The vast majority (88.9%) had at least one biological child, and 73.6% had at least one biological child under the age of 18. Fewer than half (43.1%) had at least one biological child under the age of 18 in their care or living with

them. Ten women volunteered that they were currently pregnant (not a survey question, so this data was not collected systematically). The women lived with biological or non-biological children (38%), a friend or roommate (18.1%), a spouse or partner (14.1%), their own or spouse/partner's parents or extended family (9.9%); this question was not applicable for 31% of women due to experiencing homelessness or living in a program facility.

Several different questions helped to reveal that a substantial number of study participants were trafficked at some point, defined by experiences of being coerced or forced into trading sex by a third party who profited from their sex trading. For instance, 40.3% indicated that they were tricked, coerced, or forced into trading sex when they first began selling sex. Almost two-thirds (65.3%) had ever given a cut or all of their profits from selling sex to someone else, but this included people such as roommates, lookouts, people who provided transportation, etc., as well as pimps and significant others. Another telling indicator of trafficking experiences is that 48.6% of participants were under 18 years old when they first began selling sex, which would define them as victims of trafficking based on their status as minors.

I conducted interviews with 16 of the 72 surveyed women (one additional interview failed to record and the data was lost). Some demographic information for the women interviewed (N=16) is included in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race/ethnicity	Educational attainment	Trafficking history
Brooke	27	African American	Some college (no degree)	Yes
Danyelle	34	African American	Some college (no degree)	Yes
Diane	50	African American	Some college (no degree)	No
Faith	50	African American	2-year degree (Associate's)	Early trafficking history but mostly independent
Kendra	31	African American	4-year degree (Bachelor's)	Yes
Kiana	28	African American	High school diploma	No

Lisa	37	African American	Some college (no degree)	No
Maya	19	African American	No high school diploma	Yes
Melanie	35	White	2-year degree (Associate's)	No
Nina	47	Native American/Latina	Some college (no degree)	No
Nyasha	38	African American	Some college (no degree)	No
Selena	43	White/Latina	Vocational training/license	No
Sharise	33	African American	Some college (no degree)	Yes
Tasha	30	African American	2-year degree (Associate's)	Early trafficking history but mostly independent
Taylor	18	White	No high school diploma	Yes
Veronica	56	Native American/Latina	2-year degree (Associate's)	No

Of note, the women interviewed had higher educational attainment on average compared to the survey sample. I selected interviewees, in part, based on their strong desire to share their experiences, especially with insight and self-reflection, while I was administering their surveys. This may have led to sampling bias of participants with higher educational attainment. However, I considered other factors in interview sampling. I attempted to maximize a variety of characteristics or experiences like previous unhealthy substance use, trafficking experiences, exiting status, level of contact with the police, age, and race or ethnicity. Interview participants were also recruited based on availability and ability to make follow up contact to arrange an interview (e.g., same phone number still worked) not all that were selected/asked were able to participate in an interview, though no participant verbally declined to be interviewed.

Data Analysis: Quantitative

All survey data were entered into SPSS and cleaned, with the help of a graduate student assistant. There were no missing data. Open-ended survey responses were also entered into SPSS. Some open-ended data were transformed into quantitative variables, for instance by summing the number of known physical or mental health conditions. Descriptive analysis of all variables was completed. Certain variables were transformed in order to find the sum of scales, or to collapse categories of variables.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, the following research questions guided the quantitative analyses: What variables are associated with exiting from sex trading outcomes? What variables are associated with perception of the police (i.e., rating of overall experience with the police)? What is the relationship between perception of the police and sex trading-exiting outcomes?

The first dependent variable (DV) was the exiting outcome variable, which was derived from the following question: “Which statement best fits you today?: 1) I am currently interested in quitting/trading sex, 2) I am currently only interested in reducing my sex trade activities or changing my activities to reduce harm, or 3) I am not currently interested in quitting or reducing my sex trade activities.” The latter two responses were collapsed to create the “not wishing to exit” category (value=0), while the first response became the “wishing to exit” category (value=1). If the participant was not currently engaged in trading sex, their response was “N/A,” which became the “exited” category (value=2). This three-category variable was highly correlated with the three-item motivation to change (Miller & Johnson, 2008) scale (survey items 95-97). The motivation to change scale was not used for the exiting outcome variable because some women may have answered the third question— “I could quit trading sex”—based on their economic need and circumstances rather than based on their internal motivation to change (some participants communicated this explicitly). Given that many participants did not solely trade sex on the street throughout their sex trading experiences and the difficulty in parsing out what type or venue of sex trading in which they were last or most currently engaged, I focused on exiting in general from sex trading.

Independent variables (IV) were categorized based on the following research sub-questions: What is the relationship between exiting and demographic/socioeconomic characteristics and prostitution experiences? What is the relationship between exiting and indicators of health and well-being (e.g., trauma symptoms, substance use, and social support)? I presumed that the relationship between the IVs and the DV may be bi-directional.

The IVs that represented personal, demographic, socioeconomic, or prostitution-specific domains included: age of entry into trading sex (continuous variable), age at time of survey (continuous variable), history of trafficking (binary), race (categorical—Black, White, other), ethnicity (binary—yes/no Latina), relationship status (4 categories), having minor children in their care (binary), educational attainment (3 categories), housing stability (binary), employment status (3 categories). A few variables were not explored for associations with the DV due to lack of variation (i.e., the vast majority had the same experience), including food insecurity, income level, and health insurance. Differences in group means were assessed using Pearson chi-square tests for each of the nominal independent variables and the exiting outcome dependent variable, while Mann-Whitney tests were used for the continuous IVs (age of entry and age at time of survey) and the exiting outcome DV.

The IVs that represented health and well-being domains included: services used (all binary: case management, substance use, drop in services, shelter, counseling/therapy), LES score (interval or ratio variable), anxiety score (continuous), depression score (continuous), PTSD score (continuous), PTSD screen (binary), potential SUD score (4 item scale, ordinal) ability to carry out physical tasks (ordinal), smoking (3 categories), rating of physical health (ordinal), fatigue (ordinal), rating of physical pain (continuous), sum of known mental health diagnoses (ratio), sum of known physical health conditions (ratio), social support score (continuous), positive religious coping score (continuous), and self-efficacy score (continuous). Differences in group means were assessed using Pearson chi-square tests for each of the nominal/ordinal IVs and the exiting outcome DV, and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to assess differences in group mean rankings for the continuous IVs and the exiting outcome DV.

The second DV related to participants' perception of police. This survey question stated: "How would you rate your overall experience with the police, on a scale from 0 to 10 (with 0 being very negative to 10 being very positive)? This variable was highly correlated with a variable that asked about frequency of being treated fairly by the police (ordinal). The rating of

police variable was dichotomized as ratings fell equally within the ranges of 0-4 and 5-10, with larger frequencies for ratings of 0 and 5. With an evenly split dichotomized rating variable (36 participants in each group), this avoided the issue of low cell counts (i.e., specific ratings that held few or zero cases).

IVs were categorized in the same manner as above (e.g., demographic, health and well-being), based on the following research sub-questions: What is the relationship between demographic characteristics or early prostitution experiences and indicators of experiences with police? What is the relationship between indicators of health and well-being, and perception of the police? Again, I presumed that the relationship between the IVs and the DV may be bi-directional. The same IVs described above, with the addition of each of the types of interactions with the police (all binary variables), were analyzed for differences in group means based on the perception of police DV, using Pearson chi-square (for nominal and ordinal IVs), while differences in group mean rankings were analyzed using Mann-Whitney or Kruskal-Wallis tests (for continuous IVs).

Finally, the two DVs were analyzed using a Pearson chi-square test to assess for differences in group means with the following research question: What is the relationship between perception of the police and exiting outcomes?

It was expected that upon finding significant bivariate associations between any of the IVs and either of the two DVs, further multivariate analyses would be conducted via multinomial logistic regression. However, the low sample size led to an excess of observed cell counts with zero frequencies; thus multivariate analyses were not possible.

Data Analysis: Qualitative

Qualitative data analysis followed grounded theory methods—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding culminating in an emergent theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Analysis began with field notes that were written after each survey and interview to make observations about the participants and their experiences, to note patterns that might be emerging between

participants, and to reflect on my own ideas and potential biases. Interviews were professionally transcribed by a third party, then I edited and verified each transcript while listening to the audio recording. All transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose qualitative analysis program.

I trained a graduate assistant in open coding and memoing, in order to have a second person for blind open coding of transcripts, meaning that coders could not see each other's codes. Codes were discussed and revised after each of the first three transcripts. Blind/double coding continued for the first seven transcripts. We developed a codebook, which we discussed, revised, and refined, with codes grouped or categorized. I then continued open coding and categorizing codes for the following nine transcripts without assistance. The final codebook included 319 codes grouped into 35 categories (some categories had sub-groups). An example of a category included "police interactions" with sub-groups "negative police interactions" and "positive police interactions."

I used a variety of strategies to engage in axial coding, whereby connections between codes or groups of codes were drawn. I wrote out note cards of codes and manually laid them out to visualize where groups of codes were linked. I created coding paradigms around the broad categories of exiting from trading sex and relationships with the police (see Appendix D). As I began merging data, I drafted documents listing all the quantitative and qualitative results that pertained to either exiting or to experiences with the police. Open-ended survey data were integrated into these documents. I created tables of mixed data to illuminate different aspects of exiting or relationships with police and to compare and contrast the different sets of data. These efforts ultimately led to the selection of major themes, i.e., the selective coding process, and an emergent theory.

Integration of Data Analyses

Integration is an essential feature of mixed methods studies, occurring at the levels of design (transformative convergent parallel), methods (merging), and interpretation and reporting (narrative and joint displays) (Fetters et al., 2013; Guetterman et al., 2015). An additional layer

of analysis occurred through integration of findings. In accordance with the convergent parallel mixed methods design, quantitative and qualitative data were merged (Fetters et al., 2013). Focusing on the data analysis and interpretation process, I integrated the quantitative and qualitative data during axial and selective coding, particularly as I was identifying major themes and a theory. Integration of data helped to build upon existing analyses, generate new ideas and insights, and convey a meaningful picture of women's experiences with exiting and with the police. Data integration uncovered areas of both concordance (or confirmation) and discordance between sets of findings, otherwise known as the fit between results (Haynes-Brown & Fetters, 2021). Merging data also served to expand concepts and understandings, as each set of data helped to illuminate what was missing in the other. These analyses were woven together in narrative and table format. The tables, known as joint displays (Guetterman et al., 2015; Haynes-Brown & Fetters, 2021; Johnson et al., 2019), allow for both sets of analyses to be presented together in a way that is both visually engaging and serves as a means to advance the integration analysis process (Haynes-Brown & Fetters, 2021). Joint displays include a new third set of findings examining the fit (e.g., concordance, discordance, expansion) and explain the meta-inferences, or interpretation of the integrated data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2020). Thus, I used narrative and joint displays to detail and explain merged findings as they relate to exiting and the ways that police influence exiting.

Qualitative and Mixed Methods Rigor

Various strategies were employed to enhance rigor in this mixed methods study, i.e., to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and reflexivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of methods and data were achieved through the convergent parallel mixed methods design, in which the survey and interview collected some of the same information in different ways, and at different points in time for each person who completed both a survey and an interview (Morse, 2015; Amankwaa, 2016).

The survey was pilot tested and both the survey and interview guide were reviewed by multiple social service providers who work with women and youth engaged in street level sex trading; two of those providers were also survivors of sex trafficking/formerly engaged in selling sex. These providers also reviewed and offered feedback on recruitment materials. Data collection instruments and recruitment materials were also debriefed with faculty and other colleagues, and IRB Board members provided input to prevent bias in interview questions.

Sampling and recruitment approaches helped to increase rigor. For instance, study participants that met the criteria of having ever engaged in street level sex trading were recruited through multiple programs of different types across the city, as well as from participants' social networks to reach participants who were not connected to programs. I attempted to maximize variation related to certain characteristics or experiences, such as age, race, ethnicity, substance use history, trafficking history, exiting outcome, and level of police contact. I employed theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with interview participants to gain insight about divergent and convergent patterns reflected by study participants. For instance, more survey participants than expected had minimal contact with police and/or no contact with police related to selling sex, thus I recruited interview participants who also had minimal to no prostitution-related contact with police. In addition, I used past professional experience and relationship building with community-based service providers, as well as a prolonged engagement strategy (Morse, 2015) at one program site.

I took field notes after each survey and interview to record observations and practice reflexivity. This served as a means to explore emerging concepts and patterns, as well as to increase transparency and reflect on potential biases. I used member checking to examine ideas presented by one or more participants with subsequent participants (Morse, 2015). For instance, "I've heard x before, what do you think about that?" Plans for member checking with participants after preliminary analysis was completed were cancelled due to the COVID-19 public health crisis. Peer debriefing with colleagues served as another tool to practice reflexivity

and minimize bias (Padgett, 2008); this occurred throughout data analysis, beginning with survey data entry, open coding with consensus building to create a codebook (with the help of the graduate assistant), and axial and selective coding processes.

I employed negative case analysis, noting outlying data and experiences that did not fit the dominant patterns observed (Padgett, 2008). For instance, while participants tended to have more negative experiences with the police, some had more positive experiences and perceptions of police; divergent results lent to an emergent theory that was inclusive of all the ways that study participants might experience the police.

To augment the dependability and confirmability of the study, I created an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), consisting of field notes and reflections, a codebook, analytic memos, axial and selective coding processes documented by notes, coding paradigms and other visualizations, and tables of integrated findings. Thick description, which included both the transparent description of methods and the contextualization of data collection, analysis, results, and implications within the broader social and political environment of participants, also enhanced rigor in this study. These rigorous methods led to a set of inclusive themes and an emergent theory grounded in the data that was situated in the larger context of the women's lives.

Rigor in mixed methods research is often evaluated by assessing legitimation, originally defined by Onwuegbuezie and Johnson (2006), a process in which the quality of the mixed methods is audited. Their nine types of legitimation generally focus on consistency between purpose, research questions, research design, and sociopolitical context and the meta-inferences made (Onwuegbuezie & Johnson, 2006). Another framework for assessing the quality of inferences was developed by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008), focusing on design quality (use of appropriate procedures to answer research questions) and interpretive rigor (credibility of interpretations based on results). Both frameworks are multi-faceted and complex, requiring ongoing process evaluation from start to finish of a mixed methods study. Thus, I was

Careful to maintain mixed methods methodological rigor, for example ensuring both sets of data collection addressed the same questions, identifying my social justice lens, using appropriate statistics and qualitative analysis techniques, attending to divergent findings, using adequate or advanced approaches for converging data, etc. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Community Benefits of Research

In alignment with the transformative methodological framework of this study, I will ensure that this research is disseminated in ways that may influence policy and practice (Mertens, 2021). I will develop, present, and distribute materials and other oral and written communication for different audiences, e.g., people with lived experience with sex trading, providers of health and social services serving individuals who have traded sex (especially those that assisted with recruitment of participants and pilot testing and review of study materials), law enforcement and first responders, advocacy organizations, policymakers, academics, etc. This method is an essential aspect of my research and ensures that the voices of study participants are heard in meaningful ways and that the community can benefit from this research.

Results Chapter 1: Exiting

This chapter presents the results pertaining to the following research questions: “What facilitates or impedes the motivation and ability to exit from sex trading?” Bivariate quantitative analyses and multiple layers of qualitative coding, and their integration via merging and joint displays, produced results that illuminate factors impacting the exiting process. These factors fell within a central category or theme of “barriers to and facilitators of exiting.”

The factors, derived from a combination of quantitative variables and qualitative codes or categories, are sub-themes that represent either a barrier or a facilitator, or both. These sub-themes include economic and housing stability, caregiving of minor children, legal system and the police, access to community care and resources, stigma, social support, trauma exposure and symptoms, mental health, substance use, spiritual and religious coping, positive and negative thoughts and beliefs about oneself, and readiness and motivation to change. I chose these sub-themes based on both quantitative and qualitative results—descriptive statistics and tests of statistical significance, as well as qualitative codes, categories, and themes that rose to prominence.

The social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), loosely represented in the results below (and Figure 2 at the end of this chapter), provides a useful framework for the organization of these factors that considers all levels of influence from structural and societal, institutions and communities, interpersonal relationships, and the individual and her internal state. To set the context of sex trading in the Midwestern urban American landscape, the sub-themes are loosely organized by barriers and facilitators to exiting that tend to be more structural and societal-level factors and then narrow down to factors that tend to be more focused on the individual; each factor is discussed in terms of its impact at each level, as appropriate. A final sub-theme reveals participants’ specific recommendations as to what helps women exit or improve their lives, including relevant legal or policy changes.

The quantitative and qualitative findings are woven together to present a fuller picture than they would if presented alone or sequentially. These are combined to create a third set of integrated findings (fit and meta-inferences). All results are presented in both narrative form and joint displays (i.e., tables of quantitative, qualitative, and integrated findings). The joint displays present results related to exiting, including quantitative data identifying significant differences between means or mean ranks for the three exiting outcome groups: exited, wishing to exit, and not wishing to exit. These findings are juxtaposed with corresponding qualitative data that share the voices of interview participants, with their exiting status (at time of interview) identified.

Table 2 provides greater detail regarding exiting statuses of interview participants at both time of survey and time of interview. The second column identifies one of three categories of exiting outcomes indicated by participants at the time of the survey, while the third column indicates exiting status at the time of the interview, according to my interpretation of their narrative. Both columns are included as exiting among participants proved to be more fluid and nuanced than one point in time categorization of exiting might convey. Of the interview participants who were still trading sex or would do so if needed, their sex trading no longer included street level activity.

Table 2

Interview Participant Exiting Status at Survey and Interview Points in Time

Name (pseudonym)	Exiting outcome group (at time of survey)	Exiting status (at time of interview)
Brooke	Wishing to exit	Currently exited; would trade sex if needed
Danyelle	Wishing to exit	Actively sex trading
Diane	Exited	Exited more than one year ago
Faith	Wishing to exit	Rarely sex trading (as needed)
Kendra	Exited	Exited more than one year ago
Kiana	Wishing to exit	Actively sex trading
Lisa	Exited	Exited more than one year ago

Maya	Wishing to exit	Currently exited but would trade sex if needed
Melanie	Exited	Exited more than one year ago
Nina	Wishing to exit	Recently exited
Nyasha	Exited	Exited more than one year ago
Selena	Not wishing to exit	Recently exited
Sharise	Exited	Exited more than one year ago
Tasha	Exited	Recently exited
Taylor	Wishing to exit	Recently exited
Veronica	Exited	Exited more than one year ago

Table 2 demonstrates the fluidity of sex trading as some women’s motivation, intentions, and ability to exit changed over short periods of time. Some decided they no longer wanted to trade sex, others found they needed to continue for various reasons, while others strengthened their resolve to stay exited. All participants either wished to quit or had quit at the time of the interview, thus qualitative data does not reflect the voices of those who do not currently wish to quit. Nevertheless, because of the fluidity and nuance of their sex trading histories and exiting statuses, qualitative data help describe and explain this exiting outcome; the women’s narratives include times in their lives when they did not wish to quit and their reasons for wanting to continue to trade sex.

Results depict a complex, interconnected web of factors that influenced women’s ability and motivation to either continue or stop selling sex. The data presented also include reasons for initiation into or continuation of sex trading in ways that help explicate the barriers to exiting. Findings highlight what can be done to effectively facilitate exiting for those who wish to exit and help improve the lives of women who have traded sex, whether exited or not.

Economic Stability

The level of economic and housing stability that participants experienced is related to the macro-level policies, systems, and structures that set wages too low and housing and other

costs too high. Particularly for those who may have grown up in low-income households, concentrated neighborhood poverty, under-resourced and inequitable educational systems, and/or racist de facto segregation and other forms of discrimination, these systemic hurdles set a context of disadvantage that they may have struggled to overcome. The fact that the majority of participants were BIWOC and approximately 35% of survey participants had not completed high school or a GED makes it more likely that many of these systemic barriers may have been contributing forces. Whatever their childhood economic situation in the past, their sex trading history and present reality were full of financial and housing instability that precipitated entry and made exiting difficult or undesirable.

Notably, trading sex is often more lucrative than other conventional or legal employment. For many, it is rational choice to trade sex in lieu of a job that does not pay a living wage, especially if one lacks educational opportunities or other means of economic advancement or if collateral consequences limit legal employment. After Brooke, who had been a ward of the state and trafficked since she was 16, completed high school, she felt she had few choices to make a living:

I had to start hustling, that's just what the choice was. I was working at Popeye's too, but I think I was making like \$6.50 an hour or something. I can't pay no damn rent with that.

And my check was like \$350 every two weeks. So, I had to strip. I didn't have no choice.

Brooke had been trafficked, in part, through strip clubs, so this paved her way back into trading sex. Danyelle, who had been trafficked since the age of 14, similarly felt unequipped to provide for herself without sex trading. She stated:

The money was good, so I kept doing it. I didn't have any life skills. I didn't know nothing about working. My mom never taught me that, even though she wasn't a bad mom, don't get me wrong, she would have never condoned this or had me to do this, but I never worked and then that was the way to start feeding myself.

Many respondents enumerated the large amounts of money they received for sex acts, and felt the money was not only necessary to live, but also addictive or gave them a sense of power. For many, the money was either the only or the most positive aspect of trading sex. When Brooke was asked what she thought was difficult about quitting sex trading or leaving the lifestyle, she responded: "The money. It's addictive. One day I made \$4,000.00 in one day." While not everyone was able to command the high prices that Brooke did, especially if solely engaged in street level sex trading, the ability to earn cash in hand quickly and at any time, whenever the need for money arose, was significant and compelling. Maya said: "My mama stayed right on [street name], psshh, all I had to do was get dressed and walk outside." At a societal level, this reveals that there is substantial and unwavering demand for paid sex, and that women are often better compensated for selling sex than they would be in many service industry jobs or other employment sectors.

For survey participants, the most frequently endorsed reason for entry into sex trading was to meet basic needs, such as to pay rent/bills or for a place to stay (75%), and 54.9% stated it was a way to make money faster than they could at a conventional job. Economic insecurity remained a compelling reason to continue or return to sex trading, with 85.5% indicating that they needed to meet basic needs. Other reasons for continuing or returning to trading sex included "fast access to cash" (92.8%), "better money than conventional jobs" (65.2%), "only way to provide for my family" (58%), and "unable to find better employment/lack of job skills/unable to hold a job" (52.2%). As a reason for exiting, 46.4% of women reported: "a major life event or opportunity, including job, marriage/relationship, health issues/injury, etc." While this was inclusive of many different kinds of life events or opportunities, employment and a new relationship both afforded greater economic security. As Kiana stated:

Nobody else is going to take care of me. I'll take care of myself. When I need something, I'm going to get it one way or the other. So, it makes it hard when you don't have

financial needs met. If I was to get a boyfriend and be in a relationship, and to have two incomes, where his income and my income is coming in, I won't have to do it.

Being employed and having the means to provide for oneself and one's family was crucial for many women who had exited and was often lacking for those who wished to exit. Only 22.2% of survey participants worked full or part time (legal employment), with another 31.9% stating that they were unable to work, likely due to a documented disability (38.9% received SSI or SSDI). Employment status was significantly associated with exiting outcomes (see Table 3) —those who had exited were more likely to be employed than those who had not exited (for both groups of those who wished to quit or did not wish to quit). The qualitative findings also reflect the significance of employment and the kinds of employment challenges that many participants faced.

Table 3

Joint Display on Employment and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative	Integrated findings
Total Sample: 45.8% Unemployed 31.9% Unable to work 22.2% Employed (PT/FT)	Theme/code: <i>Employment/employment challenges</i>	Fit: Concordance
Wishing to exit: 68.0% Unemployed 16.0% Unable to work 16.0% Employed	Brooke [currently exited but would trade sex if needed, employed]: Before [program], I couldn't get a job nowhere, nowhere... And they looked at me like 'this bitch got a motherfucking [criminal] record long as locusts. Hell no.'	Meta-inferences: Quantitative findings show that there is a statistically significant differences between exiting outcome groups based on employment status. A visual inspection of differences in percentages shows that being unemployed may be associated with those who wish to quit, while qualitative findings demonstrate why, e.g., the significant challenges of finding and keeping employment for a variety of reasons. Findings also elicit questions about the ability to maintain an exited status, considering that about one-third of the exited group were also unemployed. Being employed is important, yet not sufficient for everyone. Notably,
Not wishing to exit: 33.3% Unemployed 60.0% Unable to work 6.7% Employed	Veronica [exited, unable to work]: Now that I got my SSD and everything, now I'm working on getting my section 8 [housing] because I can't work. I mean I got in a car accident. I've got six bulging disks, pinched nerve, and arthritis in my tailbone. I have too much stuff that's wrong with me and it's a hard life. I did have a hard life. I did work. I haven't worked in five years, but I did work 32 years.	
Exited: 34.4% Unemployed 31.3% Unable to work 34.4% Employed		

<p>Omnibus Pearson chi-square: 13.994, $p=.007$.</p>	<p>Selena [recently exited, unemployed]: I was a hairdresser. I went to the best beauty school in the state of Wisconsin. At one time, I was making over \$70,000 a year at 21 years old. I still hold state credentials. You can't go from Monday being a full-blown, low-level, street, drug-addicted prostitute to Tuesday going back into a professional salon making \$70,000 a year. It's impossible.</p>	<p>half of all employed respondents were only working part time. Level of income generated makes a difference, as discussed by some participants. Inability to work due to disability is high for those not wishing to exit, which may also be driving the significant statistical differences between groups. Sex trading may be a means to supplement income.</p>
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The findings demonstrate the potential significance of employment in facilitating exiting, given the higher rate of employment among those who had exited (34.4%) compared to those who had not (16% and 6.7%). Findings also convey the challenges of finding and keeping suitable employment, which may be due to a criminal record, lack of life skills or job experience, low educational attainment, paucity of jobs paying a livable wage, medical and psychological conditions or mobility impairment, and the time and effort to recover from substance use disorder and/or rebuild one's life. For those who are unable to work, but receive disability benefits (SSI/SSDI), the income may not be enough to meet all the financial needs of their households, thus impacting their desire or ability to quit trading sex. The fact that about one-third of those exited were unemployed and another 31% were unable to work raises questions about other factors that make exiting possible beyond employment status and associated work income. Given results that suggest the fluidity of sex trading and exiting, these employment status findings point to a potential challenge in maintaining an exited status over time without sufficient income, especially when conventional (legal) income sources may be too low to maintain a household in the long term.

Other descriptive findings demonstrated the pervasive financial hardship of participants. The vast majority (90.3%) had an annual income less than \$20,000. Food insecurity was high for participants at the time of the survey, with 79-82% endorsing food insecurity items; 81% of

participants received SNAP benefits and 22% received WIC benefits. Despite most having access to public benefits for food, the level of assistance may not have been high enough to achieve food security.

There are individual-level aspects of economic instability, such as economic hardship due to SUD (e.g., large amount or all of income spent on drugs). While the financial hardships are individual experiences, the economic burdens are pervasive and stem from larger structural forces (e.g., lack of living wage, prohibitive costs of higher education) that make it much more difficult for some to meet their own financial needs or that of their families.

Some who were not currently trading sex acknowledged that they had or likely would trade sex again if a bill came up that they could not pay. Nyesha explained:

I was out doing the things I was supposed to do. I was out looking for jobs. I was out taking care of the business I was supposed to be taking care of, but things just wasn't moving fast enough, and I backslid a couple times to get the things that my children needed.

Many contended that if financial struggles abated, they would not be likely to return to trading sex. This was true for Taylor, for whom achieving economic stability was a way to stop trading sex:

I was always forced to do it. And now I'm not forced to do it. I'm not going to do it. And I have a house now, I have resources where I can get stuff now. I don't have to sell my body for money anymore because I know I have money.

Thus, economic stability may facilitate exiting from sex trading by eliminating or reducing the need for the fast, reliable income it generates to meet basic needs, such as housing and support of children.

Housing Stability

Related to economic stability, lack of stable housing proved to be a barrier to exiting while stable housing facilitated exiting. For over half (52.8%) of survey participants,

homelessness led them to begin trading sex. Some had run away or were kicked out as minors (38.9%) and had no other way to support themselves or find shelter, making them vulnerable to traffickers or other exploitative persons. Taylor, who had run away as minor, said: “Because I was homeless, they'd [traffickers] be like, ‘Oh, I can help you.’ And then it's, ‘You got to pay me back.’ And that's the way I paid them back.” Diana’s husband brought her from out of state and stranded her on the streets of Milwaukee, where she eventually turned to selling sex to survive and buy drugs. Veronica became homeless and went from panhandling to trading sex, saying: “I had to turn around and go that low so I can be clean and fed and rested.” Though not asked systematically, survey participants commonly volunteered “needing a place to stay” or “due to homelessness” as reasons for continuing or returning to trading sex. Nina reported that there were always customers who would let her stay with them in exchange for sex, but without housing of her own these conditions make it hard to quit trading sex.

The joint display below juxtaposes quantitative, qualitative, and integrated results pertaining to housing stability. A little more than one third (34.7%) of survey participants reported that they currently had their own stable housing and 19.4% were in a long-term program facility (e.g., transitional housing), while 36.1% were homeless and 9.7% had precarious housing. Stable housing was significantly associated with exiting outcomes, with a higher proportion of those who wished to exit having unstable (or no) housing, while 75% of exited women had stable housing. However, a little more than half of those who did not wish to exit also had stable housing, demonstrating that for some, stable housing may not have as much influence on a person’s desire to exit. This corroborates the finding that a complex and interacting combination of factors increase or decrease the ability and motivation to exit.

Table 4

Joint Display on Housing Stability and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative theme/code and quote	Fit and Meta-inferences
Total Sample:	Code: <i>Housing situation/problems</i>	Fit: Concordance, Expansion

45.8% Unstable/no housing	Kiana [actively trading sex, unstable housing]: Right now things is up and down. Even though I have a job, it's still hard because I have five kids.	Meta-inferences: Stable housing is associated with exiting.
54.1% Stable housing (includes transitional living programs)	It's not too easy to find a place where I can afford with five kids, that would accept me and five kids, so it's hard. That takes you back to the streets. I have to get money somehow to maintain what I need to maintain.	Quantitative and qualitative data align in that unstable housing is a critical barrier to exiting, while stable housing can be a facilitator of exiting. Qualitative findings expand our understanding to show the lack of affordability of housing even when there is conventional income, especially when minor children are in a mother's care.
% with stable housing by group: 75% Exited 28% Wishing to exit	Daria: Where are you living now? Kiana: Right now I'm living with my sister. I'm in the process of trying to move into my own place, but like I said it's hard. I could afford \$650 with a regular job, if that.	Those without housing may choose to trade sex to obtain temporary or long-term shelter. Findings also show that for those with stable housing who do not wish to quit, sex trading may be a means to maintain that stability. However, stable housing may not be sufficient to motivate a person to exit and there may be reasons that make trading sex appealing beyond meeting housing needs.
53.3% Not wishing to exit	Daria: Are you working right now? Kiana: Yeah, I'm working as a personal care worker. Part-time. So, it makes it harder. I also work the temp service, it's still not enough. So, it's like you've got to make ends meet one way or the other.	
Omnibus Pearson chi-square: 12.493, $p=.002$.		

Both sets of data align—quantitative findings highlight the significant association between stable housing and exiting, while the qualitative findings explain the importance of housing stability in facilitating exiting. The qualitative results also reveal why those with employment or disability income may wish to continue to trade sex. Interview participants, such as Kiana, had conventional income sources that were prohibitively low, with sex trading income a sure way to manage their financial needs and desires. Even when Maya had secure housing without sex trading, she wanted to buy things beyond basic necessities that sex trading allowed her to afford: “When I had my house, it was easy for me to say, ‘Okay, I’m done.’ But then it’s all them basic ‘wants.’”

For some participants who continued to trade sex despite having housing, having some form of regular income meant that sex trading could be done more safely and on their own terms (e.g., less frequently, off street, with regular clients, no trafficker), which may have led

some women to feel satisfied with sex trading and not wish to quit. For instance, Faith described how, earlier in her sex trading history, she had two regular clients and relative safety and stability.

Between the two of them, they paid my rent, they supported my drug habit. I didn't need or want for nothing. That's before I started walking the streets [again], because I'm like, "I ain't got to walk the streets, I got clientele, they just come to my house." And I'm not going to lie and say that I didn't enjoy it. Sometimes I did enjoy it.

Results show that economic and housing stability are important facilitators of exiting, yet not everyone who has their basic economic and housing needs met wish to exit and not all those who have exited achieved economic and housing stability. This suggests that other factors are at play and that employment and housing stability may not be sufficient on their own to motivate or enable exiting. Findings also suggest that the ability to meet all economic needs, even with conventional income and stable housing, may be limited among women who have traded sex on the street in the U.S. context, where other safety net resources may be lacking.

Caregiving of Minor Children

Most survey participants were mothers, and some were also grandmothers. Survey findings demonstrate their desire to provide for their children as well as to stop trading sex for the benefit of their children. Qualitative results describe a range of concerns related to the women's ability to provide for their children, keep them safe, and keep them in their custody or in the safe care of a trusted family member. They also expressed concerns over their children's health and well-being, fear of or grief due to loss of custody of their children, and hope in the reconnection and rebuilding of relationships with their children. The following joint display (Table 5) presents the mixed methods findings related to children and exiting.

Table 5

Joint Display on Children and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative
Total Sample: 88.9% At least 1 biological child 73.6% At least 1 biological child under 18 43.1% At least 1 biological child under 18 in their care (10 voluntarily reported being pregnant) Reasons for stopping (N=72): 59.4% Stopped for children 42% Stopped due to pregnancy % with minor child in care by group: 87% of not wishing to exit 60% of wishing to exit 40% of exited Omnibus Pearson chi-square: 8.976, $p=.011$.	Codes: <i>Economic codes related to children; Concerns about children; Stopping for children</i> Kiana [actively trading sex, minors in her care]: Since I left [program], I'd say at first it became at least 2 or 3 times a week. Then after it became maybe 5 times a week, because of the more money I needed to take care of me and my kids. And we're out here, we're living house-to-house, so at this point I have to take care of my kids. Once I did get on my feet a little bit I slowed down again. Now I'm at the point where I just do it if I need funds, I need Pampers, I need milk, I need food. I have to really be in need for things. That's basically how it goes now. Faith [rarely trading sex, minor in care]: You know what made me stop was after I lost my baby, when I became pregnant with [youngest son], I quit everything [drugs and sex trading], because I knew that if they took another one of my kids, I wasn't coming back mentally. [Youngest son] was my saving grace.
Integrated findings	

Fit: Concordance, Expansion

Meta-inferences: Quantitative results reveal what appears, on the surface, to be discordance between descriptive statistics that show that many participants stopped trading sex because of their children, while a large majority of those who do not wish to quit had minor children in their care. Qualitative findings suggest that while having or being a caregiver of children is a motivator to exit, but simultaneously, it is a reason to continue in order to provide for the needs of their children. Qualitative findings also demonstrate that some of the motivation to quit may be out of fear of losing custody of their children due to drug and sex trade activity.

The role of children and caregiving on exiting status appears to cross multiple ecological levels. Material provision for children is tied to economic policies that do not ensure adequate financial stability or a safety net for families. Prevailing stigmatized attitudes and norms, criminalization of sex trading and drug activities, and resultant institutional policies, can lead to child welfare involvement (or fear thereof). Brooke stopped trading sex for this reason:

Now I'm just taking so much precautions because I can't lose my kids to this shit. I can't have them in the system how I was because my parents didn't fight for me. I'm going to fight for my kids. I just can't risk it. It's not worth it.

At the interpersonal and individual levels, children were a powerful motivating force in the women's lives. This was observed in the number of women who reported that children were a reason to exit, and "my child/ren" was also the most common response (68%) to an open-ended final survey question, which asked "what gives you hope or makes you laugh?" Interview participants spoke a great deal about their children (whether minors or adults) and grandchildren. They discussed their relationships, whether close or estranged, sharing concerns about their health and well-being and how they wanted to secure a good future for them. Ultimately, mothers made choices to either continue trading sex to provide for their children by whatever means necessary, or to exit in order to protect their children from any potential problems associated with their unhealthy substance use and/or sex trading, including collateral consequences. Caregiving for minor children may have mixed effects on exiting, potentially facilitating the motivation to exit while also impeding one's ability to exit due to increased financial burden.

Legal System and the Police

Though a small number of survey participants had no contact with the police or minimal to no involvement in the criminal legal system, the vast majority had some contact with police, court system officials (judges, prosecutors, public defenders), correctional officers, and/or probation or parole agents. In fact, 83.1% had ever been incarcerated (jail or prison), 47.9% had ever been ticketed for prostitution, and 83.3% had ever been arrested for any other offense. Some were arrested and detained as juveniles. This criminal legal system involvement has an impact on exiting from sex trading.

The criminalization of sex trading and other activities related to addiction, homelessness, poverty, and mental illness serves as a structural barrier to exiting. These existing problems are often compounded or exacerbated through the process of arrest, municipal citations, prosecution and sentencing, incarceration, probation and parole, and a criminal record, which result in collateral consequences. The criminal legal system increased economic burdens by

means of direct costs (e.g., fines and fees) that study participants could only pay by continuing to sell sex or that just accrue until they lead to harsher charges and convictions. Selena stated: “By the time I went to [prison] I had thirty-seven \$338 loitering and prostitution related tickets.” The economic burden is also felt in indirect costs, such as loss of current employment or housing, if incarcerated, and future opportunities for education, employment, housing, and more. Several respondents talked about the effects of a criminal record on employment. Danyelle, despite being a veteran with seniority for military jobs, was discouraged after attending job fairs, explaining, “I won’t be able to have nice jobs. My record is so horrible. I’ve been getting in trouble for a long time too.” Sharise had trouble finding housing due to her record: “It was hard for me to find a landlord to accept me, like ‘Hey, I trust you, you’re going to pay your rent.’”

Criminalization and an ever-present criminal record also affected freedom of movement in public spaces. Veronica explained that because of her arrest record, she continued to get ticketed by the police despite having quit trading sex two years prior. In frustration, she recounted how police assume that she is trying to solicit customers, when she is simply waiting for public transportation: “They say ‘oh, you’re always waiting at a bus stop. You’re waiting for somebody to pick you up.’” Criminal policies can further restrict people who have traded sex through “prostitution-free zones” or court-ordered injunctions. Selena related that 20 years ago a group of one hundred people were placed under a court-ordered injunction restricting their public presence in certain areas of the city:

There was certain blocks throughout Milwaukee, on [street names], that these women literally could never step foot on again or they would go to jail. When they did the injunction on them—they had these prostitutes in the courtroom—they allowed anybody from the community to come in and get up and speak against them and say whatever they wanted to say.

Kendra also discussed how her access to public spaces was restricted when she was put on a list of habitual prostitution offenders that was made public:

There was a lot of pushback from the community in Nevada because they put us on the news. They put us on the internet. They put us all over anything. Our faces, names, arrest charges, all that. They put us in the paper, everything. They publicly shamed us.

Becoming a target of the police and even community members because of one's criminal record, where one's physical presence in public spaces is grounds for arrest, increased the women's chances of being ticketed, arrested, detained, and incarcerated. The collateral consequences of this criminal response are potential immediate economic and housing losses, as well as a long criminal record that restricts future opportunities. Together, these add up to be an impediment to one's ability to exit.

These criminal processes also give abusers and sex traffickers leverage to manipulate and control their victims. Brooke's child's father controlled her by threatening to report her activities to the police: "He had to know when I go out of town, and he'd be, 'Oh you better give me some money or I'm going to call the police.' He just started doing little spiteful stuff." Sharise's trafficker exerted control and forced dependence by bonding her out to him when she went to jail:

The cops don't know when y'all locking us up. You all are messing up everything at home. They don't think about that. They don't think that when we get out of jail, we've got to face the consequences. We've got to get the money back, plus some...The more they [police] lock me up the more they're going to see me. Why? Because I just lost money getting bonded out. So, I've got to make that back and make that back [to trafficker].

Kendra also faced retaliation by her trafficker for being in jail, describing how once after being incarcerated for four months: "The day I got out, I got lashes, like 25 lashes." The criminal legal system never tried to identify her as a trafficking victim nor ensure that her rights were protected, explaining how her trafficker had a lawyer to represent her whenever she was

charged with prostitution offenses and incarcerated, but his purpose was always to serve the trafficker's interests. Criminal consequences for sex trading seem to increase the control of abusers and traffickers and leave them vulnerable to continued abuse and commercial sexual exploitation.

In addition, collateral consequences such as criminal records can create disruptions to the family unit, even into the future in the case of the impact of a criminal record on child welfare involvement. Brooke lived in fear of having her children taken out of her care. When talking about the controlling behavior of her child's father, she said: "Now he's to the point, he call CPS on me every time he get mad or every time I don't move the way he wants me to move. And they believe anything he say because my background." She felt that the child welfare system looked upon her unfavorably due to her criminal record, and her child's father was able to use the threat of child protective services as a tool of manipulation.

Racial, gender, class, age, and other types of discrimination also play a role in the way the legal system and police act as a barrier to exiting, particularly when these identities overlap and intersect. Further, these identities intersect with discrimination against people who sell sex and/or use drugs. Some participants discussed instances of racial profiling, and comments or actions toward them that were racist, transphobic, sexualized and misogynistic. For instance, one survey respondent shared that a police officer told her she was "just another n**** on the street." Multiple survey and interview participants discussed police calling them "hoes," "bitches," and other degrading names. Diana said, "they would ride down the street hollering, 'Go home, whore! Prostitute!'" When a police officer found the cash she was storing in her wig, Sharise was asked "how many blow jobs did you have to do to get this?" These racist, sexist, and anti-sex worker police behaviors affected their perception of and trust in the police, which in turn affect help-seeking behaviors when in crisis or seeking to leave a trafficker or exit from sex trading.

Interview participants also discussed fears or negative experiences when attempting to report to police (see Results Chapter 2) or testify in court about victimization of themselves or others. Women discussed being discouraged, dismissed, disrespected, left vulnerable to retaliation from a perpetrator, or criminally penalized. Brooke felt used and failed by the legal system, after testifying against her trafficker who had amassed substantial wealth through trafficking and could afford a good attorney. She explained:

I did testify against him. All his felonies got dropped and he wasn't charged with anything, not trafficking, not stabbing me, not intentional body harm, not anything. I wrote a letter to the judge. I testified, I came to court, I did all that...He had the highest felonies you can possibly have and walked away with nothing.

Brooke recounted how, later, the district attorney's office came looking for her to testify again because the same trafficker had thrown lighter fluid on another woman and her child:

And they wanted me to come testify on him. But I was like, shit, if y'all would have charged him the first time, he wouldn't even have had a chance to do this to somebody else. So yeah, I feel like the system does not help with women when we come forward and tell the truth and tell what's going on.

She also felt that the legal system did nothing to protect her against retaliation or help her start fresh on her own, despite her requests:

They just wanted me to testify and didn't help me do nothing. I said, "can y'all help me get my first month rent? Can y'all help me get on [state government cash assistance program]?" They didn't help me do squat shit...But they want that story.

Her fears came true later as the trafficker she testified against was able to locate her, break down her door, and assault her in her home, leaving her with injuries, scars, and constant fear.

Conversely, when the legal system protects and ensures the rights of victims, it can facilitate exiting and a way to heal from the trauma. In Taylor's case, a legal advocacy organization stepped in to help in seeking restitution against her trafficker. She stated: 'So I

went to court against him and I testified again on why I think I should get restitution and the judge granted it.” Some positive experiences with the criminal legal system included police pursuing a perpetrator, help getting away from a trafficker, and winning civil damages in court, which helped women achieve greater safety, improve their circumstances, and/or restore some level of faith in the system.

At the interpersonal level, the experiences with legal system players are also very impactful and can serve as either a facilitator or barrier to exiting, depending on the type of interaction and the way it was perceived. At the individual level, there is an internalization of these interactions/experiences as they contribute to the women’s sense of self-worth or value in the world, and their subsequent health and help-seeking behaviors. After Faith reported a non-sex trading related sexual assault, and identified the man’s mugshot, she was harshly dissuaded from testifying as she was told how all of her actions, background, and character would be questioned in court. Faith felt discouraged and disempowered: “I just wound up not even following through with it.” Results Chapter 2 discusses in great detail the women’s experiences with police and the effects of those experiences, with particular attention to the influence on exiting, and includes several joint display tables presenting these findings.

Access to Community Care and Resources

While there were some gaps in the community-based services that women sought, the vast majority of participants (95.8%) were connected to a program or service of some kind, including case management (65%), counseling/therapy (54.2%), drop-in programs (36.1%), SUD treatment (22.2%), shelter (22.2%), and a range of other services. The high rate of social service connections was likely due to sampling bias, as I focused on recruiting study participants through community-based programs. Nevertheless, this access to community services seemed to be a positive element in their lives, as qualitative findings pointed to community-based services as a means to facilitate exiting. For instance, Melanie’s regular visits to a drop-in center was the first step to exiting. She was able to pinpoint the day she was ready

and began to receive assistance toward quitting sex trading and achieving sobriety: “One day on a Tuesday, I just couldn't get high, I was trying to prostitute all day. I just couldn't and I came in [to the program] and I said, ‘it's time.’” Conversely, Melanie shared an example of how community services may be lacking, demonstrating how they can act as a barrier to exiting: “I think the detox facilities here, they're fucking crappy. It's worse than being in jail. Well, it's like being in jail. It's terrible. Like the shit they feed you, what they make you wear, how they make you feel.”

At a structural level, access to community care and resources is affected by how resources and funding are prioritized and distributed. Stigmatized and criminalized groups of people, such as those who use drugs or trade sex, may be deemed as undeserving of care and resources. For instance, Diana was dismayed when she saw public comments online that were in opposition to providing counseling and other services to those in need, by those who perceive that they are paying for other people to get help; she questioned the idea of “who's worth it and who's not?” This negative public sentiment (e.g., attitudes that deem some worthy of help and others deemed unworthy) can lead to denied access, individuals feeling forced to hide their activities or feeling as if they have been set up for failure due to unrealistic expectations, or even harmful or punitive consequences.

For some, the systemic failures in access to care and resources began early as minors when they were abused, ran away or were kicked out of their family homes, lived in foster care or group homes, or as they transitioned out of the child welfare system. Brooke often ran away from home as a teenager, so her parents “signed their rights over to the state,” and she ended up in a juvenile detention facility despite not having committed any crimes.

I became state property. I was 16 years old, so no one wanted to adopt a 16-year-old girl who had issues... When they don't have an open house or an open group home, they send you back to the detention center. I didn't have anybody that was communicating with me throughout my family. You still have to put money on your phone for you to get

the collect calls. So, I didn't have anyone that was helping, so once I got out, I would get on a run.

Given the high rate of survey participants (and stories from interview participants) who had run away, were kicked out of their homes, were wards of the state, and/or who were victims of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) as minors (48.6% of survey participants and 9 out of 16 interview participants had a history of CSE), there were clear systemic failures in access to care and resources for youth in the community. For instance, Taylor discussed going one from one abusive home to the next and running away from foster care or group homes as a minor. This made her vulnerable to traffickers: "So basically, I was taken from a sweet kind home with a little abuse and I was put into a survival mode where I had to survive and that's how I was surviving." These lost opportunities for prevention and intervention with youth act as a barrier to exiting.

At the institutional and community level, women who trade sex are affected by program policies that may be overly restrictive (e.g., no contact with family or strict curfews), lacking in trauma-informed practices or understanding of prostitution or trafficking dynamics, and staff who did not understand how to address the needs of women with complex trauma and a history of trading sex. Some felt that services were siloed, e.g., drug treatment services did not address other related needs or problems. Some programs were lacking a harm reduction approach. In Brooke's case, after getting out of a halfway house, "I signed up for this program [name] and they was paying my rent. But once they knew I started working the streets, they stopped helping me. So, then I just really, full-fledged started hoeing." Some survey and interview participants temporarily stopped sex trading to abide by the rules of a shelter or residential program, though they still had economic and other reasons to continue trading sex.

Others wanted to move beyond harm reduction to intervention or holistic healing. Nina indicated that some mobile outreach programs were lacking:

What they're doing is they're just feeding us, they're giving us needles, they're giving us condoms. Yeah, you're being safe, but you're not helping the problem. Really, you're not.

You're just kind of giving us permission, that's how I see it. It is kind of smart though. I always use condoms, I never had a problem with that. But I just think they should have more programs out there that just come to us and help us...[Providing] resources, they can help us in a different way. Counseling and resources and the hope—there's no hope out there.

Conversely, many spoke of various programs that helped them in significant ways, whether by helping them with material resources to stay housed, assistance to vacate their criminal records, and ongoing case management, support, and genuine care. Kiana came to a program to speak with her advocate/case manager, “Just to talk, get stuff off my chest. I come for therapy for my kids, they come to therapy. I come here just to get away sometimes, just to clear my mind, clear my thoughts. It's just peaceful here.”

Interview participants often spoke about seeing a therapist, and what they gained from therapy. Though only approaching statistical significance (Omnibus Pearson chi-square=4.995, $p=.082$), being connected to a therapist or counselor was associated with differences in exiting outcomes: 68.8% of those who had exited were seeing a mental health professional, compared to 40% of those who were not wishing to exit and 44% of those who were wishing to quit. No other type of social service connection came close to statistical significance; this quantitative finding is worth consideration due to the smaller sample and its practical significance, which was corroborated with qualitative data related to therapy/counseling.

Table 6

Joint Display on Social Service Connections, Therapy, and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative	Integrated
Total Sample: 95.8% Connected to a program or service, including: case management (65%); counseling/therapy (54.2%); drop-in	Tasha: I had to do intensive inpatient first, so I did four months of that. Then I graduated my program, and I got into outpatient in April. I'm still in outpatient now, but I'll be graduating in August. And	Fit: Concordant/Expansive Meta-inferences: Access to community-based social services and supports was key for participants to facilitate exiting and improve

<p>programs (36.1%); SUD treatment (22.2%); shelter (22.2%).</p> <p>% Seeing a therapist/counselor by group: 68.8% Exited 40.0% Not wishing to exit 44.0% Wishing to quit</p> <p>Omnibus Pearson chi-square =4.995, $p=.082$</p>	<p>then working, and I'm in sober living, so things are looking up.</p> <p>Nyasha: I get support from outside resources. As far as my psychiatrist and my psychologist, and [names of programs].</p> <p>Lisa: When I go see my psychiatrist or my therapist, I'll stop in on a group or something like that. Just to get me re-focused on the positive stuff that is going on... But I beat myself up a lot. Past stuff that I can't fix. My therapist said I shouldn't dwell on stuff like that but it's like I want to go back and try to fix them things and I can't.</p>	<p>their health and well-being, and the quality and nature of programming and staff were equally important. Those who had exited were more likely to be seeing a mental health professional, which, according to qualitative data, may be a facilitator of exiting over the long-term to address mental health symptoms, negative thoughts, and coping mechanisms, as well as to develop healthy behaviors and coping skills.</p>
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Interview participants, such as Tasha, spoke about stopping use of drugs and trading sex by means of helpful community-based services, and being on a path to recovery (see quote in Table 6). They discussed these helpful resources and ongoing care from formal service providers as integral on their path to a better life. Diana, who was living in a 2-year residential program, explained:

What do we need? We need more programs like this where you are able to take the time to work on you without any issues, even sleeping, bathing. Your basic needs need to be taken care of...I'm able to buy food because I have a job. They gave me a job, right? So, I can feed myself.

When asked what was going well in their lives, several mentioned specific programs, mental health and social service providers, and community advocates that were helpful to them. Selena stated that she gained a lot from the services she was receiving, to the point that she was going both for services and as a peer support: "I spend a lot of time here, at [program name], almost like a volunteer now." Lisa drew on peer support to learn about a helpful program:

Somebody off the street, she was on the street... I was talking to her and she was like, "You could go with me to this place." I'm like, "Okay." And I came and I got to know the resources and stuff here. I like the people here and I been coming ever since.

At the relational level, community care and resources were most beneficial when the care provider was perceived as authentic, non-judgmental, safe, compassionate, and a good listener. Melanie discussed two different counselors while in SUD treatment—one who encouraged her and believed in her ability to succeed and another who treated her as if she was bound to fail. Melanie felt that the approach in many treatment facilities was wrong and provided an example: "‘Oh you need to do this, you need to do that.’ Or ‘this is the way to do it.’ No, no. ‘How can I help you become a better person? What do you feel that would help you?’" Melanie contended that a better approach would be to listen and ask questions such as, "What led them there? What got them there?"

Faith was able to assess if someone is safe to share her experiences with, and the impact it can have:

Because when you feel alone, or ain't nobody going to understand you, or people will judge you—and I like that you, your body language says everything. You don't look down, or your body language don't, and that could mean life or death for somebody.

Access to safe, sensitive, appropriate, and adequate care facilitated exiting, as many women talked about the instrumental resources and support they received to stop trading sex and/or abusing substances. But when access to care was denied, unsafe, inappropriate, or inadequate, this served as an impediment to exiting or improvement of health and well-being.

Stigma

Stigma, though unaccounted for in the quantitative data (because there were no survey questions included on this topic), was a pervasive theme in the qualitative data, at many levels. Stigma affected participants' ability to access formal and informal support and led to feelings of shame and self-blame, and possibly self-destructive behaviors.

At the structural level, stigma is reflected in the criminalization of selling sex and other laws and policies, as well as in broad societal and cultural norms and attitudes. Kiana identified the way people look down on people who trade sex and showed resistance against the societal stigma of selling sex when she explained:

I feel like prostitution is a way of living. Just like they have their jobs and what they do, everybody can't get out here and get a job as easy as them, or can't get the job that they have, or can't get a job that pays the way that they pay. I feel like if you're not harming anyone, what is the thing? Sex is legal. We can have sex all we want. So what's the difference from us getting paid to have sex as if it was a job versus us just having sex for free? I'm not seeing a difference at all.

At the community or institutional level, participants felt that different institutions and the community perceived and treated them in a stigmatized manner within these settings. For many, it affected their decisions to seek help. Melanie anticipated being labeled, judged, and treated poorly, so she refrained from accessing care after being victimized:

Like when that happened with me getting raped. Of course I wanted to say something, of course I wanted to go to the hospital, but I was too afraid of what the outcome was or they wouldn't believe me or things like that. So of course you don't because you feel like nobody's going to listen because you're just a junkie off the streets.

Selena talked about community stigma, repeating during her interview, that “we are not garbage,” and wanting to maintain respect in her community:

I don't want to have that stigma. I quit prostituting in the beginning of December. I haven't prostituted since then. I don't want that stigma because this is where I live. Even when I was still using drugs back then and prostituting, I would never go out and leave my house until at least midnight when my neighbors were asleep. I never did anything in the daytime. I live there. I don't need to be kicked out. I don't want them making complaints. I don't want them to not want their children to talk to me and things like that.

Similarly, at the community level, Kiana mentioned that one negative aspect of trading sex is the stigma, “What if you ever see this person in public or if you're mutual friends with someone else. Would he talk? Would he say anything?” Nina worried that she might obtain a job where her co-workers or supervisor might be former customers. In addition, several survey and interview participants spoke of managing their street sex trading locations and hours in such a way so as not to be seen by family, friends, or people they knew in the community.

At the relational level, many participants were afraid of being outed or had to deal with disdainful and shaming family members, friends, or partners, which left them feeling unsupported and alone. Veronica felt judged by her family, rather than treated with compassion and offered assistance to improve her circumstances:

‘Cause you know for a fact if your family knew about it, they'll turn around and judge you every single day. ‘You're worthless, you're a whore.’ You don't want to hear that. You want to hear sympathy. You want to hear ‘Oh my God, why didn't you tell us? You should have come to us.’ You want support, not be judged and pushed back out onto the street.

Others discussed lacking the kind of genuine support and love that they would like to have from an intimate partner due to stigma related their sex trading history. Selena stated:

They're not going to want to make you their wife or the mother of their kids. They're always going to just want you to be a secret... Because of course they're all going to want to sleep with you and have sex with you and do all kinds of crazy shit with you, but they're not going to want to go shopping with you, out to eat with you or to church with you, you know, take you home.

Faith had been trying to hide her sex trade and drug activities from her family, and especially did not want to be outed to her children. She tearfully recalled an incident when she was being arrested on the street and her mom and her kids happened to ride past and see: “I can remember my 30-year-old being nine, asking me, ‘Momma, why is you standing on the

corner and getting high?” For Veronica, the stigma that her children or grandchildren might have to endure if she continued trading sex contributed to the reasons she quit. She didn't want them to hear, for example:

“Rumor, hey, your mother died of AIDS or being a prostitute” or whatever. They don't know. I figure what they don't know can't hurt them, but for me, if I did keep on going doing what I'm doing, they are gonna know.

At the individual level, the stigma was often internalized, leading many of the women to feel self-blame, shame, and lack of self-worth. Lisa felt that the worst part of trading sex was, “Feeling dirty at the end. That was my big pet peeve. I always felt disgusted with myself afterwards.” Faith spoke frequently of blaming and punishing herself, and of the shame she felt:

I went through a lot of stuff out there because I was embarrassed to be out there. I was hoeing in the shadows... I put myself through so much out there because I feel like I was punishing myself. Because I knew better, to be doing what I was doing, but I didn't understand what the grips of addiction was.

Maya explained the feelings that arise and are internalized due to stigma, despite her efforts to create a better life for herself, and a subsequent numbing and isolating reaction:

Soon as I feel like I'm getting there and I'm doing good, and I feel like I'm a woman and I'm something, here comes somebody bringing me down, reminding me who I am, not who I was, but who I am. They'll say something that bring up emotions that I felt when I was out here [in the streets]. And those emotions and feelings is all a part of who that person was. So, you just bringing that person more and more to the surface to where I just don't give no fuck. Fuck it. Don't nobody fuck with me anyway.

Stigma, at the structural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels, appeared to be a barrier to exiting. Public stigma hampered help-seeking and access to services, because of women's previous experiences being stigmatized or anticipation of a stigmatized response. It also had a destructive effect on relationships, where friends, family, and intimate partners were

unsupportive and alienating. Stigma also contributed to feelings of shame and low self-worth, which appeared to have the effect of pushing some participants to engage in more risky or self-destructive behavior. While the fear of being outed due to stigma or a general desire to avoid stigma (for themselves or their children) may have prompted or increased a motivation to exit among some participants, the effects of stigma generally did not appear to facilitate the exiting process.

Social Support

The importance of social support as a facilitator of exiting and as a means of improving one's life was a common theme and proved to be statistically significant between exiting outcome groups. A lack of social support was viewed as a barrier to exiting. Social support could come from the community, family members, peers, or intimate partners, thus landing within both ecological levels of community and institutions and interpersonal relationships. As Lisa clearly stated: "I'm big on support because I didn't have that at all. My mom wasn't supporting me at the time. My dad, he wasn't there because my dad stayed in Chicago. I didn't have really anybody."

The joint display below provides results from both sets of data and integrated findings related to social support. There was a significant difference in group rank means between groups, with those who had exited with a much higher level of social support than both non-exited groups (those who were wishing to exit and those not wishing to exit). Qualitative data reflects how and why social support is so important. Kiana, who was still occasionally trading sex, indicated that she was lacking support due to her family members having their own emotional or economic troubles and were thus unable to offer her the support she needed:

My mom died a few years ago so now it's really only me and two of my sisters. It's just been a down spiral for me and my family. Everybody's really more of emotionally supporting theirselves right now or physically supporting theirselves.

Table 7

Joint Display on Social Support and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative
Total Sample: 12.4 mean social support score (range from 4-20) Standardized score 53.13	Theme: <i>Having/needing/lacking social (informal) support</i>
Group rank mean by group: 44.88 Exited (mean 14.4) 29.32 Wishing to exit (mean 10.8) 30.6 Not wishing to exit (mean 11.1)	Diana [exited]: You need somebody who is going to be consistent in what they say. You know, they're going to take you to your doctor's appointment, they're going to take you to therapy if you need to. I got a ride to therapy like for the first month or so because I didn't need to get on the bus. I didn't need to be exposed to alcohol. I didn't need to be exposed to old people [former peers]. I didn't need to be exposed to none of that because it's too easy to fall. It's too easy, so you need all the support that you can get to get a few days under your belt until you can get some clarity in your thinking.
Omnibus Kruskal-Wallis test: $H=9.344, p=.009$: If I have feelings like I do now, to use, because I was talking about it, then I know what to do. It's good to talk about it, and being honest. I know who to talk to.
<hr/> Integrated Findings <hr/>	
Fit: Concordance	
Meta-inferences: Quantitative and qualitative data show the importance of social support, which makes a difference for those who have quit (more support) and those who have not quit (less support). The qualitative data describes how social support facilitates recovery from SUDs and provides material, instrumental, and emotional support to follow a new path. A lack of social support left participants feeling alienated and isolated, and they did not have the kind of assistance that may naturally come from a supportive social network. Social support for all groups was relatively low.	

Interview participants shared their experiences of lacking social support throughout their lives and how it left them feeling isolated and unworthy of love and care. In contrast, women also shared the work they did to rebuild relationships and seek out support from family members, friends/peers, intimate partners, recovery and other support groups, and community advocates. Danyelle was planning her exit from sex trading, admitting that she did not have family support but could find support in other places:

I probably could use more of my resources, maybe come to groups [at program], kind of be here more. Find groups in the community... I need to get into a schedule and have something to do every day and have positive people to be around.

Melanie reflected on the difference in her life before and after exiting and achieving sobriety:

At that time, I had no support. And support is a huge thing... So when you're coming off the drugs, there's so much you have to build back... You have to build relationships back with people. Because like now me and my sister, I have the best relationship again.

These relationships helped them achieve and maintain positive life changes.

Though social support was lower for those who did not wish to exit than for those who had exited, a slightly higher level of social support for those who do not wish to exit as compared to those who do wish to quit, may help to explain why they want to continue trading sex. About 22% of survey participants endorsed “support or social network in the life” as a reason to continue trading sex. Danyelle provided an example of the type of mutual support she experienced with peers who had been trafficked but now trade sex independently: “It's like a community...And we'll all be struggling, need to make money, and we'll come up with the money we have, put it together and go to Illinois or Iowa or somewhere close.” She explained that they all make their own money trading sex, but they cooperatively pool resources: “Then we put it on gas, we go half on condoms.” Most of the qualitative data tends to support that social support was lacking for non-exited participants and for the exited group prior to exiting, but further exploration of the context of social support for those who do not wish to exit may be warranted. Social support appears to be crucial as a facilitator of exiting and self-improvement, for those who want to quit or have quit, while the lack of social support is a barrier to exiting.

Trauma Exposure

The level of trauma exposure among participants was extraordinarily high compared to that of the general population, though typical for individuals who trade sex on the streets. Survey participants had an average of 11.4 types of lifetime adverse experiences endorsed out of 14 possible types of adversity. The lowest number of trauma exposures was six, and 21.7% endorsed all 14 items. Interview data similarly found a high level of adversity and trauma, particularly childhood sexual and emotional abuse; unhealthy substance use, mental illness and incarceration of childhood caregivers or adult intimate partners; sexual and physical assault

(often with weapons involved); being drugged or held captive; and various layers of complex abuse associated with intimate partner violence (IPV) and sex trafficking. There was also discussion of traumatic loss of loved ones, including losing custody of children. The stories of violence and victimization were laced throughout and often dominated interviews.

The pervasiveness, frequency, and intensity of violence can be framed as an aspect of misogyny, a broader societal problem, that affected study participants. One effect of this misogynistic violence is that it impeded help-seeking and exiting from sex trading. Danyelle discussed the attitudes she has observed regarding sexual assault of people who sell sex: “Some people look at it like, ‘How are you going to call the police and you're selling your body?’” Veronica detailed the recent deaths of women who traded sex (“there were six prostitutes in the last three months”) that presented as homicides (e.g., one woman with a gunshot wound and arson, one overdose with multiple needles, another woman torched inside a dumpster), but were not investigated as such. She felt there was a lack of concern for their lives, stating what she perceived from police as an attitude of “when a prostitute gets killed, it’s ‘oh well, less paperwork,’” as if they were disposable and their death unworthy of a proper criminal investigation.

Some laws and policies make it unsafe to report victimization, particularly when the victimization occurred while engaging in criminalized or prohibited activities. Women spoke of being arrested instead of helped or taken to a hospital upon reporting their own victimization (see Results chapter 2). Choosing to report being sexually assaulted while using drugs or selling sex can also lead to loss of services or resources, e.g., being kicked out of a shelter, losing public assistance, or punitive child welfare consequences.

In cases of trafficking, despite growing awareness and beneficial changes to policy, there is still a lack of awareness and identification of trafficking victims, as well as prevailing attitudes contending that many victims were complicit in their being trafficked. “Being forced or coerced to trade sex” was endorsed by 40.3% of survey participants as a reason for entering,

and several interview participants detailed the many barriers to leaving their traffickers, including unhelpful interactions with the police and countless episodes where there was no attempt to identify them as victims of trafficking. For example, Sharise felt that she was never treated as a victim despite being trafficked, saying, “Understand, they are out to arrest us, versus assist us.” She indicated that police communicated to her: “Oh it's your choice, you can leave the game when you want to. You can leave that pimp. You just don't want to because you're lazy. You don't want to work a job. You don't want to pay taxes.”

Conversely, when participants had contact with designated, trained officers within trafficking units, they discussed helpful encounters and even instances of receiving protection and a means of escape from a trafficker. Taylor's trafficker was being prosecuted with her cooperation, which she felt safe offering because of a long-standing relationship with police personnel who knew and understood her history: “I trust this detective because I've talked to this detective, I've known this detective for years. He's been there for me, so I talked to him.” These kinds of experiences and relationships with police were more rare, but participants called for this to be the norm as a means to increase their safety and hold perpetrators accountable.

There is also a structural level component in regard to the trauma of IPV and its connection to sex trading. IPV was reported by some survey and interview participants as a reason for starting to trade sex because it enabled them to secure financial freedom to leave the abusive relationship or survive on their own after leaving. This reveals the economic structures and missing safety net that leave women vulnerable to abuse and dependent on sex trading to escape. Nina was in an abusive relationship when she first began trading sex through an escort service, stating that as the money started rolling in, “it was a way for me to get out of the controlling relationship I was in.” Others experienced economic pressure within abusive relationships and were encouraged to trade sex and hand over their sex trading profits to their partners. As Diana explained, “every dime I had, he had to have.”

At the interpersonal and individual level, the high level of trauma that others inflicted on them led some to enter into sex trading and exacerbated mental and behavioral health problems that can impede exiting. Many survey participants explained this in open-ended responses about the reasons they started trading sex. Interview participants, such as Tasha, explained how sexual abuse led her into trading sex:

It started when I was a kid. My biological father, I was molested sexually by him a lot, and I was told not to tell, and then that happened from the age of six to 16, and after that it was just like, in my mind, that's how I was supposed to live. So, I was very promiscuous at 14, and liking older men. It really got out of control after 16.

Violence exposure can motivate some to want to exit. Some survey participants endorsed 'victimization of self or others' as a reason to exit. This victimization may have resulted in debilitating injuries or might have been a tipping point or part of a culmination of experiences leading to a desire to exit.

The joint display in Table 8 presents the quantitative, qualitative and integrated findings related to trauma exposure and how it relates to entering into or exiting from sex trading.

Table 8

Joint Display on Trauma Exposure and Exiting

Reasons to start (from survey)	Trauma exposure	Reasons to quit
Total Sample: 38.9% Ran away/kicked out of home as a minor	Total Sample: Average of 11.4 types of adverse experiences (14 item scale, lowest score=6)	Total Sample: 46.4% I was victimized
Open-ended survey responses (N=72):	21.7% Endorsed all 14 items	44.9% Witnessed or heard about other people involved in trading sex who were injured or killed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childhood abuse leading to: running away, mental health or drug use problems, confusion about sex and love, or taking back power via money for sex (instead of taken for free) • IPV (e.g., as a means to leave or as a means to survive after leaving) • Lured/recruited by traffickers outside group homes, detention centers, and alternative schools as a minor 	Interview Sample: Codes: Violence and Victimization; Effects of Trauma/High Stress; [certain types of] Negative Experiences with Police (see Results Chapter 2)	Interview Sample: Code: Stopped due to violence exposure and victimization

-
- Death/loss escalating mental health and drug problems and street life/sex trading
-

Qualitative code and quotes: Stopped due to violence and victimization

Veronica: It was a kicker for me, I mean 'cause I'd seen all these deaths and everything, killings, and all this stuff for stupid reasons, drive-bys. What really inspired me to stop is that you know I never thought about death. I mean I'd seen death and everything, but it never really focused on me. It didn't really hit home for me until I got raped for three hours and stabbed and shot three times.

Maya: Everything is done. We did our deal. I got the money. I'm finna get out the car. He dragged me all the way to the back and just gets to choking me and choking me. And I swear to God, this is why I believe in God so much, I don't know what happened. Literally, I just saw white, and next thing I know, I was sitting on my mama porch. ...And then the person that I talked to about it to before, [advocate] called me two days later saying that that person in that two-door Monte Carlo, that young looking dude, just shot a teen in the back trying to run from his car. And they still ain't catch him. I was afraid to even be at my mama house. I feel like I put the whole house in danger. If he see me, he going to want to kill me, hurt me, so I left. What more could I do? I had to leave. I felt like I had to. I left, and I told myself that God helped me through that first situation, and I'm not going to put myself in another one. I literally stopped everything. Around that time, I got heavy back into [program]...

Integrated Findings

Fit: Concordant

Meta-inferences: The high level of trauma exposure documented in the survey data was also evident in the interview data. It had an effect on women's desire to quit or resulted in exiting (even if temporarily), especially when the traumatic incident was life-threatening. For many, trauma exposure was ongoing and most traumatic events did not result in an immediate exit, but these events seemed to have had a cumulative effect that made trading sex less appealing and quitting more desirable. Trauma exposure may have increased motivation to exit, but did nothing to facilitate women's ability to exit.

Violence and victimization at the hands of traffickers presented a significant form of trauma exposure and associated symptoms. Like other forms of trauma, it seemed to lead to mental and behavioral health problems that impeded exiting. Trafficking, however, much like IPV, impacted the women's agency and safety, as traffickers often wield enormous power and control over the lives of their victims. The joint display below (Table 9) presents quantitative and qualitative results pertaining to trafficking—as a means of entry or reason to continue or exit, and includes reasons (in italics) that may or may not represent coercion by others. The joint display also incorporates results related to survey questions that asked if participants ever gave a cut (or all) of their profits from selling sex to someone and what kind of person received those

profits. These questions helped to identify situations where the person may not perceive any force or coercion or where the arrangement to share profits may have been more consensual (e.g., a lookout or roommate).

Table 9

Joint Display on Sex Trafficking and Exiting

Reasons to start	Reasons to continue	Cut of profits
Total Sample: 40.3% Someone coerced/forced me	Total Sample: 36.1% Someone was forcing or manipulating me to sell sex	Total Sample: 65.3% (47) Ever gave a cut or all their profits from selling sex to someone else
38.9% Ran away/kicked out of home as a minor	23.6% Family, friends or partner pressured me to keep selling sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.6% Currently giving a cut/all profits to someone else
35.2% Friends or family were involved and introduced me to sex trading	9.7% Family or friends encouraged me to keep selling sex	Who received profits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over half: more than one type of person Pimp (17); significant other (16); someone who provided transportation (9); someone they got drugs from (8); friend (8); roommate (8); lookout/protection (5); family member (4); bullies (3), etc.
Reasons to quit (quantitative and qualitative)		
34.8% Got away from person who was forcing or manipulating me to trade sex (N=72)		
Code: Stopped because got away from trafficker		
Code and excerpts: Barriers to leaving trafficker		
<p>Kendra: He used to tell us stuff like he had friends in high places. He was friends with cops. He was friends with low life sleazeball kind of guys that'll put hits out on your families and kill your families and stuff. Mind you, he had my ID, you understand, and all of this. He made himself always to be like this omnipotent person. When you think that about somebody, you don't want to play with that kind of person, because you think they can do anything, and they have enough money to do anything.</p>		
<p>Taylor: With [trafficker name], I left him alone for a little bit for like two weeks and then he found me and followed me to my house and then got out the car and kind of proceeded to beat me up until I said that I was going to go back with him.</p>		
<p>Maya: I had a job doing whatever the hell he told me. He got to locking me in a room. Yep. I got locked in a room. This n**** put a padlock on the door from the outside.</p>		
<p>Sharise: And you can't run away because he's going to find you. He knows where your momma stay at, your grandma stay at. Why? Because he send them money. So if you do choose to leave you just got to choose to go with another pimp. But the ass whoopings, the emotional beat downs, the mental beat downs, the spiritual beat downs. I mean he just had our souls in his hands, literally. We was just puppets.</p>		
Integrated Findings		
Fit: Concordant		

Meta-inferences: The quantitative and qualitative findings appear to align, as experiences of trafficking were common, and the individuals to whom women gave their profits were not always what the general public perceives as a trafficker. Coercive and exploitative relationships with family members or intimate partners were found in both sets of data. Though leaving a trafficker was possible, it came with great risks to their safety (and that of their families in some cases) and their experiences were layered with multiple levels of control that constrained their agency. In addition, fewer respondents reported leaving their trafficker as a reason for quitting sex trading than the number who indicated some level of trafficking in their history, pointing to the continuation of sex trading activity for some women.

While women who are sex trafficked face many of the same barriers to exiting as those who trade sex independently, they are confronted with several other layers of control—both physical and psychological—that are impediments to leaving. Attempting to leave can feel impossible or can be a harrowing experience that may fail, placing a trafficked woman and her family members or children in grave danger. The psychological control may be even more profound, as most trafficked interview participants attested to the kind of emotional, mental, and spiritual “beat downs” that Sharise described.

Leaving a trafficker does not always mean also exiting all sex trade activities. The quantitative results show that a smaller percentage ever exited sex trading due to leaving their trafficker (34.8%) compared to those who began or continued sex trading due to force or coercion (40.3% and 36.1%, respectively). The qualitative data helps to explain this discrepancy, as all but one of the formerly trafficked participants continued to trade sex independently (if temporarily) after leaving a trafficker. This was likely due to some of the positive aspects of selling sex (e.g., fast access to cash, good money) and the other existing barriers to exiting sex trading. As 19-year-old Maya explained:

It was a point where I did it by myself. It was a point where I got away from men, period. And it's like I was doing it by myself for some time because I didn't have any job experience... You know how many jobs turned me down?... And on top of that, I'm a felon. I was on probation... It's so hard. It's like I'm set up. I feel set up.

Trauma Symptoms

The stories of violence and trauma were endless, and most participants identified how it led to trauma symptoms. Faith recounted a horrifying incident that was set within a series of traumatic events. After already once being raped by a man at gunpoint in an alley,

The same guy got me twice, he raped me for four hours in an abandoned garage on [street intersection], and he told me, he said, "Every time I see you, I'm going to get you, every time I see you." It was a really, really bad, bad time for me. I had lost my mom, I had gave up because my kids was gone, and I was going through the PTSD.

Many spoke of ongoing victimization, which led to trauma symptoms, such as becoming hypervigilant, in order to maintain some safety.

I would go to sleep with my clothes on, and then when I'd wake up, my clothes would be off, and this old man just over me, and I'm just waking up. I'm all frantic and stuff, like, oh my God, and I'd be mad at myself, like, damn, I shouldn't have fell asleep, but I was tired. I needed some sleep, so he told me, whichever—multiples of them did it to me—but they'd be like, "you can rest here, you good." This and that. They'd wait till I go to sleep and then violate me, so I wouldn't go to sleep. I had to stay up.

Nyesha explained that due to childhood and adulthood sexual trauma, she dissociated during sex: "That's what I've had to do, disassociate. Take myself out the room, period. I'm there, but I'm not in the brain." In both of these cases, these were logical responses to prevent physical and/or emotional harm but may have lingering, long-term effects.

Considering the high level of trauma exposure, often interpersonal, complex, ongoing, and unresolved, 87% screened positive for PTSD. Many participants spoke of the ways that trauma led to symptoms of extreme anger, guilt, hypervigilance, numbing, dissociation, anxiety, depression, and self-destructive behaviors. The joint display below (Table 9) provides quantitative data showing the prevalence of PTSD among participants and the statistically significant differences in group mean ranks for PC-PTSD scores, with those who had not exited

(both wishing to exit and not wishing to exit) having higher average scores (i.e., more types of PTSD symptoms). This corresponds with qualitative codes and themes that reflect women's the way trauma has affected them. Nina's quote demonstrates how SUD and other addictions are often borne out of exposure to trauma and unaddressed trauma symptoms, which helps to explain how the effects of trauma can act as a barrier to exiting.

Table 10

Joint Display of Trauma Symptoms and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative	Integrated Findings
<p>Total Sample: 87% screened positive for PTSD (PC-PTSD score of 3 or higher) Range 0-5</p> <p>Mean PC-PTSD score by group and mean ranks: Exited (mean 3.3, mean rank 28.05) Not wishing to exit (mean 4.3, mean rank 43.47) Wishing to exit (mean 4.4, mean rank 43.14)</p> <p>Omnibus Kruskal-Wallis test: $H=10.807, p=.005$.</p>	<p>Code: <i>Effects of and dealing with trauma and stress (trauma reactions and PTSD)</i></p> <p>Nina: We're all addicted because we're running from something, we're trying to hide our feelings. You didn't wake up, you didn't get born this way. We had some traumatic episode happen to us at some point, we needed to escape our reality, so we needed to mask our feelings. Because we all have these conditions, and they're not diagnosed, we don't know what we have, we just know we're not feeling right. We know that something is not going right in our brain and we need to fix it. So, the only way to fix it is to soothe it. Drink, I don't know, get high. Some have eating disorders, some have sex disorders. There's something that's feeding our need to pacify that inner problem we got going on.</p>	<p><u>Fit</u>: Concordant, Expansion</p> <p><u>Meta-inferences</u>: While each of the three groups' mean PTSD scores reflect positive screens for PTSD, those not wishing to exit and those wishing to exit have higher average scores in relation to women who exited. Those who had exited had lower PTSD scores on average, thus fewer symptoms. The association between fewer PTSD symptoms and exiting shows that less severe trauma symptoms may facilitate exiting, though directionality is unknown. Nina and others expressed awareness of their trauma and the potential effects, how it contributed to their mental health and substance use problems. The link here shows how trauma symptoms can lead to behavioral health problems that may precipitate trading sex and/or make exiting from trading sex difficult, but also that exiting from sex trading may allow for a reduction in PTSD.</p>

It appears that trauma exposure occurs often, both before engaging in and during sex trading; associated trauma symptoms may precipitate entry into sex trading and/or make exiting more challenging. This may be due to ongoing trauma occurring while trading sex and using

drugs. Being exited from trading sex may confer more safety, thereby reducing trauma symptoms. Fewer trauma symptoms among those who had exited suggests that increased trauma symptoms are an impediment to exiting, while fewer trauma symptoms may facilitate exiting and/or trauma symptoms may decrease as a result of exiting.

Mental Health

Considering the extensive trauma and adversity faced by survey participants, a high rate of mental health disorders compared to the general population is not surprising. Based on a brief screening, 69.4% screened positive for general anxiety disorder and 55.6% screened positive for depression. In addition, many reported their mental health diagnoses. Survey participants had a mean of 1.5 known diagnoses, with the most common being depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar, and schizophrenia/schizoaffective/unspecified psychosis. Many interview participants discussed their mental health, naming the disorders or symptoms and the impact on their lives. Lisa said, "I always have dealt with depression. People with depression they a lot of times second guess they-self. Like you're not good enough or you're not worthy of being in the world and stuff like that." Nina elaborated on her mental health:

My anxiety is through the roof. And I learned, later, that I have post-traumatic stress disorder. They got me on some medication, it's an antidepressant plus anxiety. Which by the second week, they doubled it, because my anxiety has not gone down. And I hate it, because it [anxiety] controls your life.

For some, their mental health disorders caused a downward spiraling effect. Melanie explained how a traumatic loss led to a deep depression, then heroin addiction, loss of her home, and loss of custody of her children, until she was trading sex on the streets. She stated:

When my dad died, I just went downhill... My mind was like, I just want to self-medicate myself because I was so depressed. I didn't even want to be alive and I didn't care about my kids, I didn't care about myself, I didn't care about nothing because I was so lost. And the minute I shot up heroin I thought that it changed everything. At the moment, I thought

like all my problems went away... And then it went into me losing my children, me losing my home. Before I lost my home, I started prostituting in my house because I didn't want to work... So I started prostituting on [street name]... And just became homeless and started prostituting and up for five, six days straight, just getting high.

The following joint display (Table 11) shows the high rate of depression and anxiety among survey participants, and the differences in depression and anxiety scores between those who had exited (lower average score) and both groups who had not exited (those who wished to exit and not wishing to exit had higher average scores). These quantitative results are compared with qualitative data examining mental health problems in interview participants.

Table 11

Joint Display of Mental Health and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative
Total Sample: 55.6% Screened positive for depression 3.07 Mean score on depression subscale of PHQ-4 (Range 0-6)	Code: <i>Health problems (mental, physical)</i> <u>Nyesha [exited]</u> : I try to keep myself motivated, but I know at some point I'm going to get depressed and at some point I'm not going to be there [at job]. I just know this because that's just how it works with the depression.
69.4% Screened positive for anxiety 3.86 Mean score on anxiety subscale of PHQ-4 (Range 0-6)	
Depression score group mean ranks: Exited (mean 2.4, rank mean 29.59) Wishing to quit (mean 3.6, rank mean 41.78) Not wishing to quit (mean 3.6, rank mean 42.43)	Daria: You mentioned the psychological damage. What do you think the psychological damage is from the lifestyle? Diana [exited]: I mean it's the not being worthy of the real deal. True, genuine, caring, and love for you as a whole person... You have to do internal work. You have to reaffirm yourself... I think daily I learn more and more, and I control how to react to the world around me and the people in it. I choose what I'm going to accept and what I'm not.
Kruskal-Wallis Omnibus test: H test=6.435, $p= 0.040$.	
Anxiety score group mean ranks: Exited (mean 3.2, mean rank 30.7) Wishing to exit (mean 4.4, mean rank 41.24) Not wishing to exit (mean 4.3, mean rank 40.97)	
Kruskal-Wallis Omnibus test: H test 4.702, $p= 0.095$ (approaching significant differences in mean ranks).	
Integrated Findings	

Fit: Concordance

Meta-inferences: Depression and anxiety present as barriers to exiting. The quantitative results show that there are fewer or less severe depressive and anxious symptoms among those who exited, and the qualitative data support this and offer explanations. Mental health disorders may make maintaining conventional employment more challenging or may lead to or be exacerbated by ongoing involvement in sex trading and other associated activity, like unhealthy substance use. Yet, mental health problems are an ongoing struggle even for those who have exited.

These findings demonstrate that untreated mental health disorders may act as a barrier to exiting, thus reducing symptoms of depression and other mental health disorders may facilitate the long-term process of exiting. Greater stability and reduced risks to health and safety that may be associated with exiting from sex trading may also facilitate a reduction of mental health symptoms. Qualitative and quantitative findings show that ongoing mental health treatment was helpful for participants, given the high rate of positive screenings for depression and anxiety among all participants, the number of women engaged in therapy (54.2%), which was higher for those who had exited, and the reported need to continue to mitigate symptoms and work toward healing among those who have exited.

Substance Use

Most of the women surveyed (80.6%) and interviewed identified substance use as a past and/or current problem in their lives. It drove some to trade sex as a means to buy drugs, while others used it as a way to manage and cope with the lifestyle of sex trading or being trafficked. The following is a joint display representing quantitative and qualitative data describing the substance use-related reasons for starting, continuing, or exiting from sex trading.

Table 12*Joint Display of Substance Use and Entering, Staying, and Exiting*

<u>Reasons to start</u>	<u>Reasons to continue</u>	<u>Reasons for quitting</u>
48.6% Needed a way to pay for drugs/alcohol	58.3% For drugs/alcohol	39.1% Stopped using drugs so no longer wanted or needed to
Code: How/why started drug use or street involvement	Codes: Using drugs and alcohol; Drug addiction	Codes: Being or getting clean and sober; Stopped using drugs

These results suggest that, for some, substance use precipitates entry into sex trading and/or is inextricably connected to trading sex. Women’s stories of how they began using drugs and alcohol to cope with trauma, which led to addiction and a need to trade sex (whether or not sex trading began before or after developing an addiction), underscores the complexity of exiting with multiple, simultaneous barriers to overcome. Stopping substance use was a way to discontinue sex trading for those who sold sex for drugs and quitting sex trading meant no longer having cash in hand that tempted them to buy drugs.

For others, drugs or alcohol was a necessary accompaniment to sex trading or to meet the demands of traffickers. Brooke described regular drug use while she was trafficked: “That’s why I needed Adderall to be up all day, rollers [MDMA]. I’d sleep all during the day and be up all night, all night, all night.” Whereas Kiana, who was not trafficked, explained that she had used drugs to loosen up and “numb” herself before trading sex: “There was a couple times where I might have popped a roller just to make me more comfortable and lay back.”

Current unhealthy substance use was significantly associated with exiting outcomes, with a greater rate of current unhealthy substance use among those who had not exited, i.e., both those who did not wish to exit and those who did wish to exit but had not yet. The following joint display presents the quantitative results of the SUD screening measure and the statistically significant differences in group means between exiting outcome groups, juxtaposed with corresponding qualitative code and quotes.

Table 13

Joint Display of Substance Use Disorder and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative
Total Sample: 80.6% Screened positive for potential SUD in past or present Mean score 2.9 on CAGE-AID (4 items, range 0-4)	Code: Using drugs and alcohol Veronica: So, I was on the streets and everything. I have been whipped with cords, just things that had happened to me [by husband]. He used to chase me, trying to look for me and everything, but I couldn't do that. I wanted to just be free, so I

47.2% (27) had current possible SUD (n=58)	started using drugs and alcohol. It got severe where the money was coming easy and everything. My addiction started getting worse, so I turned it around and started like being a prostitute.
Current SUD, by group: 21.9% Exited 64.6% Wishing to exit 73.3% Not wishing to exit	Daria: Does sex trading go hand in hand with drugs? Was there ever a reason to trade sex if it didn't have to do with drugs? Tasha: No. It's always been about drugs. Yeah. If it wasn't marijuana, if it wasn't crystal, if it wasn't molly, if it wasn't heroin, if it wasn't dope, it was something. It was always some drugs.
Omnibus Pearson chi square=15.618, $p=.004$.	

Integrated Findings

Fit: Concordance

Meta-inferences: Active unhealthy substance use is a barrier to exiting or may inhibit a desire to exit. Both sets of findings show the significant role of (potential) SUD in sex trading. Sex trading is necessitated by the need for a constant flow of cash to buy drugs on a regular basis, and SUD makes other forms of employment challenging, at best. There is also evidence of a slippery slope from trauma to unhealthy substance use to trading sex. The severity of substance use may also impact motivation and ability to exit, differentiating between those for whom trading sex was always a means to procure drugs and those who used substances, but sex trading profits were for other purposes.

Current unhealthy substance use (or SUD) appears to be a significant barrier to exiting and is associated with not having exited. Both sets of data point to recovery from addiction or a lack of unhealthy substance use as a facilitator of exiting. Many women surveyed and interviewed had past SUDs and were no longer using substances in unhealthy ways, due to steps they took to quit and engage in recovery. It is important to dispel stereotypes by noting that not all women trading sex on the street (or elsewhere) have a SUD and that recovery is possible for those who do. Many survey and interview participants had moved beyond unhealthy substance use; some still traded sex for economic or other reasons.

Spirituality and Religious Coping

For some participants, their faith or religious and spiritual practices helped them cope with all the hardship, adversity, and trauma. In the survey data, positive religious coping was found to be significantly associated with exiting outcomes, as those who had exited had a higher mean score for positive religious coping than those who did not wish to exit. Qualitative data

was also interlaced with references to religious beliefs and practices, and the strength and hope they instilled. The following joint display presents corresponding results from both sets of data.

Table 14

Joint Display of Positive Religious Coping and Exiting

Quantitative	Qualitative
Total Sample: 39.1% Spiritual/faith reasons for quitting	Code: Faith/Spirituality
Positive religious coping mean score 20.5, range 0-28, SD 7.8.	Melanie: Initially I always thought about my kids, like that never stopped running through my mind. You never stop thinking about "I want to get better." But when you're using, you just feel like there's no hope. And I just kept praying and praying and praying and praying that things would get better.
Positive religious coping score by group: Exited (mean 22.7, mean rank 43.11) Wishing to exit (mean 20.4, mean rank 33.92) Not wishing to exit (mean 15.9, mean rank 26.7)	Faith: I'm trying. I have my bible study, [youngest son] and I study, we go to the hall. Little bit by little bit. That's where my peace of mind comes from right now... [My bible study teacher] said, "Just keep on going, and eventually He going to remove you from the situation." And I have faith that He is.
Kruskal-Wallis Omnibus H test= 6.975, $p=.031$.	Kendra: I'm very pleased to say that as somebody who has been advocating for survivors also, I look up and I'm seeing more people trying to understand, desiring to understand, wanting to help, and that's a blessing and I appreciate every single person that has stepped in to intervene or has a desire to intervene. So, I thank God for that.

Integrated Findings

Fit: Concordance, Expansion

Meta-inferences: The qualitative data alone would not have shown the importance of faith and spiritual coping practices, as excerpts about this were often subtle and woven into discussion of other subjects. The quantitative findings reveal that those who had quit practiced more positive religious coping than those who had not quit (both groups), and those who did not wish to quit appeared to be the least likely to practice positive religious coping among all three groups. Though there is not enough data to provide a more detailed potential explanation, the integrated results show that those who had exited often do rely on religious practices such as prayer, gratitude, religious learning and community as a means to achieve greater well-being and maintain hopefulness.

Positive religious coping or spiritual beliefs and practices appear to facilitate exiting, as it was associated with having exited. This may be due to faith beliefs that promote motivation to exit, and practices that assist in coping and healing. Those wishing to exit may be on a developing path to exiting given their level of positive religious coping. Though I did not specifically ask about their faith, spirituality, or religious coping, qualitative data show many

references of thankfulness that God helped them survive life-threatening situations or ongoing adversity, and that God was looking out for them and listening to their prayers. Tasha stated that when she was on the street seeking customers, she felt safer near a church: "I was raised in a church. I'm thinking let me just stand by this church, because, in my mind, I'm like, God can watch out for me." Many participants expressed gratitude to a higher power for living through so much adversity to be where they were at the time of the interview. Nyesha said, "I went through a lot. I'm blessed. My God, I am so blessed." Similarly, Faith remarked, "It was horrible out there, it was horrible, and I'm so thankful that Jehovah delivered me from them streets."

Positive religious coping and attitudes may also be reinforced through traditional 12-step groups for SUD, in which some women discussed participating. Diana referenced both 12-step groups and church together as ways that women can cope in healthy ways and work toward healing: "If it works, it works. Just like NA [Narcotics Anonymous], church. I mean I have a strong faith and I believe in God and it's not because somebody told me. It's because of my own feeling and experience. But if it works, use it."

Positive or Negative Thoughts and Beliefs about Oneself

'Thoughts and beliefs about oneself' emerged as another theme captured in the qualitative data: positive thoughts and beliefs about oneself facilitated exiting while negative thoughts and beliefs about oneself impeded exiting or made exiting more challenging. Some of these negative thoughts and beliefs included low self-worth, feeling alone or isolated, giving up or hopelessness, disbelief and regret about how life had turned out, self-destructive mindset or behavior, and false sense of pride or respect.

Many interview participants made a direct connection between negative thoughts and beliefs, such as low self-worth, and starting or continuing to trade sex. Kendra explained that she lacked self-esteem as a young person and was more easily lured and manipulated by a sex trafficker:

Traffickers really play with their victims' minds, and they really play with their egos. When you're somebody who already does not feel confident in yourself and then you have a person that recognizes that in you and really uses it to pull on your strings, it can be really detrimental to you because you, especially when you're operating from an external locus of control and not an internal one, because you really believe what they say about you is true.

Danyelle became momentarily quiet and reflective after sharing what she felt was one of the negative aspects of trading sex: "But the downside is I get dressed up, I put on my makeup and stuff and get dressed, but on the inside I don't feel pretty. It does something to your self-esteem, you have insecurities."

Some suggested that there was a void (e.g., for love, loneliness) they needed to fill. Maya insightfully shared that her history of sex trafficking, IPV, and sex trading stemmed from a lack of love in her life that she kept seeking to fill in unhealthy relationships:

I did all this stuff because I just wanted to feel loved. And truly, honestly, I don't know what love is. I'm still trying to figure out what's love. And it's like people keep telling me, "You got to love yourself before you can love anybody," but how can you love yourself when nobody ever taught you what love was? How do you know what to show yourself if you've never been shown? You know? I don't know. It's like I'm in a spinning cycle, and I just keep going round and around and around and around and around, and I'm ending up back in the same place. It's just different people, similar situations.

Many shared that part of their challenge in quitting sex trading had to do with an identity struggle, feeling unsure of who they are and trying to find their true selves. Many women engaged in street sex trading or who have been trafficked take on aliases, sometimes even taking on a different personality or character. Brooke shared that, "I just want to be back to me. I just want to find Brooke. I've been [Brooke's alias] so long." She added, while showing me a scar of her alias that had been seared with a hot implement on her skin, "Oh, I've got branding.

He [trafficker] stamped me too.” Sharise stated that she still struggled with her identity and was searching for a new path in life: “Right now I just need to find my purpose. I don't know what my purpose is now but I'm looking for my purpose, trying to find it.”

Finding their identity and forging a new path was associated with positive thoughts and beliefs about self. This came in the form of ascribing of purpose in life, believing in their strength and resilience, seeing their innate value and feeling like they deserved better, having ethics or morals, providing or feeling hope, and feeling thankful to be alive, off the streets, and out of the “lifestyle” that some respondents referenced (e.g., up all night, partying with drugs, etc.). Diana experienced self-growth in her recovery from addiction and transition out of sex trading:

You know I hated myself [voice got quiet]. It's a process of loving myself. Had to tell myself this morning that I'm beautiful and I love myself because the fairy tale is still always, I believe, in our mind that, “Yeah, Prince Charming is there somewhere.” You know, but I'm happier today. I don't need a man to validate me. I got a lot. I have a lot of work to do. I mean, I'm working. I have two therapists. [laughs]

Taylor also spoke of a newly developed perspective, where she reframed her experiences and sense of self:

My saying is I'm a survivor, not a victim 'cause I don't like that victim word. 'Cause if I was a victim, I'd be dead. I'd be cold in the ground, but I'm not dead and I'm not cold in the ground. I'm alive and I'm well.

Many women helped others, by volunteering or working at programs, informally helping others on the street, advocating and speaking out about their experiences and changes they wish to see, which seemed to contribute to their positive thoughts and beliefs about themselves. Melanie volunteered at the program that she felt was instrumental in facilitating her exit from the street life, and maintained that:

You gotta give back, you got to realize that giving back is good. And it makes me feel good as a person. You know, like I gave back because these people [program staff]

helped me out so much—tremendously. And even still to this day, I know if I needed help they'd be there, but I don't ask for it unless I really, really need it.

Selena also volunteered at the program that helped her, was preparing to speak at an event about her experiences, and was doing her own informal street outreach: “I spend a lot of time with women now from the streets, mentoring.” Similarly, Lisa spoke to women she knew or met on the street near her home. She said, “I just try to talk to them a lot and tell them ‘there's something better out here than the way you're going. If you need any support, I can be that support for you.’”

When the women discussed their hopes for their future, their words reflected a strong belief in their ability to accomplish goals, improve their lives and that of their children, and give back to the community, especially to those coming from similar circumstances. Positive thoughts, beliefs, cognitive re-framing, and actions lent to positive growth and outlook on themselves—their identity, purpose, and worth. Given that qualitative data reflects negative thoughts and beliefs about oneself as a barrier to exiting, developing more positive views may be a factor that facilitates exiting from sex trading, especially if it coincides with alleviation of mental health symptoms in the long-term process of exiting.

Readiness and Motivation Change

At the individual level, the concept of readiness and being motivated to change was an overarching theme related to exiting from sex trading. The idea presented by interview participants was “you have to want to change” or be ready and willing to accept help, e.g., “you can't force somebody” (Selena). Survey participants' most commonly endorsed reasons for quitting were: “I wanted something different for my life” and “I just got tired of selling sex,” which represent an internal shift in thinking. Corresponding codes emerged in the qualitative data. This cognitive shift could be due to one or more factors described above, at various levels of one's social ecology, and/or related to other factors, including age and time spent sex trading. The following joint display (Table 14) juxtaposes some related reasons for beginning or continuing to

trade sex, such as “the lifestyle associated with sex trading appealed to me” and “for the sense of power it gives me,” as well as qualitative codes (in italics) for reasons to trade sex or positive aspects of trading sex, such as sex trading was “fun and easy.” The fourth column mixes quantitative and qualitative results related to reasons for quitting.

Table 15

Joint Display on Cognitive Shifts Related to Sex trading and Exiting

Reasons for starting	Reasons for continuing	Qualitative: Reasons for or positive aspects of trading sex	Reasons for quitting (quantitative and qualitative)
Total Sample: 38.9% Lifestyle of sex trading appealed to me (e.g., fun, a game, attention, money, partying and drugs) 19.4% Wanted to work on my own schedule	Total Sample: 57.9% Convenience 37.5% Flexible hours 30.6% For the sense of power it gives me 22.2% Support or social network in the life 19.4% Enjoyed the work (e.g., pleasing people)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling sex is fun and easy/an adrenaline rush • Being in demand and wanted by men • Intrigued by sex work • Meeting different people (johns) • Pride in ability to do a good job/ please men • Traveling/different environments/lavish lifestyle 	72.5% Wanted something different for my life (N=72) <i>Stopped due to wanting something different/better for her life</i> 63.8% Just got tired of selling sex (N=72) <i>Stopped due to tired of the life/ trading sex stopped being fun</i>

Code and Quotes—Stopping due to tired of life or wanting something different/better

Selena: I think my life point is turning. I'm at the point in my life where I don't want to be like that no more. I don't. I've struggled through all of it, so now it's my turn to help and work with these other girls that are out here like I was when I was in my 20s.

Lisa: I had a lot of people that would talk to me and tell me, "You don't need to do this. Why are you doing this? You're a pretty girl," and stuff like that. Sometimes I took that in consideration. And I think that was one of the reasons that really changed my mind on stopping.

Danyelle: This is why I can't. I want a husband, I want a family, I want all that. It's so annoying, even just dealing with all these different guys, [with me] trying to get money and everything, it's a turnoff, like ew. It's really, after the years, it's just a turnoff, and then they try to treat you like you're just this piece of meat and, "Come, I got the money, so you got to come." I just feel so disgusted, that's why I was like, "I don't give a damn about that thousand dollars." And in the back of my mind, "Damn, I need it," but I was like, "I don't want to be treated like that." They'll be like, "Hurry up get here, you have to get here now." Over the years, I guess it gets tiring.

Integrated Findings

Fit: Concordance

Meta-inferences: Both sets of data produce results that highlight some of the positive and appealing aspects of trading sex that some of the women may have experienced (outside of economic necessity). The data also show that many women reach a point when trading sex and the associated lifestyle become tiring, and they want something different or better. The integrated results show that this is a psychological or cognitive shift whereby the appealing aspects of trading sex or other reasons to continue (e.g., fast cash, convenience, attention from men) are no longer as appealing or the negatives begin to outweigh the positives.

Motivation and readiness to change was also observed in women's responses to the final interview question, when asked about their hopes for the future. This provided an opportunity for the women to share their dreams and aspirations, however simple or bold. Their answers demonstrated their positive thoughts and beliefs, their sources of motivation, and intentions to change or move forward in a positive direction.

Many of the women focused on improving their health and well-being. Nina's plan was to "stay clean and sober. Be with my kids. Get my anxiety and depression under control. My post-traumatic stress disorder figured out. Not have any more episodes. Just live a healthy lifestyle. And not resort to masking it with chemicals." Faith also stressed the importance of stability, health, and peace of mind, stating, "My hope for my future is to stay drug free, to find me a stable housing, and to just be happy—peaceful, having inner peace." Nyasha also wanted "to be able to be in the right state of mind at all times, to be able to get off SSI and open a business" that she could sustain for her sons and granddaughter to benefit from in the future.

Future hopes commonly focused on children. Sharise said, "I'd like a family. If I can't bear any, I'd like to adopt a football team." Veronica's grandchildren were her driving force, her face lighting up every time she mentioned them. Lisa spoke of her two daughters, saying "I'm living for them...I want to see them go to college and accomplish their success in life." She added hopes to own a home and have grandkids, but said, "I don't want to be rich. I just want to be comfortable. Being able to leave my kids something in the future." Brooke wanted to "make sure my boys are just really established and not being another Black statistic. Just raising them the right way, just putting my all into them."

Some talked about financial success and entrepreneurship. Sharise said “I want to be a homeowner. I want to be a business owner.” Brooke said, I just trademarked my [cosmetic] business. I wanna start my own wig line. I want to move to California. I want to put my boys in a condo on the 22nd floor, I want to own that whole floor.”

Many were planning to go back to school or finish a degree and discussed career aspirations, which often involved helping others and giving back. Melanie wanted to help others in their recovery; she was already working in the medical field and had begun graduate school for a nursing degree. Tasha said, “I want my career to be working with people that struggle with addiction” and mental illness. Danyelle was enrolled and set to start classes in a few months, with hopes to work with at-risk youth. Kiana also aspired to help young people; she planned to go back to school for a Criminal Justice degree in order to become a youth probation officer. Brooke shared a dream:

I want a group home for runaway girls, and just get me my own girls’ group, build their confidence. Let them know how beautiful they are. Get us a college fund going for Black women, Hispanic women, all type of women, to make sure our women get empowered to go to college and not be afraid of anything.

Taylor’s hope for the future was especially bold—for sex trafficking to end—and Kendra was using her voice to speak out and advocate for sex trafficking victims, with hopes to establish a career that would serve this purpose. Selena asserted that she had a role to help in her community:

In that little inner-city neighborhood that's still drug infested, I'm still a safe person for everybody out there...I want to keep my rapport out there because those people are not garbage. People from the ‘hood, whether it's gang members or prostitutes. I care for my own people, the people from where I come from.

The women’s hopes and dreams were inspirational and compelling, showing tremendous motivation, resilience, and altruism, despite the many layers of lifetime adversity

they had suffered. Whether they had exited or not, these plans involved motivation and intentions to change toward a better future for themselves and others.

Recommendations: What Helps

Interview participants provided a range of recommendations in response to the question “what helps a woman exit sex trading or improve her life?” The most common response was generally about needing resources and assistance, in a variety of ways. This included resources to obtain and maintain housing and pay bills, help to secure employment or other means of income, residential programs, mental health and SUD counseling and treatment, assistance for mothers and children, post-incarceration/re-entry services, and the legal ability to and assistance with clearing a criminal record (e.g., vacating convictions).

Taylor’s response to what helps was, “Just resources. That’s all I really need is resources.” She elaborated:

Resources I can survive off of, that I don't need a man or a pimp to help me with. Like I'm getting SSI soon. So that's one of the resources that will help me, that I know every month I'll get a check and I don't have to pray that I pay my phone bill or pay my bills or something like that.

When I asked what women need to stop trading sex if they want to exit, Nyesha suggested: “A strong mind, a positive thinking, and income and resources.” She explained that resources could be: “Like psychologists, psychiatrists, things like that, to help with your mental state... Income, as far as working or whatever you're going to do in order to pay your bills and things like that so you won't be in that situation.” Sharise’s response took into account an array of services and resources along with the need for safety for women who are trafficked:

I believe in every police station, there should be some type of counselor like you for sex trafficking, to change that person's mind. To get her out of harm's way. I don't care if she complains about, "Oh I left my ID." Because we have all the excuses to not leave the game. We will come up with all type of excuses and it should be no excuses. So I think

they should have some type of fund where the prostitutes can go to like a safe house. The prostitutes can go and get clean. Get better as a woman. Help them get a job. Help them fix their credit. Just help them. Every police station needs one. A compassionate person, like you, that can sweep her away from the game. "Baby, don't worry about your ID. Don't worry about those shoes. Listen. You ready now? Because we've got a van in the back right now with a new identification, a new credit where credits go." Just sell her a dream so she can leave and get in that van and go to Kentucky. Because she don't know nobody in Kentucky. So she can hibernate and be a better woman.

When discussing SUD treatment and counseling, many of the women qualified that "just getting clean and sober is not enough." This refers to the idea that treating the SUD is only treating the symptom, if the underlying issues, including trauma, mental health, and sex trading experiences, are not addressed simultaneously. Diana had been in treatment programs that felt "like a bandaid" and did not include therapy or "peel back a lot of layers."

The resources and assistance described by participants would also require policy changes to improve funding and effectiveness. For instance, residential programs and economic supports were not currently adequate to meet all the needs of participants. For instance, I surveyed and interviewed women who were homeless or were in unstable/unsafe living situations and on waiting lists to access desperately needed residential treatment or rental support. Local, state, and/or federal funding were not adequately allocated toward these resources and services. In addition, policies were lacking or in need of improvement to assure that programs provided effective services (e.g., length of time of Medicaid/insurance coverage of behavioral health services). Diana asserted that there should be, "Better programs. You know the state funding for programs is limited. You got a thousand different treatment centers. Cut them down. Make them better treatment centers for longer periods of time."

In addition, several women discussed the need for “time and distance” in order to successfully transition away from unhealthy substance use and sex trading. As Tasha explained,

People, places and things. I can't watch certain movies. I can't be around certain people. I can't even be around my stepdaddy because he's still getting high, so when he come, I'll be like, “all right, Mom, I'm out of here” ... I'll just remove myself, you know? It's not a curable disease, but it's almost like [you can] keep it under control from having outbreaks.

Selena stressed that especially when coming out of incarceration, supportive resources that provide a little distance from the old way of life are important:

Maybe there should be other options to set them up in programs in other areas to give them a fresh start instead of returning them somewhere where they already don't have any support. That leads them back into failure because all it takes is for them to run into one of these girls that they used to get high with here or an old john that recognizes them on the street. That's all it takes... Strength doesn't come for a long time, but you have to give some way for somebody to try to return back into society.

In addition to these formal sources of help, social and informal support were also suggested as facilitators of exiting. Lisa said,

That's basically the main thing you need if you really want to get out of what you're doing, being in prostitution and stuff like that—support. And then you have to have your own mind made up and willing to accept the support that you need instead of fighting against it...So basically, support. I'm going to keep saying that. Mentally, physically support. Emotionally support. Family support. Just support.”

Danyelle discussed the support she felt from an intimate partner:

I really like him. I want to work on me right now, but I do want him still to be in my life because he's a very positive person. He talks about everything positive, nothing

negative. He by like, “Block those people.” Anything positive. So, people like him that are doing things with their selves and want to do stuff with their life.

Many of the women also stressed the need for a safe, judgment-free person with whom they can talk and share sex trade history. This also meant having survivors or those with lived experience leading, advocating, speaking out, and serving others. Diana explained that she takes on this role with the women she works with at a drop-in center, with an understanding of where the women are coming from:

Because of their experiences or where they're at in their life, you know. They had a bad day. They were beat up last night. They were raped last night. You know people are constantly harassing them and fucking with them so they're going to take this shit out on somebody. You know, like where I work, I mean we're opening the [program name], you know, I'm like, "We got to meet people where they're at." They're going to come in.

Some of them are going to have a bad attitude. You know, and we're the only ones that they can take it out on kind of safely, they feel. And it's not that we deserve it or deserve to be disrespected, but they need us.

Kendra had taken on a leadership and advocacy role, explaining the importance of survivors speaking out in order to change policies and practices:

Maybe they [police] didn't really understand it the way that they would now because so many people are starting to be able to discern a little bit more, and so many survivors are coming forward to break all of the mental binds. Because survivors like me are starting to tell our truth. People are starting to be able to really see what the fuck it's like to be in a situation that's fucked up like that, and the psychological impact that it makes and the physical impact that it makes, and things like that.

Identified earlier as a necessary internal or individual level factor, the women stressed that a person has to want to change. Danyelle stated: “But yeah, I'm definitely going to get out [of sex trading] ... I have a lot of people in the community that support me; it's just me, I have to

be ready.” Throughout Melanie’s narrative, she consistently asserted that the motivation has to come from within:

But when I say you got to want it, you got to tell yourself, “No, I want this back. I want my self-worth back.” For me as an individual, I had no self-respect for myself. I wanted my kids back. I wanted the life I was used to. I knew it was going to take a lot of work to get there, but you got to want to work for it. It only works if you work it. Support is great, you need support, but that individual has to want it.

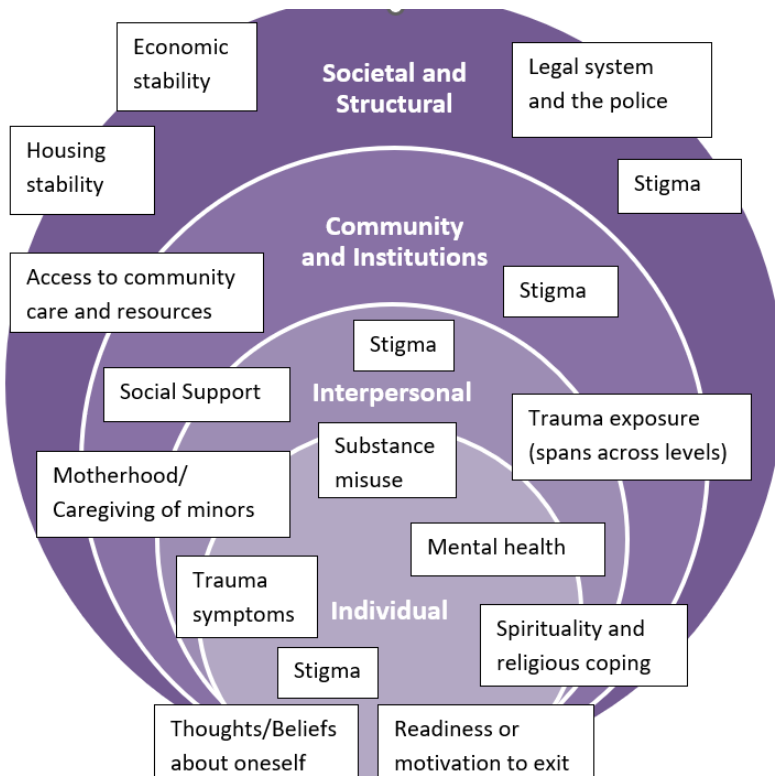
Diana affirmed that, “You know, ultimately it’s up to people. It really is up to people. You know, but I don’t think that we should turn our backs.”

Theory: A Complex Web of Interconnected Factors

All of these factors or sub-themes demonstrate an intersecting array of dynamics, both positive and negative, and at multiple socio-ecological levels, that impact women’s lives and influence the process of exiting from sex trading. The mixed methods analyses led to the theory of “a complex web of interconnected factors across social-ecological levels that act as barriers to or facilitators of exiting from sex trading.” These factors overlap across each other and across levels to affect motivation and ability to exit. The concept of a web is particularly descriptive, as the multiple intersections and overlap of factors and layers conjures a sense of “stickiness”—they are intertwined in such a way that makes it difficult to pull apart or treat separately and distinctly. The outer rings of the web serve as the contextual factors—societal and structural, community and institutions—while the layers gradually work inward toward the center, to the interpersonal and the individual and their internal influences. Figure 2 below is conceptual model that shows these factors across socio-ecological levels; while it is not a visual depiction of a web, one might imagine a web connecting factors and intersecting across factors and levels.

Figure 2

Social Ecological Web of Complex, Intersecting Exiting Factors



The mixed methods design and integration of findings provide a full picture that helps visualize what barriers and facilitators are significant and why, and the emancipatory framework of this study directs us to solutions to these complex issues at the structural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels.

Results Chapter 2: Police Influence on Exiting

This chapter presents the results pertaining to the following research question: “Among women who sell sex on the streets, what is the nature of their encounters with police and how do these encounters influence exiting?” I explored variables associated with perception of law enforcement for women who trade sex and the relationship between perception of the police and the motivation or ability to exit from trading sex. The selective coding process drew from both quantitative and qualitative data to identify central themes and sub-themes.

The first central theme that emerged was “types of interactions with police,” with sub-themes that include negative interactions, ambiguous interactions, and positive interactions. The kinds of ambiguous interactions discussed were considered negative or positive depending on the interview participant or the circumstances in which they occurred; those interactions were perceived by study participants in a positive, ambivalent, indifferent, or negative manner. The second major theme identified was “perception of police.” The sub-themes include 1) police do not help, 2) police do not believe ‘drug users or prostitutes’, 3) police act with impunity, 4) fear of police, and 5) police are just doing their job.

The third central theme is the “influence of police on exiting.” This theme draws from the results related to barriers and facilitators to exiting, the women’s experiences with and perceptions of police, and resulting effects. The five sub-themes are: 1) police responses to victimization cause harm, 2) the attitudes and behaviors of police make them a threat instead of a source of help, 3) police may reinforce a trafficker’s power and control, 4) arrests compound problems, and 5) police can be a source of help and a catalyst for change.

As in the previous results chapter, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated (merged) within the analysis and interpretation processes and are presented together in a mixed fashion. Results are woven together in narrative and joint displays, with integrated findings that demonstrate the fit between quantitative and qualitative findings, and meta-inferences that interpret the combined results. The results of this chapter draw more heavily

from qualitative and descriptive quantitative results, as bivariate analyses did not produce many statistically significant associations related to perception of police or exiting outcomes.

Results are organized by themes and their associated sub-themes, culminating in a grounded theory that explains the role of police in exiting from trading sex, and the ways that the police facilitate or impede exiting. This chapter ends with respondents' specific practice and policy recommendations related to the police and the criminal legal system. The results and emergent theory demonstrate the spectrum of experiences with police and provide lessons that forge a path toward structural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual change.

Before presenting results about types of police interactions, perceptions of police, and the influence of police on exiting, it is important to first understand the level of police contact of interview participants. Frequency of contact with police, and whether the contact was punitive or not, has bearing on their perceptions of police and what effects or influence the police may have on the women's lives.

Level of Police Contact

Survey results describe how respondents experienced a high level of police contact. Criminal legal involvement was very common among survey participants, as 83.1% had ever been incarcerated in jail or prison for any offense. A smaller percentage were ever ticketed (47.9%) or arrested (45.1%) for prostitution-related offenses, while 83.3% were ever arrested for any other offense (not related to prostitution). Some had contact with police related to sex trading that did not result in a municipal fine, arrest, or incarceration (i.e., non-punitive). Others spent shorter periods of time in street level sex trading, were in settings or circumstances that helped them avoid police scrutiny, and/or used strategies that minimized risk of police contact. Yet almost all women surveyed or interviewed had some form of police interaction.

Though the vast majority had some contact with police related to a criminal offense or due to their own victimization experiences, some of the women surveyed and a few of those interviewed had minimal to no contact with the police related to sex trading. I did not ask

participants about the number of encounters with police or the specific number of times ticketed or arrested. Table 16 provides descriptive information about interview participants (using pseudonyms) regarding level of police contact based on my interpretation of responses to questions about police experiences. This was not a variable I initially accounted for, so the distinction is binary, either low (minimal contact) or medium/high (many police encounters). Table 16 also includes their overall ratings of police, on a scale from 0 (worst) to 10 (best).

Table 16

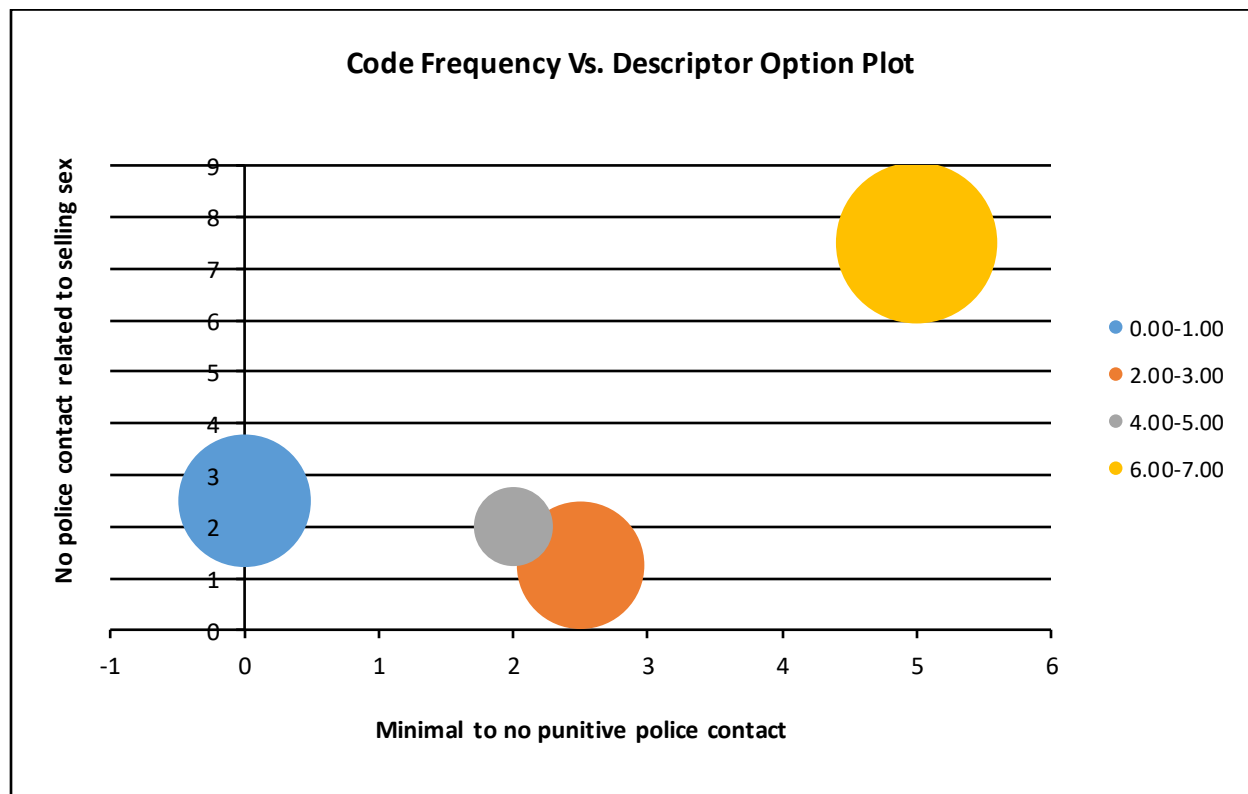
Interview Participants' Level of Contact with and Rating of Police

Name (age, race/ethnicity)	Exiting outcome (at time of survey)	Level of contact with police (interview data)	Rating of police (at time of survey)
Brooke (27, Black)	Wishing to exit	Medium/High	0
Danyelle (34, Black)	Wishing to exit	Medium/High	3
Diane (50, Black)	Exited	Medium/High	4
Faith (50, Black)	Wishing to exit	Medium/High	7
Kendra (31, Black)	Exited	Medium/High	3
Kiana (28, Black)	Wishing to exit	Low	6
Lisa (37, Black)	Exited	Low	5
Maya (19, Black)	Wishing to exit	Medium/High	5
Melanie (35, White)	Exited	Medium/High	3
Nina (47, Native American/Latina)	Wishing to exit	Medium/High	5
Nyasha (38, Black)	Exited	Low	1
Selena (43, White/Latina)	Not wishing to exit	Medium/High	5
Sharise (33, Black)	Exited	Medium/High	0
Tasha (30, Black)	Exited	Low (none)	8
Taylor (18, White)	Wishing to exit	Medium/High	2
Veronica (56, Native American/Latina)	Exited	Medium/High	0

Another way to present findings related to level of police contact is based on how often a participant discussed not having contact with police related to sex trading or for punitive reasons (e.g., ticket/arrest). Figure 3 is a code frequency versus descriptor option plot (created within Dedoose) which helps to visualize how the frequency of codes containing quotes about minimal punitive contact with police or lack of police contact related to sex trading may be associated with ratings of police. The Y axis represents the frequency of use of the code “no police contact related to selling sex” and the X axis represents the frequency of the use of the code “minimal to no punitive contact with police.” Interview respondents are represented by their rating of the police, in four groupings. This plot shows that those who spoke most about their lack of punitive or sex trade-related contact with police had the highest ratings of police.

Figure 3

Police Contact Type Code Frequency and Police Rating Descriptor Plot



This table and figure show the variation in level of police contact (for any reason) and police rating for interview participants, and how level and type of police contact (non-punitive or non-sex trade related) may be associated with perceptions of police.

The level of contact with police does not account for the possible presence of police in their environment who did not make direct contact with them or interfere with their sex trade activity or other activities. For instance, Tasha managed to avoid police the entire 10 or more years she was trading sex on the street, reporting that though police were around, they did not bother her. She perceived that those who did get arrested and harassed were making themselves overly obvious or causing a disturbance: “Them the ones who were all in the middle of the street, acting crazy. Kicking a police car, like, ‘girl, you know you going to jail.’” She added that police are more concerned with drug dealing than sex trading.

Most interviewees did not share Tasha’s luck in avoiding the police, and especially felt targeted once they had their first arrest or citation on their record. Veronica was harassed by police constantly even after disengaging from sex trading; her arrest record followed her, limiting her ability to move through her own neighborhood without police harassment and false arrest.

They're [police] still saying that I'm doing it when I'm not doing it... They said, “Well, where you are, you're hanging around the prostitutes, so you're going to get a ticket.” So, I avoid [those streets] ... Then I get stopped by the cops and going to jail. ‘Excuse me, I'm not in the prostitute zone.’ I'm like four blocks away from it but I'm still getting ticketed... It's like I'm an easy target. “Oh, I need to get my quota, I need one more ticket. Oh, there she is. Ms. [last name], come here.” I'm waiting at the bus stop. They say, “You're always waiting at a bus stop. You're waiting for somebody to pick you up.”

These data related to police contact frequency and type of contact (e.g., punitive, sex trade related) may be helpful to consider in each of the women’s narrative of their experiences with and perceptions of the police. Results mainly focus on the experiences of those who had

sex trade-related police interactions, but also provide insight on other types of police contact and overall perceptions of the police, regardless of level or type of police contact.

Types of Interactions with Police

To set the context, it is important to understand the types of interactions that women who have traded sex have had with police. Women were asked about a variety of different kinds of encounters with police, beyond arrests and municipal citations. Survey items were based on the literature and professional knowledge of potential police interactions with women who trade sex on the street. Descriptive statistics are summarized here first, then integrated with qualitative findings and described in more detail within their respective sub-themes below.

Commonly, women were paid for sex by the police, with 45.7% indicating that they had customers that they knew to be police officers. Interviewed women indicated that some officers arranged for or paid for sex while on duty, which added a level of coercion. Others paid for sex while off duty, which some women deemed as acceptable while others felt compromised or fearful of repercussions. Of women surveyed, 40% reported being verbally harassed, which included things like being called offensive and degrading names, humiliated, intimidated or threatened, and arbitrarily stopped, questioned, and searched. Similarly, 40% reported being falsely arrested, meaning that they were arrested without cause (e.g., with no evidence or while not engaged in sex trading activity, as in Veronica's case above). Another 40% reported being used as an informant by the police, whereby they either voluntarily or via coercion provided information to police about other crimes and criminal suspects. When asked about assault by the police, 32.9% indicated that they were physically assaulted by police and 21.1% were forced to engage in sexual acts with police.

Interactions with police did not solely revolve around their criminalized activity, but also pertained to their own victimization. Given the high rate of exposure to violence of women surveyed, many women had contact with the police due to instances of physical and sexual assault, robbery, abduction, IPV, and sex trafficking; 59.2% had ever reported their own

victimization to police. Of those who reported victimization, 60.5% were not satisfied with the response from police, though some indicated having multiple incidents of this nature and had experienced a mix of both helpful and unhelpful/harmful police responses. Many women indicated that they did not report victimization experiences to police, endorsing the following reasons to not report: 67% due to fear of own arrest, 53.5% due to fear of someone else's arrest, and 63.4% due to fear of being dismissed or not treated respectfully by the police.

Conversely, 52.8% reported ever having a helpful interaction or response from police, endorsing one or more types of help listed in the survey. Of these 38 survey participants, 84.2% reported not being arrested or receiving a warning only (though participants seemed to have ambiguous feelings regarding this interaction, perhaps seeing it as neutral vs helpful). Other helpful interactions included: 78.9% were encouraged to make a change, 65.8% had police respond to a crisis in a helpful manner, 57.9% were shown compassion or sympathy, 31.6% were referred or taken to a program for help, and 21.1% were given food or other items. Additionally, 34.2% endorsed that they considered instances of police arresting them as helpful. Being arrested was considered helpful in situations where the women were experiencing homelessness or needed some sort of escape from drugs or street life. Open-ended survey responses related to helpful encounters with police also included being given advice or counseled, police checking in or looking out for them, officers from specialized trafficking units being more sympathetic and understanding, being helped to escape from a trafficker or other person trying to cause them harm, being offered an alternative to arrest program, taken home, allowed to sleep at the police station without booking, and helped to find items that were lost. At least one woman indicated that the police helped her by procuring more sex trade business for her from his friends.

This array of experiences sets the stage for relations between police and women who trade sex, while qualitative results provide more details about these interactions and illuminate how women perceive these interactions as either 1) negative, 2) ambiguous, or 3) positive. The

results summarized above are presented below in greater detail, in narrative form and joint display tables, organized by these three categories.

Negative Police Interactions

Interview participants uniformly felt that certain types of personal experiences with police were always negative. These experiences include poor response to their victimization, verbal harassment, false arrest, physical assault/excessive use of force, sexual assault, other police misconduct, and racial profiling. The two joint displays that follow juxtapose the quantitative and qualitative results pertaining to negative experiences with police.

The first joint display (Table 17) presents findings related to poor police response to victimization. Survey participants were asked if they ever reported their own victimization to police, and if so, if they were satisfied with the police response. They were also asked if they had ever chosen to not report an incident where they were victimized to the police, either due to fear of arrest or fear of being dismissed or disrespected. Women experienced unhelpful or harmful responses from the police when they were victimized by others. The apparent re-traumatization due to these responses appeared to have a profound effect on women, as both quantitative (e.g., frequencies) and qualitative results depict. Qualitative findings also point to an effect on help-seeking behavior.

Table 17

Joint Display on Negative Police Interactions Related to Victimization

Negative—Victimization Quantitative findings	Negative—Victimization Qualitative codes	Negative—Victimization Quotes
Total Sample: 59.2% Ever reported their own victimization • 60.5% of those who reported their own victimization were not satisfied with response from police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating as if deserved to be victimized • Treating like criminal instead of victim • Arresting after reporting victimization 	<p>Diana: I mean, this one guy that I was dealing with, he hit me, took my wig off, pissed on it, and I tried to flag the police down. They just kept going. They would ride down the street hollering, “Go home whore! Prostitute!” You know, I don't think they have any training maybe or empathy.</p> <p>Danyelle: [Upon calling the police after being raped at gunpoint] The police were</p>

67.6% Victimized but did not report to police for fear of own arrest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting to police but nothing became of it • Police refusing to treat assault as rape • Having to advocate to be treated as victim 	really mean to me then. They were acting like it was my fault, “Did this really happen or did he take his money back?”... I've never really called, that was the first time I ever called the police. Because you don't call the police. It's like, those are risks that you take... [You don't call] out of fear of being arrested pretty much, and then you just don't want to deal with the police. And then that's going to be, okay, now they know your face [i.e., identifiable to police as a “known prostitute”].
63.4%: Victimized but did not report to police for fear of being dismissed or not treated respectfully		

Integrated Findings

Fit: Concordance and Expansion

Meta-inferences: Both sets of results point to a high frequency of incidents of victimization where the police responded in an unhelpful or harmful manner. The qualitative results show how the police respond in a harmful manner or do not respond to the victimization at all. Both sets of findings also show that many women choose not to report victimization to the police and the reasons for not doing so; choosing to not report may be based on their own past experiences with the police or a general perception of the police and how they respond poorly to victimization against women who sell sex, as well as choosing to avoid potential negative consequences of making contact with police. The damage occurs through victim-blaming responses; lack of help to ensure their health, safety, and legal rights; criminal repercussions; and through a loss of help-seeking behavior (or reinforcing the idea that one should not seek help from police).

Stories from Faith and Selena further illustrate negative police responses to victimization experiences. Faith explained how after being raped, her mother convinced her to call the police, but they responded by shifting the blame to Faith and treating her as a criminal instead of victim.

The police came to the house; I had just gotten out of jail for a 12-day commitment, but they hadn't taken it out of the system yet, so when I called the police, they wound up arresting me when I called to tell them that I was raped, and it was the ‘good cop and bad cop.’ The one was like insinuating, “Well, you shouldn't have been out there,” and this and that, and I was like, “I don't care what I'm wearing, or where I'm at, that don't give nobody no right to take pussy from me.” So, they wound up charging me with destruction of property because I was so angry that I kicked a hole in the wall as they was taking me out the house or whatever. They got me down to the county jail, and I kept telling them, “I want to go to the sexual assault unit.” They kept saying you got to

wait until you booked, you got to wait until you booked, and I started hollering about a lawyer, bitching and moaning, and they finally took me to [hospital].

Faith was forced to advocate aggressively and vociferously for herself immediately following a traumatic incident, simply to get appropriate health care and support. She was dissuaded from pressing charges and nothing became of her report. Faith added that the perpetrator was a serial rapist that eventually got caught and imprisoned; other women also mentioned learning that their perpetrators assaulted others. Thus, an appropriate response and investigation by the police might have prevented further sexual violence against others.

Selena told a harrowing tale in which three men attempted to gang rape her in an abandoned building, and in her attempt to escape they stabbed her and pushed her out of a second story window. Naked and bloody, she ran to a neighboring residence for help and asked for the police to be called to the scene. She relayed that instead of receiving help from the police:

I did end up going to jail. They did not care about who did it to me. They did not do any further investigating. They said it was my fault because I was on drugs and I had no business being there. I do know that they do not take the word of anybody who's a user, for one. They pretty much think you're out there.

These findings demonstrate the harm and potential re-traumatization that can be caused by police, which may be especially impactful in the aftermath of significant trauma (e.g., a sexual assault). This was often due to the police assuming participants' culpability due to their sex trading, drug use, or past criminal record. The police were often more concerned with executing an outstanding warrant than properly investigating the violent crimes against the women or ensuring that the women received emergency services and health care after a sexual assault. Poor response to victimization was clearly seen as a negative type of experience with the police. This collective experience was widely known, influencing both those with prior experiences of poor police response and those who never previously reported victimization to

the police to choose not to contact the police or seek emergency assistance in the event of an assault or other victimization.

There were several other types of interactions with the police that were uniformly perceived as negative, including physical assault or excessive use of force, forced or coerced sex, verbal harassment and harsh treatment, false arrest, restriction of freedom/rights due to being a “known prostitute,” racial profiling, and other police misconduct or corruption. The following joint display (Table 18) presents findings related to these types of interactions (with qualitative codes in italics).

Table 18

Joint Display on Negative Police Interactions Related to Assault, Harassment, and Misconduct

Quantitative and qualitative: Negative Interactions	Quotes: Negative Interactions
40%: Verbally harassed by police (N=72) <i>Harassed by police</i> <i>Treating harshly</i>	[Verbal harassment] Sharise: So when the cops see it [her cash], they were like, "How many blow jobs you had to do to get this?" Damn, for real?
40%: Falsely arrested (N=72) <i>False arrest</i>	[False arrest] Melanie: I was actually walking and I wasn't even prostituting at the time. And this girl stopped me to talk and it was like three minutes. Dude pulled up and, "now I'm arresting you". I'm like, "Dude, I wasn't even doing nothing. You're assuming." "Oh, I know what you're doing. I know this. I've done this for years."
32.9%: Physically assaulted by police (N=72) <i>Assaulting physically/police using excess force</i>	[Excessive force] Taylor: That's happened in my past where they've tackled me and tased me and all that other stuff.
21.1%: Forced sex by police (N=72) <i>Forcing or coercing sex</i> <i>Refusing to trade sex with police</i>	[Forced/coerced sex] Selena: He literally would pick me up once a week. You would either do what they say or they make life fucked up for you. You don't got to go do what they want you to do, but then every time they see you, they're going to arrest you or fuck with you. He would pick me up every week in his freaking full uniform in his little fucked up Toyota and take me to [grocery store] in the middle of the parking lot at like 7:30 in the morning and have sex with me on the front seat in full uniform and drop me off and pay me \$10.
<i>Other police misconduct/not able to report misconduct;</i> <i>Notoriously bad cops</i>	
Other types of negative interactions: • <i>Racial profiling</i>	[Police misconduct] Kendra: I could remember times when the police officers were confiscating our money, saying they were evidence. No, they weren't using it for evidence. They were taking it for themselves. We never got it back. It never got into

-
- *Being/becoming a "known prostitute"* evidence in the jails. In fact, one of the crews became really infamously known for doing it.
 - *Restricted from areas*
-

Integrated Findings

Fit: Concordance and Expansion

Meta-inferences: Both sets of findings align. Quantitative findings highlight the frequency of these types of interactions, while qualitative results expand on the types of interactions (e.g., police misconduct, racial profiling, and restrictions and extra scrutiny when policy identify a woman as a "known prostitute"). Qualitative results also describe what occurs in these types of interactions and how they affect the women. A sense of humiliation and disempowerment seemed to permeate these experiences.

Other stories depict these kinds of negative interactions with police and the resulting physical and psychological effects. Nyasha was brutally sexually assaulted by a police officer:

One time I was raped by an on-duty police officer. I wasn't even out prostituting or anything at this time. He just pulled me over, arrested me—well, he handcuffed me— took me two and a half blocks down in an alley, took the cuffs off me and raped me anally. And let me out. I just felt humiliated.

Danyelle recounted an incident where police used excessive and unnecessary force:

I was big and pregnant, and I got pushed down by the police. You could tell I was pregnant, there was no hiding there was a baby damn near ready to come out. I was like seven-eight months pregnant. Yep, they didn't get in trouble for that either. They pushed me down and then they dragged me back. I had a burn mark like this big on my leg. It looked like a motorcycle burn. It was horrible.

Similarly, Diane described physical and verbal abuse by the police that diminished her view of the police:

I've been treated pretty bad, thrown on the ground, several police together, like, "Stop resisting." "I'm not doing nothing. I'm standing here. I'm hollering, yeah, because I feel like you're trying to do something to me," you know, while other police watch. Yeah, so it's really hard to get a good, like different view [of the police].

Veronica witnessed a violent encounter with a police officer, which left her feeling that police get away with violence, mistreatment, and misconduct, and was fearful of what they might do to her. She recounted that,

I even seen a cop choke a prostitute. Scared the shit out of me. Turned around, ran and hid. Actually I think I stayed in that damn dumpster for six hours because I was so scared. 'Cause I seen and I didn't know if he saw me.

Kiana explained about sexual misconduct by police toward women who sell sex by telling a story about her cousin's experience:

There was one police officer that treated her like she was a prostitute, where he wasn't supposed to search her and he did anyway. He felt on her a little bit. He offered her a release if she could give him head. It's more of they treat us different once they find out what we're doing out there, versus anybody else. They feel like it's an opportunity for them to get in on whatever, because they know we don't want to be arrested, we don't want to go to jail... So, they'll whisper the craziest things in your ear or they'll get your information and find you.

Veronica described what happened after refusing to trade sex with a police officer, who then seemed to target her for arrest in retribution:

Then I found out he was a cop, and then I said, "no, no, no, I can't do this [trade sex with the officer]." He's corrupt and it made me feel some type of way. Then all of a sudden, I started getting tickets from the same cop. I had 42 tickets with the same two cops.

Selena explained the way police harass women on the street once they have a criminal record or if they are out in public in known drug and prostitution areas, placing them under intense scrutiny, which limits their freedom of movement and can lead to false arrests.

If you're a convicted prostitute, you can literally get a loitering ticket for being in front of Chuck E. Cheese if they want to. Once you are convicted and 'photographed and

tagged”², you can literally be ticketed just for being outside. K, but if you're not photographed and tagged, if you don't have an actual conviction, then they can still write you numerous tickets for loitering in a prostitution and drug area.

Lisa was falsely arrested after an undercover officer approached and solicited her; she was present on a street in the midst of a prostitution sting of which she was not aware:

He was like, "Hey, how you doing?" I'm like, "Hey, how you doing?" Not knowing it's an undercover cop. He approached me and I'm like, "No. I'm good on that situation." By me even engaging in conversation with him, the police pull up on me, three detective cars, and they arrest me...I never said anything about a price or engaging into a sexual act.

False arrest and harassment may also stem from racial profiling. I did not directly ask about racial profiling, so the frequency of this type of experience is unknown. However, Faith explicitly described harassment that she felt was motivated by racism:

This one cop that used to harass me all the time—that's when I first got out there and stuff—he was racial profiling...And for two weeks, they harassed me, stopping me, asking me my name, and I was like, “Why can't I just be out enjoying the neighborhood? Why I got to be prostituting?”

Also common was verbal harassment and abuse. For instance, Diana related some of the degrading things the police would say to her and about her:

I was out there bad and I had some experiences where I wasn't taking care of myself and they talked about me. They talked about me to other people. You know, “We picked your friend up and that bitch was stinking like a dog.”

Danyelle, who had been trafficked in many different states and cities, asserted that some cities had particularly aggressive or abusive police officers: “Chicago police are so mean, so rude,

² Selena’s mention of being “photographed and tagged” refers to a practice police in this Midwestern city used to identify “known prostitutes.” They had a large book of mug shots of women labeled as convicted prostitutes.

they call you bitches, hoes. They are very verbally abusive.” A few women discussed racist verbal abuse from police, such as one survey respondent who stated that a police officer told her she was “just another nigger on the street” or when Maya stated, “I done had racist cops arrest me before, calling me all kinds of Black bitches and everything else.”

Melanie described how the police talked down to her and made her feel “worthless” when detaining her: “They just attach you to a chair or this long hard bench, make you feel like a piece of shit. You’ll be thinking in your head, ‘Fuck you. I’m going to get high after this, you big idiot.’” Several women discussed verbal abuse and inhumane conditions when booked and detained, where they were kept in an overcrowded, freezing cold holding cell for two to three days with no jacket or blanket and only a cold hard floor on which to sleep.

These negative interactions with police were frequent and pervasive among study participants. They felt humiliated, violated, and powerless to hold offending police officers accountable or to assert their rights.

Ambiguous Police Interactions

Certain types of interactions with the police were described ambiguously. These interactions were perceived differently by different study participants and perceptions varied based on the context of the encounter; in some cases, participants described the encounters in an indifferent or ambivalent manner. For instance, while most spoke of arrests as a negative experience, some spoke of being arrested or ticketed in a neutral or matter of fact way. They saw it as acceptable or just “police doing their job”, provided it was absent the negative behaviors described above (e.g., verbal abuse, excessive force, false arrest). Indeed, 18% of women endorsed “being arrested” as helpful (generally, under certain circumstances such as when homeless or as a way to detox from drugs and escape the harshness of street life).

I categorized being paid for sex by police as an ambiguous police interaction because some respondents described it as positive while others described it as negative, and the context of the interaction mattered. Some saw this as just another customer and means to make money,

or even appreciated police officers referring others to them for transactional sex purposes. Others saw the police paying for sex as negative, whether or not they ever traded sex with a police officer, either because they felt it was coercive, corrupt, or too much of a risk. Also described in somewhat ambiguous terms was when police tried to get information from them about suspected criminal activity (i.e., being used as an informant). This was sometimes seen as acceptable when the women felt safe and willing to do so. Many others saw being an informant as risky, unsafe, and exploitative.

Being paid for sex by police was very common, with 45.7% of participants reporting this type of interaction. Interview participants discussed this in different ways—perceived as positive, neutral, or negative. Brooke discussed being paid for sex by many different police officers. When I asked, “Have you had any positive experiences with the police, where they helped you or treated you well or something?” Brooke responded:

They always treated me like, “Oh, I pay you.” Especially if they see me in the process or about to do it. And then they tell me, “Oh, I’m getting off at this time. This is the number I’m calling you off of, answer the phone.”

Brooke also mentioned one officer who was a regular paying customer that helped her take care of her responsibilities and others that prevented her from facing criminal repercussions:

They tell me, “If I ever see you walk in, doing anything, I’m not going to get you in trouble. I’ll make sure you’re safe.” And he did. He’d see me walking down [street name], he never busted me down, never did anything.

Sometimes participants discussed being paid for sex by police in a very matter-of-fact way, as if it was a common or neutral practice occurring within their sex trading experiences. Faith mentioned one police officer with whom she traded sex as just another regular customer, yet she also acknowledged that she learned that this police officer was notoriously engaging in coercive behavior and misconduct:

This young White guy, I used to date him all the time. He would pick me up, put me in the back of the squad car, and we would go down to [park name] or whatever. He was the guy, the officer that got arrested for harassing or extorting the prostitutes on the south side not too long ago.

Some women discussed paid sex with police officers as something that was normal for them at the time, but later felt it was problematic. For example, Nyeshia's main interactions with police involved sex parties:

I knew like two specific police officers that liked trading money for sex. I would hook them up with different girls. They would have parties. Some of us would just go to dance half naked, some would go to have sex, and some would go to be the bartenders and some would go to pass out the food. We all had different roles and different positions when we were with them.

In fact, several women discussed paid sex with police at bachelor and other group parties, private clubs, and the like, arranged or patronized by police officers.

Others described paid sex with police officers in more ambivalent terms, where they expressed both openness to the encounter and discomfort with certain aspects of the interaction. The way the interaction was perceived depended on whether the police officer was on or off duty, or if they were honest and upfront about being a police officer. Kiana engaged with a man via social media, who she learned was a police officer through some photos she found. She explained her discomfort with trading sex under these circumstances:

He asked me, "Did you want to meet up at the hotel later? You know I got you." And it was more of me being scared of, yeah, this might be a setup, more than anything. I kind of blocked him like, nah. So, it was one thing when you was giving me advice and we was talking as mutual friends, to you jumping to, "Okay, let's meet up at the hotel." No, something's not right about this picture at all. We was talking for about two, three weeks, and you never mentioned one time, like "I'm a police officer."

Among other respondents, trading sex with police was perceived as negative under any circumstance. Maya felt uncomfortable with trading sex with police officers:

One of my other tricks, I found out, was a police officer, and I didn't know he was a police officer. It scared the hell out of me when I went to his house and heard walkie talkies going off, and stuff like that. I seen some handcuffs in his bathroom, I seen a walkie talkie in the kitchen going off, and his whole uniform just laid out on his bedroom floor beside his bed...I thought, is he trying to set me up?

Taylor, who was trafficked as a minor, had police officers pay her for sex while on duty and in uniform: "They'll be like, 'Yeah, I'm a police officer, but I'm down with it. I mean, I'm not here to arrest you. I'm just here to get pleasure.'" Because of her status as a minor (and trafficked) at the time, these interactions were harmful regardless of the neutrality of her statement; she also later stated that this type of police interaction was part of what "kept me in [trafficking]."

I categorized "being used as an informant" or being asked to inform on others, reported by 40% of respondents, as ambiguous because respondents had differing opinions about this type of interaction, depending on the person or context. Nina described how the police approached her in a somewhat friendly manner:

They will pull up on me. Because they'll be looking for somebody, they'll come up to us and ask us about somebody—that they're concerned about someone's wellbeing or they're looking for somebody dangerous or something like that. And they'll come up and they'll be like "Hey Nina, how's it going?" I'll be like "I was fine until you pulled up on me, messing up my business, move along." I was always a jokester with them.

Nina further contended that "[Police] need us in a very big way. Because we know what's going on out there." Others explained that being an informant to the police is a great risk to their safety. Tasha asserted: "That's putting me in danger, period, because somebody else could have been watching me talk to the police. I wouldn't talk to them anyway."

Lastly, interactions with police that did not result in arrest and women feeling insulted and disrespected sometimes seemed to fall into a neutral or ambiguous category of interaction. As Brooke stated:

I got in some trouble out in Chicago, but they never really, they really don't care. They run your name, if you ain't got no warrant, they don't take you in. I got stopped plenty of times in Chicago walking the boulevard. As long as I ain't had no warrant, they didn't take me in. They asked me why I'm working, "you look, you too clean to work the track. Why you out here?" That's what I used to get a lot. "You ain't on drugs." They'd check my arms, make sure. "What the hell is you out here for?" "I need some money." "Who you working for?" And I never [told who], "I'm not working for nobody."

Ambiguous police interactions may be perceived by study participants as either positive, negative, neutral, or discussed in an ambivalent manner. In interpreting these results (e.g., respondent's assessment of police interactions), I considered the underlying context of power imbalance and potential coercion that can create risks for women trading sex. However, presenting these interactions from the women's point of view is helpful for understanding their threshold of expectations, how different police interactions affect perceptions of police, and what influence they may have on exiting.

Positive Police Interactions

Over half of surveyed women reported ever having a helpful interaction with police. The types of helpful or positive interactions that women endorsed are included in the joint display table below with associated qualitative codes and quotes. The main types of positive interactions include not being arrested by police (e.g., given a warning/let go), police showing compassion and not treating like a criminal, encouraging to make a change, offering to help quit trading sex, and helping in a moment of crisis.

Table 19

Joint Display on Positive Police Interactions

Quantitative: Positive interactions	Qualitative codes/quotes: Positive interactions
Total Sample: 52.8% of those surveyed reported a helpful interaction	<i>Not being arrested by police</i> Nina: I got pulled over. When I say pulled over, I was walking. And they said, "What are you doing out here?" They ran my name and stuff, and nothing ever came of it, but they were always like, they knew my history before I came out there and they knew I was falling into the cracks.
Types of positive interactions (N=72): 44.4% Not arrested/gave warning only	<i>Police encouraging her to make a change</i> Melanie: One officer would tell me, "so much better than this," and you know, meant it. Things like that stick with you.
41.7% Encouraged to make a change	<i>Police offering to help quit trading sex</i> Selena: He literally would always whenever he had me and had to take me downtown or anything, he would always be like, "What can I do? What can I do to get you out of this? You don't belong out there." He was totally sincere.
34.7% Responded to a crisis in a helpful manner	<i>Police showing compassion/ not treating like criminal</i> Taylor: Talking to certain police officers, they made me feel better about myself. Like I'm a victim, you know what I mean? I'm a victim of it. I'm not the one doing it to myself.
30.6% Showed compassion/ sympathy	<i>Police helping in a moment of crisis</i> Maya [while being chased down the street by someone who wanted to harm her]: They stopped that person and I kept running. It's times where, yeah, the police have helped me.
18.1% Arrested	
16.7% Referred or taken to a program for help	
11.1% Gave food or other items	

Integrated Findings

Fit: Concordance and Expansion

Meta-analysis: Quantitative and qualitative findings generally align in terms of the types of positive interactions, and what kinds of interactions were more common than others. However qualitative results also illuminate other types of positive interactions (discussed below) such as ongoing friendly relationships with police officers and more compassion and helpfulness from police trained or specializing in human trafficking. However, though the largest number of women endorsed not being arrested as a positive interaction, very few interview participants spoke of these types of encounters as especially helpful, unless there were other positive aspects associated with those interactions (e.g., being treated respectfully or with genuine concern).

Positive interactions with police ranged from a kind word to dramatic tales of being removed from life-threatening harm. Even the smallest of positive interactions had an effect as respondents felt like they were treated more humanely. Faith recounted how she got caught in a sting, but the officer that pulled up alongside her offered encouragement instead of insulting her,

"You seem like such a nice girl, you not like these other girls out here. Why are you doing this? Have you ever thought about stopping?"

Selena had ongoing, friendly relationships with police officers at different points in her sex trading history. When she was still a hair stylist and only traded sex online, she had some positive relationships that benefited her:

I've had help with law enforcement in [name of county] because I cut almost all the [county]'s law enforcement's hair when I was living in [city name]. I cut the chief of police and the deputy lieutenant's hair faithfully every two weeks for three and a half years. Because I have such a long criminal history, it would be hard for me to move to a really nice place or whatever, and they even let me use them as references and things like that.

Later when Selena was in Milwaukee, she was on good terms with a few different officers, who checked on her, or joked around with her: "They'll joke with me, they're not all bad. They're not all bad to me anymore." Nina also had officers that checked on her or joked around with her. She explained that in her experience, police officers did not bother much with her because she was not disruptive and kept a "low profile," something that other women who were able to avoid police interaction also expressed. Nina felt like she was showing some respect to neighbors and the community because:

I didn't put myself out there. I wasn't known to use. I didn't have needles on me. I wasn't a threat; I didn't cause problems out there. So, I wasn't one of those people that they had to keep an eye on. I didn't have the neighbors calling about me. I was in and out, I wasn't just staying on one corner. I made it a route. I walked a couple blocks this way. But I caught [got customers] fast.

Some women, like Danyelle, had positive experiences with law enforcement personnel with training and expertise in trafficking:

The [suburb name] police, Human Trafficking Division, they're really nice. That's because they care... They're like, "Please don't come back here, they have bedbugs at this hotel." They told me all this stuff, and they drove me from [suburb] all the way to [urban street intersection] and told me to stay away.

Taylor also described positive experiences with trafficking-specific law enforcement personnel: "There's a couple police officers that have been through the same thing. And they just help now. They don't do harm, they help." I asked, "Been through the same thing, meaning that they were trafficked themselves?" Taylor responded affirmatively, "Mm-hmm, so they understand what's going on. They're here to help." Interactions with law enforcement personnel that were trained to understand sex trafficking or who had lived experience acted in a more sensitive and compassionate manner and were more attentive to the women's safety and well-being.

Taylor also had help with police arresting her trafficker and her trafficker's "associates". Facing a life-threatening situation where one of her trafficker's associates (i.e., other men assisting in the trafficker's operations) was seeking retribution against her for reporting to the police (though it was a different trafficking victim who had done so), the police arrived on the scene and facilitated her escape:

He came to me and he was like, "Bitch ass whore you snitched on him. Give me your phone. Change the password." So I did all that because he had a gun pointed to my face. And I was praying that I would get out of there alive. And that's when the police knocked on the door.

She was able to get away and went to a program for help and then to the police. Ultimately, the individuals responsible for trafficking and harming her were arrested and prosecuted for their crimes against her and others, which gave Taylor some faith that police can and will help trafficking victims.

Though Sharise never received help from police in leaving a trafficker, she described a uniquely helpful encounter with a police officer who went above and beyond the call of duty to help her get out of harm's way:

She pulled over and I'm thinking she probably taking me in. She was like, "Girl, let me tell you something." She was Black, in Vegas. She was like, "It's a killer out here. He's snatching up little girls. I'm letting you know you should go home." And she gave me a hundred dollars. And I cried. I cried the whole night because I'm like, "God, you trying to tell me something." I didn't go out that night because I don't want, uh-uh [shaking head in thought]. What? What officer to give a prostitute a hundred dollars—a stranger? And tell her that she can't work tonight because there's somebody out here kidnapping girls? So, I went in. She even took me to the hotel. You hear me?

Kendra had a particularly moving experience where police and security officers helped her in a time of crisis. They provided her with invaluable assistance, allowing her to successfully escape from her trafficker when she sought them out for help in a Las Vegas casino:

They were trying to get my family on the phone for like two hours. We couldn't reach my family. They didn't want to let me back out on the street, but they really weren't supposed to have me in there. They could have gotten in a lot of trouble, so I remembered them going to bat for me in that way. They were like "Okay, we're going to keep trying, but if we can't get them eventually, we're going to have to go let you go back out." But they were like, in their heart, you could see that they were having this fight within themselves like "No, we have to just keep trying. We have to just keep trying." When we got my family on the phone, everybody clapped and everybody, like you saw the emotion come out of them. I remembered them telling me, "We're going to check in on your name to see that you've not been back in any of our casinos and we're going to be pissed and we're going to come at you hard if you come back here. Don't you come back to Nevada. You get out of here and you go home, and you get your life back

together.” I remember one of them telling me thank you, because he said so many times they go home from work, and they can't tell their families that they did anything that they felt was of value. One of them was like “I can go home tonight, and I can share with my family that one of the girls, they went home.”

This experience was very impactful for Kendra, in that it helped her physically escape a dangerous and abusive situation, but also gave her a sense that there was help available in a time of crisis and that these police and security officers wanted to see her do well. It positively motivated her to not return to her trafficker, even when she felt a pull back to her trafficking “family.”

Overall, despite many negative encounters with the police, these positive experiences influenced the women's perceptions of police to varying degrees. This spectrum of harmful to helpful police encounters described by interviewed women helps to explain the way women rated the police in surveys.

Perception of Police

Surveys and interviews revealed data related to women's perception of the police. Their perceptions were based on their own experiences, interactions they witnessed or heard about, and a general sense of the police that may come from collective experiences or community perceptions. For instance, Maya said “I don't trust the police, and it's not just because of what I've been through. I don't trust police because don't nobody trust police. They don't never show up on time for one, and when they do show up they always arresting the wrong people.” However, given the high rate of arrest and incarceration among survey and interview participants, most had at least one personal interaction with which to base their impressions of the police.

Survey participants had a relatively low perception of the police. Survey participants were asked to rate their overall experience with the police; the mean rating of police was 3.9 on a scale of 0 (worst) to 10 (best). In addition, when asked how often they felt they were treated

fairly by the police, 25.4% indicated never, 16.9% said rarely, 26.8% endorsed sometimes, while 21.1% indicated often and 9.9% said always.

Among interview participants, there were some differences in ratings of police based on level of contact, as those with minimal police contact had an average police rating of five, while those with medium/high level of police contact, had an average rating of three. Level of police contact was not assessed within survey data. There was not much difference in average police ratings among exiting outcome groups of interview participants: women who exited had an average rating of three, women wishing to exit had an average rating of four; there was no statistically significant difference in exiting outcome group means among survey participants (using either Kruskal-Wallis test with rating of police as a continuous variable or using Pearson chi-square test when rating of police was dichotomized into two equal groups). There was also no clear pattern of difference in ratings of police based on race or ethnicity. Among interview participants, Black women had a mean rating of 3.8, White women 3.3, Native American women 2.5, and Latina women 3.3. Among survey participants, there was an even split of women who rated the police 0-4 (n=36) and 5-10 police ratings (n=36); these groups were compared but there were no statistically significant differences in police rating based on race, ethnicity, or age.

Each type of police interaction (e.g., prostitution-related arrest, false arrest, physical assault) was explored to determine if there were any statistically significant associations with the women's ratings of police. Of all the types of interactions that women had with the police, only two were found to have statistically significant associations with perception of police. Those who were not satisfied with police response to their report of victimization and those who indicated that they did not report victimization to police due to fear of being dismissed or not treated respectfully were associated with lower ratings of police, i.e., worse perception of police. While it is surprising to fail to find significant associations between other negative experiences with the police and low police ratings, the qualitative data also show a great deal of emphasis on harmful responses from police after being victimized. In fact, some, like Veronica, perceived that type of

encounter as the worst of all their experiences with the police: “They didn't believe me when I got raped. They didn't even know I was stabbed, I was bleeding inside,” though Veronica tried to tell the responding police what happened to her. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative data point to the heavy impact of poor police response to victimization. The display below presents joint findings and interpretations pertaining to how poor response to victimization affects perception of police.

Table 20

Joint Display on Police Response to Victimization and Perception of Police

Quantitative	Qualitative codes and quote
<p>Lower police rating: 0-4 Higher police rating:5-10</p> <p>Satisfaction with police response to their victimization (N=72)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not satisfied: 60% Gave police a lower rating • Satisfied: 88.2% Gave police a higher rating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating as if deserved to be victimized • Treating like criminal instead of victim • Arrested after reporting victimization • Reporting to police but nothing became of it • Police refusing to treat assault as rape • Having to advocate to be treated as victim
<p>Statistically significant association between those who reported not being satisfied with response from police after reporting their own victimization and low police rating Chi-square $F=13.075, p=.001$.</p>	<p>Diana: I've had several experiences that I've been sexually abused, and you know, you get to the point where you don't even want to report it. Because they're not going to do anything. They're going to look at you like, “Well do something different. It's your fault. You shouldn't have been out there and that's what happens when you do that.” You know. It's sad to say that, and you know in your own mind you will start to believe that. It's another form of abuse—psychological, you know.</p>
<p>Victimized but did not report to police for fear of being dismissed or not treated respectfully (N=72):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsed yes: 60% Gave a lower police rating • Endorsed no: 66.7% Gave police a higher rating 	
<p>Statistically significant association between those who were victimized but did not report to police for fear of being dismissed or not treated respectfully and low police rating Chi-square $F=4.8, p=.028$.</p>	
<hr/> <p>Integrated Findings</p> <hr/>	
<p>Fit: Concordant</p> <hr/>	

Meta-inferences: The quantitative and qualitative results align in demonstrating the critical and significant impact of neglectful and harmful police responses to victimization on women's perception of police. These results also show that those negative experiences shape their decisions to avoid seeking help from police because they are perceived as unhelpful, disrespectful, abusive, and punitive (e.g., leading to arrest or labeling as a "known prostitute").

Women shared a myriad of stories in which police treated them as criminals instead of victims or as deserving of the abuse they received, and how these experiences affected their perceptions of police. Brooke explained an incident with police when a man who was supposed to be a paying customer sexually assaulted her at knifepoint:

He wanted me to piss and shit on him and I couldn't. And I told the police that he pulled out a knife on me and he just had me so shook up. They told me it wasn't rape, it wasn't anything. I thought it was something. If you're doing anything with sex and trading money, they're not help. They won't even swab—you know how they do the test results? They wouldn't even give me a swab.

Brooke and Diana's quotes, as well as those shared by many other women in both interviews and surveys, demonstrate encounters in which police were dismissive, disrespectful, victim-blaming, obstructive of access to healthcare or other services, and more concerned with arresting than assisting the women or pursuing those who perpetrated violence against them. It is especially noteworthy that these types of experiences, beyond all other types of police experiences (including forced sex and physical assault), resulted in statistically significant associations with lower perceptions of police.

Interview data reveal the following sub-themes related to perception of the police: 1) police do not help, 2) police do not believe "prostitutes" and "drug users," 3) police act with impunity, 4) fear of police, and 5) police are just doing their job. All sub-themes (except perhaps the last) overlap with one another but are distinct in the message conveyed by the women interviewed.

Police Do Not Help

Many women felt that the police do not help. Their perception was that in a time of crisis, the police would either do nothing or cause more problems for them. When victimized, the focus would be on them as criminals or as deserving of the violence against them, rather than on the perpetrator. The women felt that while police had a duty to “serve and protect,” police did not fulfill this professional mandate; the impression was that this mandate did not apply to women who trade sex and/or use drugs. As Veronica stated, “They're supposed to be our protectors. Cops are supposed to help us but they're doing more harm.” Brooke also succinctly declared, when asked what she felt the effects of her interactions with police have had on her: “If something happens, like shit, just don't call the police because they ain't going to do nothing anyway.”

Police Do Not Believe “Drug Users” or “Prostitutes”

Many of the interviewees also perceived that police do not believe women that use drugs or trade sex. They felt that police chose to assume the worst of them—that they were always liars who were guilty of crimes and responsible for their own victimization. Lisa explained:

Sometimes I think they [police] should approach the situation differently. Because sometimes these girls, they'll be wanting to get off the streets. But they treat them as users, prostitutes, and stuff like that. They basically don't give them a chance. They just judge a book by its cover: “You're a prostitute. You're a drug user. You need to be in jail.” And sometimes it's not even that. It's just they don't have a way out.

Some respondents felt that this lack of basic respect for women trading sex and using drugs led police to not properly investigate their deaths, automatically treating their deaths as overdoses, suicides, or simply unworthy of thorough investigation. Nyesha’s cousin was brutally murdered and left in an alley; she felt the police did not do their job to investigate the crime because of her cousin’s involvement in sex trading. “She was a prostitute and they found her cut up in between three tires back here in 2001. She was 23 years old.” She said the police, “Still don't have any leads or anything, they don't know anything.” Veronica described the deaths of

six women she believed were murdered that the police did not investigate: “Just like when they [police] don't think it's a killing. There's a serial killer—because there's one in a dumpster, gasoline poured on them and torched. They found bodies out at [park facility], over there in the lagoon they found bodies that were prostitutes...” She resented the lack of care and attention to these crimes against women who were using drugs and trading sex, as if they were responsible for their own deaths.

Police Act with Impunity

Some interview participants discussed the police as engaging in misconduct without any recourse to hold them accountable. Several discussed that there was no viable means of reporting police misconduct. They felt that police abused their power and authority, acting with impunity, especially in their interactions with women trading sex or using drugs. Veronica had very strong feelings about the police, often mentioning that they are “corrupt,” “two-faced,” and lacking accountability for their actions. “They are corrupt but we can't do nothing about it because they're gonna be them. Because they're gonna look at our records and say, ‘oh, she's a prostitute, so she's lying.’”

Nyasha shared that she felt police are easily able to get away with illegal activity, which led her to distrust and avoid police.

I could never trust the police because all the things we were doing illegally with each other [paid sex encounters] and then one of the guys, I didn't even know him, you know, the police officer that raped me. He just raped me, and it was like, “wow.” To this day, I really don't talk to police. If anything happens, I don't want to be in front of them. I don't want to say anything to them because I don't want to go through anything with them.

DM: Did you feel like you could report what happened? Did you try or did you even feel like you could?

No, I didn't feel like I could because they're not going to believe me anyway.

Maya had mixed feelings about the police, but perceived that police often abuse their power:

It's not like I'm just anti-police ... I feel like officers are power happy because they know where they stand in the community, so anything they say goes. I hate that. I feel like we gave them so much power that they feel like upon arrest they can cuss you out, call you all kinds of names, talk to you any kind of way, not knowing you mentally fucking somebody up. I done had racist cops arrest me before, calling me all kinds of Black bitches and everything else. I don't know how to explain it, but I feel like we gave them too much power, and at the same time not enough, because they always saying what they can't do. But then when they feel like it, when they come to a situation not even know what's going on, they can come and just withdraw they guns, tell everybody, "Shut the hell up and get down." ... I like the police. They're cool people when they can be, when they do help, but I feel like there's so many mixed personalities out there.

The perception of abuse of power and misconduct with no accountability for their actions was prevalent and resulted in distrust and avoidance of police.

Fear of Police

There was an element of fear among some of the women when they discussed their experiences with the police and their perception of police. For instance, Kiana and Maya chose not to trade sex with police (off-duty) out of fear that it could be either a set up for arrest, a means to blackmail, or to coerce or force sexual activity with impunity. In particular, Nyesha and Veronica feared the police because they felt that the police were involved in causing extreme harm (including lethal harm) to women trading sex. They tried to avoid the police at all costs. Veronica had extreme anxiety when police were in close proximity due to ongoing police harassment and false arrest.

My blood pressure goes high. I hyperventilate. I'll be sweating. I'll be like turning all red. I can't breathe...I'm so paranoid with them, every time I see one, it's oh my God, I'm

getting a ticket. I'm going to jail. I start crying, and that's how bad. And I'm trying to do good. I got out of it for over two years, but I'm still getting ticketed.

Other women shared stories of physical and sexual harm by police, thus fear of police is a possible outcome of these experiences, and noteworthy in understanding why women who trade sex may perceive the police in negative and fearful ways.

Police are Just Doing Their Job

A few interview participants held more positive or neutral perceptions of the police. This may have been due to fewer police interactions, more positive interactions, and/or a sense of the legitimacy of police in their role as enforcers of the law. Some women perceived the police as "just doing their job." Nina explained:

Everybody else's experience is different, but I had no bad experience, I just feel like they were just doing their job. You know? Because I really have very rare contact with the police. I've seen them, they came talk to me. Stuff like that. They not always arrested me, but there's some times where yeah, they had to do their job, because they're being watched and the alderman is on their ass or something like that. "Get these prostitutes out of here."

Nina empathized with the police and the job they have to do in enforcing laws against prostitution and drug use.

Selena also felt that the police should not be perceived negatively, because they had a particular job to do and it did not involve helping people struggling on the streets:

There might be a few individual [police officers] themselves that would like to see the females not do what they're doing, but that's not their job. Their job is not to transform and redirect drug-addicted prostitutes off of [street names] and to a God-fearing, law-abiding life. That's not their job. Their job is to arrest these girls.

Thus, for some women, there was a sense of the legitimacy of police and perception of police as agents in a role to arrest and enforce the law, and that police should not be expected

to do anything more or less. They acknowledged higher authorities that oversee them and greater political forces that influence the police (e.g., pressure from elected officials). The women who perceived police as “just doing their job” had several positive interactions with police from which to draw. This highlights the critical importance of positive interactions with police in order to perceive police as legitimate in their work.

Perceptions of police were also based on a perspective that not all police officers were either good or bad. Faith had a mix of positive and negative experiences with the police, which ultimately lent to an overall positive-leaning perception of police:

I mean, it's been times where they were encouraging, like “there's more to life than this, you deserve better.” I don't have a problem with the police, because like I said, it's good and bad in every race, in every setting. We all human, so different police have they different biases, or preconceived notions about people, or prostitutes, or drug addicts, or whatever, but I've ran into a few that genuinely care, so I ain't got nothing bad to say about the police. I mean, I've ran into a couple assholes, but that's everywhere you go.

The impact of harmful or helpful responses to the women's victimization experiences and the cumulative effect of positive, ambiguous, or negative interactions shaped women's perceptions of police. These perceptions of police, based largely on personal experience, affected their help-seeking behavior, thus influencing their ability and motivation to exit from sex trading.

Influence of Police on Exiting

Women's range of both positive and negative experiences with police, and the resultant perceptions of police, may have an influence on exiting. Analysis of quantitative data was not instructive in finding associations between exiting outcomes and either perceptions of police or types of experiences with police; there were no statistically significant differences in group means. Nevertheless, qualitative findings provide useful answers to the question of whether and how their experiences with and perceptions of police may influence exiting; many women

directly verbalized the influence of these encounters on their lives and their motivation and ability to exit. The following sub-themes relate to the influence of police on exiting: 1) police responses to victimization are harmful, 2) the attitude and behavior of police makes them a threat instead of a source of help, 3) police may reinforce a trafficker's power and control, 4) arrests compound problems, and 5) police can be a source of help and a catalyst for change. These sub-themes illuminate the ways that their experiences with the police facilitate or impede exiting.

Police Responses to Victimization are Harmful

The manner in which police responded to the women's victimization or neglected to respond to their victimization appeared to have a profound impact on the women, with both quantitative and qualitative results pointing to the significance of these experiences. Women that were not satisfied with police response to their victimization were more likely to rate the police poorly. Women that chose not to report to the police due to a fear of being dismissed or disrespected were also more likely to give a lower rating of police.

Interview participants shared strong thoughts and feelings about the impact of these harmful or neglectful police responses. This was exemplified when I asked Veronica, "Do you feel like those experiences that you've talked about with the police, do you feel like that had any influence on making you want to get out?" Her response was:

Yes, it did. Because for my wellbeing, my life, I could not get 100% that I'll be alive in the hands of the cops. Because when I got stabbed and raped for three hours, they didn't give a damn. They said "yeah, okay, you're a prostitute. What do you expect? You're gonna get raped. It's your fault." They put all the blame on me, and it's like if I turned around and asked for help with the cops, I might as well turn around and be dead because they didn't—I was hemorrhaging inside. They didn't give a damn.

Veronica's answer reflects the harm and re-traumatization of her experience with the police after being sexually assaulted and stabbed. This motivated her to exit because she felt that if she

continued she would be harmed or killed, and the police would be negligent in assisting her to access life-saving care. This realization that they would not help in a life-or-death situation was a horrifying wake up call. Despite this being a motivator for Veronica, this experience did nothing to facilitate her ability to exit. These harmful responses compounded trauma and impacted women's help-seeking behaviors. Brooke stated simply: "If something happens, like shit, just don't call the police because they ain't going to do nothing anyways."

Furthermore, harmful and neglectful police responses to victimization can be considered lost opportunities to intervene and assist, as demonstrated by participants who needed medical or other assistance but were delayed or prevented from receiving it. These neglectful responses also allowed perpetrators of violence against women to go unchecked, as described by participants who indicated their assailants were known repeat victimizers.

Attitudes and Behaviors of Police Make Them a Threat Instead of a Source of Help

Similar to the way poor police responses to victimization cause harm, the negative and judgmental attitude and behavior of police make them appear to be a threat instead of a source of help. Tasha explained:

We supposed to want to go to them for help, but we don't because they'd just look at us like a piece of trash or something like that, because we out here like that. Some of us, they don't smell the best, or they don't look the best. We look like shit. But if the police officer's not compassionate enough to know, to lead us in a direction where we can get some help at, we're not going to want to talk to them... because we feel like you a threat to us or you make us feel some type of way.

Tasha's statement demonstrates that police behavior and attitudes diminish women's motivations to seek them out for help, engender fear and distrust, and may cause some women to resist or even fight back against police. Other types of negative interactions, like verbal harassment and abuse, and negative perceptions of police (e.g., as unhelpful and distrustful)

discussed in this chapter reinforce the idea that police are a threat and reduce women's motivation and ability to seek help, if they wanted assistance to quit trading sex.

Police May Reinforce a Trafficker's Power and Control

Typical police interactions and the criminalized response to women trading sex may inadvertently reinforce traffickers' or other abusers' power and control over women. Sharise described the direct physical and financial consequences of her false arrest by the police in a moment when she was trying to leave her trafficker.

I was trying to get on the city bus and they [police] pulled me over. And the city bus came and I see my pimp. And he knew I was about to get locked up and guess what? He bailed me out. So, I had to go back to him. That was an ass whooping that I was not ready for. And to this day, if I see that police officer again, I'd be like, "Yeah, I got my ass whooped because of you. Because now I'm not trying to run away from my pimp. You took me to jail, and he came and got me." I told you, I was willing to bust out so I can go to the Greyhound station.

Sharise's trafficker saw her being arrested and bailed her out, knowing that this further indebted her to him and made clear that trying to escape was futile. Her experience left her with the impression that if she tried to leave her trafficker, the police would not assist and their actions might lead to more problems. The unintentional consequences following police arrest helped her trafficker retain his power and control.

Many of Kendra's interactions with police confirmed to her that the police were not on her side and would not be a source of help, entrenching the psychological hold of her trafficker:

I think that definitely some of the stuff that the police said to us that was rude and condescending encouraged us to stay in. Because everything that the traffickers said, it just made it resonate with more truth, that it was us against the world, that these people didn't care about us, that they would do us in if they could, that that's what they were

waiting on doing. I could say when I was young, the more times they locked me up and stuff the more it made me want to spit fire, like breathe fire on them like a dragon.

Kendra looked at police as a threat and an enemy because of the way they treated her, rather than as a source of protection against her trafficker.

Other quotes demonstrate ways in which police blamed them for intimate partner violence and failed to protect them from abusive partners. Police inadvertently reinforced the power and control of traffickers and abusers.

Arrests Compound Problems

Many interview participants expressed that arresting does not help them to exit nor deter them from trading sex, which is the apparent intent of arrest and criminalization of sex trading. Instead, arrest and incarceration seemed to compound or increase problems in the women's lives. Nyesha asserted:

Jail makes you worse, to me, because you're spending a lot of time away from your child or children. It's harder to solve situations when you're away from your children. A lot of times, your children got all these emotions balled up too. You got to work through those things also, and then you also got to work through the problem you got with prostitution and you got to try to fix that, so that just brings trouble on top of trouble on top of trouble on top of trouble. It doesn't work.

Nyesha's quote points to the ineffectiveness of arrest and jail as a means to stop women from trading sex, as well as the impact of incarceration on children/family.

Criminalization of sex trading also leads to a criminal record that created problems for women when trying to seek out help and opportunities, narrowing their options to improve their lives or exit from sex trading. According to Kiana:

I think they make it a little harder because once you sit there and arrest someone for that, it goes on their record. Any job can find it, Housing can find it, Food Share could find it. Anybody could locate this stuff and it makes it harder for us to get on public

assistance, because now it's more of us having a drug problem, or it's more of this and that, and now they look at you funny. You try to look for a job, it's hard to get a job with that on your record, so if you wanted to get out you couldn't because of the fact now you're looking for a job and you can't get one because y'all decided y'all wanted to arrest somebody.

Brooke, Danyelle, and Kendra also shared the impact that their criminal record had on education and employment opportunities, with both Brooke and Kendra noting that receiving help clearing their records allowed them to go back to school and secure higher wage conventional employment. These results demonstrate multiple problems that stem from an arrest, while offering no assistance to address the underlying reasons for trading sex (e.g., economic need, trafficking, SUD).

Police Can Be a Source of Help and a Catalyst for Change

Despite many of the negative interactions and perceptions of police, many of the women also had positive experiences and some had a positive leaning perception of the police due to these interactions. Interviewed women shared stories of ways that police helped them and even served as a catalyst for change. Nina shared an instance of police officers acting in a kind, compassionate, encouraging, and helpful manner.

He was just telling me how I cleaned up my life and stuff, and how I could do better. I'm worth it. And he told me, these guys ain't worth it out here. And they gave us information on how we can check into a program, different resources and stuff like that.

For Nina, this experience had a big impact because it showed her that police see her as a whole person, worthy of respect and a good life, and can be a source of help in a time of need.

While Nina had mostly positive experiences or feelings about police, others had a mix of good and bad experiences. Though Kendra had a lot of negative interactions with police, she had some interactions that were compassionate and kind, and one monumentally important experience in which police and former police/military security guards helped her to escape from

her trafficker safely. As a community activist, she also saw positive changes in trafficking-related laws, policies, and practices. Kendra explained how impactful police interactions with trafficking victims can be:

There are officers that are better informed. There are officers that are taking their time, to fight, to be in the corner of survivors, and it's duly noted and I see it too. I thank them too because one thing I know from the survivor perspective is that anybody a survivor encounters while they are in that lifestyle of being trafficked can do one of two things—they can pull them out or push them in. You have to figure out which person you're going to be. What message are you really trying to send them?

Kendra's statement demonstrates that police have a critical influence on women's motivation and ability to exit from sex trading or leave a trafficker.

Theory: Police Act as a Barrier to Exiting from Sex Trading but Can Be a Source of Help or a Catalyst for Change

The results demonstrate the many negative interactions women who trade sex have with the police and how they are affected by those experiences, leading to negative perceptions of and aversive relationships with police, thereby impeding the exiting process. Diana insightfully described the effects of negative police encounters on women who trade sex on the street, explaining how it prevented her from getting the help she needed for a long time:

It kicks them when they're down. I think it makes it harder for people to report, harder for people to ask for help, because it just reinforces the ugliness of the situation... You lose trust, you lose hope in this situation. And how do you find your way out when you can't trust nobody? You can't depend on nobody. You can't be vulnerable. You have to be hard. And you have to wear the mask well.

This “hardness” and “masking” were some of the psychological effects that translated to a loss of help-seeking behavior. Yet, findings also show positive interactions, which lend to a more

positive view of police and may facilitate the exiting process, especially if women feel they can safely turn to police in a time of crisis.

Study participants illustrated the influence of police on exiting—on both their motivation and ability to achieve this life change away from trading sex. As Kendra stated “they can pull them out or push them in.” In other words, they can be a source of hope and provide an opportunity for intervention, or they can further entrench a woman’s involvement in sex trading or sex trafficking.

Rather than rely solely on my interpretations of how police practices and laws might change based on the women’s experiences, I explicitly asked women during interviews about their recommendations for changes that might help women who wish to exit from sex trading or be able to improve their lives.

Recommendations: Police Practices

Study participants’ advice included more compassionate, respectful treatment, less judgment and more questions, and more appropriate response to victimization. However, there was also conflicting advice from a few participants who recommended stricter enforcement of prostitution and/or drug laws.

Police Should Treat Women Who Trade Sex with Respect, Compassion, and Professionalism

Nearly all women specifically recommended that police change the way they approach and treat women selling sex. The women’s responses reflect a desire for police to treat them with respect, to withhold judgment, and act in a professional and ethical manner. They wanted police to be compassionate and ask questions, rather than assume the worst. Participants also made the connection to how more respect and professionalism could both prevent harm and change the nature of police relationships with women who trade sex on the street, engendering a more positive or cooperative dynamic. Diana explained her perspective on the need for professionalism among police:

We're all human. We have moments, but you're a professional. I have a set of rules about a professional in that capacity. All your personal shit should not be displayed. Laugh about people on your own time, you know, in the car with your buddy. How can you be respected? I think that they should be more professional in their interactions. Don't demean people because, you know, these women are people regardless of where they're at in their life.

Melanie also underscored that the way police approach people selling sex (or using drugs) needed to change:

Don't approach them like they're the scum of the fucking earth, or right away assume what they're doing. The way you approach somebody, you can offer somebody so much help. And I get it and it's stressful and that's their jobs—I think about, oh this is their job, you know? But it's your approach to somebody that does matter.

Faith reported a need for greater sensitivity and understanding: “The police should have some sensitivity training about being compassionate and empathetic about what's going on.”

Taylor also advised less judgment, more compassion, and more questions to understand the women's circumstances, and noted how that will elicit better relationships with police:

They should understand what's going on first before they just judge 'cause you never know if a female has a pimp or if she's doing it just for herself, or if she has kids at home that she's trying to support.... When they do arrest her, they should treat her as normal human being not just a criminal, not just a person that sells their body, they should be treated as a human being and understood of what's going on. 'Cause if a person is treated with respect, they're going to give back respect and they're going to tell you more than what they would get when you're being rude.

Police Should Respond Appropriately and Sensitively to Victimization Experiences

Study participants advised greater sensitivity, care, and attention when responding to their victimization, and proper documentation and investigation of the crimes against them. The

women reported being treated as criminals instead of victims and/or as if they deserved to be assaulted. They had to fight to be believed and treated as a victim, and many stated that nothing became of their victimization report to the police. They also reported feeling unsafe to report victimization. The consensus was that these practices needed to change. As Nyesha stated, "I think they should help a woman out, help her to safety, first and foremost." Kendra emphasized the importance of being treated with care when victimized or if at risk of being a trafficking victim, and explained the effect of police mistreatment of victims:

Because a lot of what they did to us at that time, it pushed us further and further away from seeking help from them because the mentality about how they treated us was like we were pieces of shit, and because they treated us like that and because they didn't believe anything that we said, and they always talked about us fucked up, they called us hoes and all that kind of stuff to our faces, bitches, all of that. So because they did that kind of stuff, it made us feel like we wouldn't go to you [police officers]. If I was on my last breath I wouldn't go to you, because you're not going to care about me.

Greater sensitivity and understanding from police also included the need for safe spaces and personnel in order to report or provide information to the police about trafficking. Taylor, for instance, was able to seek recourse and protection from her trafficker by speaking to detectives trained in human trafficking and intimate partner violence who were housed within a social service program:

They have a whole, like detectives and everything that can help you. Some of them been through it and they understand what's all going on, they're not going to judge you, they're just there to take your story and file complaints and get the person arrested that need to get arrested.

Police Should Enforce Drug (and Prostitution) Laws More Strictly [Contradictory Recommendation]

Contrary to what most women advised, Selena felt that there was a need for more strict police enforcement of prostitution and drug offenses. She felt that the majority of street level sex trading was “driven by drug addiction,” and that police could do more to stop drugs from coming into the community. Though Nina and Veronica did not suggest stricter enforcement of prostitution arrests, they felt that places for safe needle exchange or tolerance of drug use set a tone for making drug use and sale acceptable, and felt police had a role to stop drugs from infiltrating communities. Veronica stated: “In order to stop all the drugs, get the damn drug dealers off the street.” Selena recommended that police:

Clean up the areas. I mean stop letting shit slide then. If you don't want this shit on the block, then don't allow it to go out on the block then. Put enough manpower out there to sit a squad on every street then and get rid of it [drugs]. And prostitution, whatever, on the streets.

However, the next statement Selena made seemed to contradict her advice: “I mean, will it ever go away? I don't think so. No, it's not going to go away. Prostitution and drugs have been here forever.” Nina shared a similar sentiment, despite empathizing with the police and the job they have to do in enforcing laws against prostitution and drug use:

There's sometimes where they're fed up with us, fed up with having to deal with us out there. Well let me tell you something: As long as the tricks keep coming, we're going to keep being out there. The drugs are calling us and calling us and calling us.

Nina's statement suggests that police efforts are futile as long as the underlying circumstances of women's drug use and sex trading are not addressed.

Thus, while many felt that arrest and incarceration were not the answer to trading sex, a few felt that police had a role in stopping people who sold drugs and sending a message that drug offenses would not be tolerated. For Selena, this extended to more strict enforcement of prostitution laws as well. Notably, both Selena and Veronica had a history of selling drugs, and Selena expressed anger over the harsh sentencing of her brother for drug trafficking

offenses. The ambivalence and contradictions expressed in their ideas, including the futility of arrests for substance use or sex trading as long as there are drugs available and demand for commercial sex, suggests that they question the effectiveness of a criminalized approach or do not trust that change can occur at the law enforcement level.

Recommendations: Criminal Legal and Police Policies

I asked study participants what changes to laws or policies related to sex trading would help women who wish to exit from trading sex or improve their lives. Their responses centered on services in lieu of arrest, decriminalizing or legalizing sex trading, and accountability for police. In addition, some recommended greater awareness about sex trafficking and sex trading, and shifting police response toward those exploiting victims or driving the demand for commercial sex.

Resources, Services and Treatment in Lieu of Arrest and Incarceration

Many advised that instead of arrest and incarceration, police should divert women to help and resources, if desired. Veronica suggested the police approach could be something like: “Hey, if you want to get help, I’ll take you. You’re not gonna get arrested. We’ll take you to detox, get help for you.” Danyelle had a similar suggestion about diversion to services in lieu of arrest for women trading sex or at risk of trafficking and knew of jurisdictions where this was in practice: “They should implement that type of program to at least give you the opportunity [to talk to somebody], versus just trying to lock them up.”

Faith had first-hand knowledge that led her to see services instead of arrest and incarceration as a solution:

I’ve been in prison, and it’s really no rehabilitation in prison, because they have these waiting lists for all these different groups, drug treatment, cognitive thinking, all of that type of stuff. You may not be able to deal with all the issues, but instead of jail time or sending them to prison, maybe treatment, therapy, self-esteem, different things to help

them know that they deserve better, because to suck a dick for \$3.50, you got to feel worthless inside, so it's something behind that action.

Brooke similarly suggested that there are underlying reasons behind sex trading that are not solved with arrest and incarceration, but rather with services and economic support.

Either you're going to make it legal for the girls to work or give them some help. Shit. The ones that's on drugs, needs to be helped with the drugs. I feel like, there's a reason why she's doing it. Find out.... You know, get out and ask us, What's the problem? What do you need? How can we help you get off the corner right now?

Brooke added, referring to the negative relationship between women on the street and police (e.g., how women will run if they see the police): “If they [police] had a better relationship with these girls that's working, it wouldn't be so bad, or seeing them as the problem.”

Decriminalize or Legalize Sex Trading

Some of the women discussed lowering or eliminating the punitive criminal response to selling sex, in general. For instance, Kiana framed sex trading as work—simply a means to make money that was harming nobody. She felt that it did not make sense for it to be criminalized:

I feel like prostitution is a way of living. Just like they have their jobs and what they do, everybody can't get out here and get a job as easy as them, or can't get the job that they have, or can't get a job that pays the way that they pay. I feel like if you're not harming anyone, what is the issue? Sex is legal. We can have sex all we want. So what's the difference from us getting paid to have sex as if it was a job versus us just having sex for free? Because whether they get paid for it or not, or whether they're out there or not, the same things happen. You can catch something. You having sex with someone that's cheating on their wife, you could have sex with a crazy person and not even know it, you could be in a relationship with a crazy person and not even know it. My thing is, what's the difference? It's their job, that's the way that they know how to make a living.

Everybody didn't finish school. Everybody don't have the means or the life skills to get up to go get a job, or to fill out an application, or to read, or to write. Whether they was having sex for drugs or whatever, they're going to get it one way or the other. Would you rather for them to go out and rob for the money that they need instead of just using their body? It's theirs. You don't have any say so over their body. Who is you to judge the next person on what they do or what type of job they got?

Faith felt that sex trading was inevitable, and suggested that it might be safer if it was legalized:

If they legalize it, then they can regulate it better, because prostitution is always going to be around. Ain't nothing nobody can do to stop it, but if they legalize it, like in [parts of Nevada] and stuff like that, it'll make it safer for the women. They're required to take care of themselves, medically they tested for different diseases and all that.

While most did not specifically name decriminalization or legalization of sex trading, many participants recommended a less punitive response to sex trading. Given the current state of prostitution laws, two respondents mentioned that they were able to get assistance with clearing their criminal records to expand their employment opportunities and discussed the positive impact of laws and legal help that allowed them to vacate or expunge their convictions.

Hold Police Accountable

Another policy or legal change that some women recommended was to hold police accountable for their misconduct and harm caused to others. This included having a means to safely report police misconduct. Veronica advised:

What needs to be changed? Do your job. Be a cop and do not screw with the system because you're a cop. Do not turn around and make people have sex with you and you supposed to protect us. Change the laws. If you get three reports about this now, what they're doing, investigate. Not from the same person but three different people saying

you're doing this. "Oh, they're lying." No. You got to investigate. You're on a 30-day suspension without pay.

Train and Spread Awareness about Sex Trafficking and Sex Trading

Some women discussed the need for greater awareness and training about sex trafficking and sex trading. Several of the women had more positive experiences with police officers and detectives within sex trafficking units, who were trained to understand some of the dynamics of trafficking. Sharise stated:

I think every police department needs some type of sex trafficking section, you know, for the prostitutes in every fucking city. They would actually save lives. They will find more missing girls because there's girls out there that's been missing for years. They with their pimp. And they get locked up every week. But they don't know it because they [police] don't ask no damn questions.

Danyelle noted that laws and policies have been progressively changing for the better, and that there was greater awareness of trafficking that she hoped would continue to spread:

I don't know really what laws has been passed or what's in the making, but I can say this, whatever they're doing, they're doing something good because there's a lot of things just breaking through for human trafficking, from when we were looked at like criminals and just prostitutes. I guess for them to just keep continue to do what they're doing because something's getting done, because it's huge now. It's all on the internet, it's everywhere.

Kendra also felt that positive changes were occurring in terms of sex trafficking laws and awareness. She noted the need to listen to those with lived experience when shaping policy and practice related to sex trading and sex trafficking:

I tell people all the time, because there are people that their life's work is to help survivors of trafficking, and I thank God for every one of them. But until you've lived the experience, it's impossible to really, really, really understand it at its core. I would

challenge people to try to think from the scope of someone who is being trafficked or has been trafficked, and not from their own identity.

Training and greater awareness, centering the voices of those directly impacted, appeared to be a key component to changing policy to ensure that victims of sex trafficking or harm via sex trading would be identified and receive the care and support needed.

Redirect Law Enforcement Efforts to Traffickers and Customers

Some participants suggested that the focus of law enforcement on women who sell sex should be redirected toward traffickers and customers. Taylor hoped for sex trafficking to end, and when asked how, she suggested to target traffickers and customers:

Because there's always a demand for it. So, if we go after the customers that buy it, there is no reason for the [trafficked individuals] to be there. And if we go after the traffickers, there's no females to be sold or males, 'cause there's males sold into sex all the time. So, there's nobody to sell to these people.

Kendra also saw inequity in the targets of law enforcement. She contended that customers and traffickers were not held accountable while women who traded sex or were victims of sex trafficking were punished and left in harm's way:

They delighted in busting the girls but never, even when they would catch the girls with the john, you dismiss the john but you bust the girl. Or you know that this girl has a "daddy", but you don't ever interrogate the girl about her daddy, but you bust the girl. At the end of the day, this girl is going to go home, break herself to some man. He's going to get all the glory, and she going to be sitting rotting in jail. You think that you've done some great justice to the world, and what the fuck kind of justice is that?

These recommendations of changes to police practices, laws, and policies affecting women who trade sex are important findings that empower and amplify the voices of those directly impacted to set a new course.

Discussion/Implications

This mixed methods study with integrated results provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the barriers to and facilitators of exiting from sex trading, experiences with and perceptions of police, and ways that police interactions may affect exiting among women who trade sex on the street. This study adds to our knowledge about the sex trading exiting process, particularly among cisgender women who have traded sex on the street, highlighting factors associated with exiting. It fills a gap in the literature on experiences with police among women who trade sex, how those experiences shape their perceptions, and how they affect their health, well-being, and the exiting process. In particular, this research offers new insights into the impact of neglectful police violence and the complexity of relationships between police and women who trade sex. Finally, participants' voices are centered in this research, as the recommendations for policy and practice come directly from women with lived experience with sex trading.

The value of mixed methods methodology for this topic and population must be underscored. It allows us to better understand the array of experiences within this marginalized group, while examining what factors or experiences might affect the specific outcomes of exiting or perceptions of police. In addition, the transformative methodological perspective served as a lens through which power relations and systemic inequities could be identified and challenged (Mertens, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Integrating these results to understand what they mean as a whole provides a much fuller picture to inform policy and practice. Using grounded theory methodology with joint displays and meta-analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, two theories emerged.

Exiting Factors

The first emergent theory explains that a complex, interconnected web of factors influence exiting from street prostitution. These factors span across social-ecological levels, and no one factor alone appears to dominate an explanation of exiting. Like a web, these factors

intersect and are difficult or impossible to disentangle. Structural factors, such as access to stable housing, along with relational and individual level factors, such as social support, mental health, and an internal motivation to change, may need to coalesce to make exiting a feasible and appealing alternative to sex trading. Because of this complex array of factors, exiting should be conceived of through holistic understanding that attends to all levels of the socio-ecological model. Services and resources for women exiting sex trading must be multi-faceted with coordinated care in order to achieve a long-term successful exit and improved well-being.

Age Factors

Previous research has suggested that older age is associated with exiting (Kerrison et al., 2016; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2012), but age was not correlated with exiting outcomes in the quantitative study analyses. Other age-related factors, such as age of entry or number of years engaged in sex trading were also not significantly associated with exiting outcomes in the current study. These age-related factors may not have been significant in the quantitative analyses due to the modest sample size. Therefore, it would be premature to discount the potential influence of age on the exiting process as a woman's advancing years typically bring greater health risk, physical and mental exhaustion, cumulative trauma, dissatisfaction or disenchantment with sex trading, and shifting priorities, all of which may contribute to exiting. At the same time, study results indicate that alterable factors may be more salient than the inalterable fact of age when it comes to exiting.

Structural/Economic Factors

The structural or economic factors significantly associated with exiting outcomes were housing stability, employment status, and having a minor child in their care. It is not surprising, yet still compelling, that factors tied to larger economic forces (e.g., housing affordability and low-wage labor) rose to the top of study results. These findings enhance previous qualitative research that identified lack of living wage employment and insecure housing as barriers to exiting (Dalla, 2006; Kurtz et al., 2005; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Matthews et al., 2014;

McNaughton & Sanders, 2007; Shdaimah et al., 2023). Those who wished to exit were largely unstably housed, unemployed, and had minors in their care. Many interview participants indicated that they continued or would return to sex trading due to financial needs, e.g., “Now I’m at the point where I just do it if I need funds, I need Pampers, I need milk, I need food.” Ultimately, sex trading is a viable alternative to make ends meet, with better pay than many jobs (e.g., service sector employment), especially among those for whom conventional employment or stable housing is out of reach. This aligns with research that explains how sex trading is a rational decision under these circumstances (Rosen & Venkatesh, 2008; Shdaimah & Leon, 2015). The overwhelming majority of women who did not wish to quit had minor children in their care, over half were unable to work due to some form of disability and another one-third were unemployed, and yet three-quarters had stable housing, which reinforces the fact that sex trading can meet economic needs. For women with children, it also offers flexibility of working hours which may be more compatible with caregiving responsibilities than conventional employment. In addition, women in domestic violence situations may use sex trading to build up the means to leave and achieve self-sufficiency, which is that much more difficult when caring for children. It seems clear that women who wish to exit need access to material assistance, stable housing suitable for families, and viable employment opportunities.

Motherhood

Having minor children is not solely an economic factor, as motherhood is a complex and multifaceted experience. Many indicated that they stopped or wanted to stop sex trading because of their children. In some cases, this was out of fear of child protective services intervention and potential loss of custody. The circumstances related to having minor children create both a push to stay and a pull to get out, for different reasons (e.g., economic, legal consequences, stigma and shame), reflecting the mix of findings presented in the literature about sex trading and motherhood (e.g., Duff et al., 2015; Hickle, 2014; McClelland & Newell, 2008; Murnan & Holowacz, 2020; Nestad et al., 2021; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Programs

servicing women who trade sex should offer services that consider the whole family unit and the mothers' wishes concerning their children, providing advocacy and assistance as needed (e.g., helping them retain parental rights, meeting the needs of their children, providing childcare or individual and family therapy, etc.).

Substance Use and Mental Health

Behavioral health problems also rose to the top as factors affecting exiting outcomes. Those who had higher mean screening scores for PTSD, depression, anxiety, and current SUD were associated with not wanting to exit or wishing to exit, compared to those who had quit. The literature abounds with findings of unhealthy substance use being highly related to street level sex trading and a barrier to exiting (Burnette et al., 2008; Cusick & Hickman, 2005; Dalla, 2000; Sallman, 2010; Wiechelt & Shdaimah, 2011), so it is not surprising to find that active unhealthy use of alcohol and drugs was more prevalent among those currently engaged in sex trading. Addiction to drugs and alcohol either kept women in this study engaged in sex trading as a means to buy drugs and alcohol frequently and/or sex trading contributed to addiction, as a means by which women may cope with or avoid aversive experiences encountered in sex trading.

Participants had extremely high exposure to trauma and adversity, with an average of 11.4 out of 14 types of adverse life experiences endorsed (and nobody endorsed less than 6 types), thus it was not surprising that women in this study had extremely high rates of PTSD and other mental health issues. High rates of trauma exposure among women who trade sex on the street are common in the literature (Cimino, 2013; Muftic & Finn, 2013; Raphael et al., 2010; Roe-Sepowitz, 2012; Surratt et al., 2004; Wiechelt & Shdaimah, 2011). Given this prevailing norm of violence and adversity, the differences rested not in who had a positive screening for a mental health disorder, but rather that those with higher screening scores (i.e., more severe symptoms) were more likely to be actively engaged in sex trading. These mental health problems may have contributed to an inability to disengage from sex trading if they wanted to. It

is possible that symptoms of depression and anxiety may be lessened by removing themselves from ongoing trauma and stress associated with sex trade activity (and drug use) and/or reducing trauma symptoms may lead to engaging in healthier behaviors and thus facilitate the exiting process. These findings corroborate other studies that have found that exiting or program completion may be tied to an individual's mental health (Baker et al., 2010; Roe-Sepowitz, 2012).

Abundant research also supports that more experiences of adversity (e.g., four or more types), particularly in childhood, are associated with substance use and mental health disorders in childhood and adulthood (Nelson et al., 2020). The prevalence of both extreme adversity and behavioral health issues among participants suggests that appropriate interventions might have been helpful in their childhood and over the life course to prevent more severe substance use and mental health problems, and reduce risks associated with street level sex trading (including preventing entry or facilitating the exiting process).

At a structural and societal level, some of the violence from which women engaged in street sex trading (and unhealthy substance use) suffer is a result of misogyny and prevailing negative attitudes toward women who trade sex. The pervasiveness, frequency, and intensity of violence, and the way that it was often dismissed or ignored by the criminal legal system, health care and social service providers, and the general public reflect a broader societal problem. This misogynistic violence is normalized to the point that women in this study expected it to occur and many assumed that they could not or should not seek help after being victimized. This meant lost opportunities for intervention and assistance with exiting.

Stigma

Stigma and its effects emerged as a dominant theme in qualitative data. I did not include any measures or questions related to stigma in the survey, thus there was no quantitative data to provide an integrated interpretation of results. Nevertheless, societal/structural, interpersonal, and internalized stigma appeared to coalesce as a barrier to exiting. Stigma prevented women

from seeking help, strained family and intimate partner relationships, and contributed to feelings of shame and low self-worth. For some, stigma may have been a motivator to exit as a means to avoid being perceived or treated poorly by others, but the effects of stigma (e.g., shame and self-blame, labeling, seen as criminals undeserving of empathy) served to impede exiting for many participants. Further, stigma is reflected in policies (e.g., criminalization of selling sex) and leads to discrimination against women who trade sex, which serves to reinforce stigmatized attitudes, causing harm and affecting women's access to opportunities and resources, as well as their ability to seek legal recourse or protect their human rights (Benoit et al., 2018; Sallman, 2010), though stigma may remain even in decriminalized contexts (Armstrong, 2019). At minimum, stigma reduction efforts should be targeted to social service and health care providers to mitigate some of the harmful effects of stigma experienced by women engaged in sex trading.

Social Support and Spirituality

Two other factors showed promise for facilitating exit. Scores for level of social support and positive religious coping were significantly higher for those who had exited compared to both groups who had not exited. It is not clear whether those with more social support had that support prior to exiting or whether it became available only after initiating an exit, especially given the stigmatization of sex trading. It is possible that exiting is conditional on social support or that social support is conditional on exiting, or that social support and exiting mutually reinforce one another. It could be inferred that having a social network of individuals that can offer emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support and a sense of connectedness (Langford et al., 1997) facilitated the exiting process for participants. Some spoke of peers in recovery or who had exited that they could turn to for advice and empathy, family members who were able to offer love and material assistance, or other sources of tangible help (e.g., getting to and from appointments) as crucial to their exiting process. While some participants may have had support and a sense of belonging from a social network that engaged in sex trading and/or drug use, that social milieu tied them to those activities and

served to hinder exiting. However, social support from other peers in the life could be helping them trade sex more safely. Interview participants felt that lack of social support impeded exiting or improving their lives.

These results align with the literature that suggests that social support is an essential factor in the process of exiting from sex trading (Baker et al., 2010; Hedin & Mansson, 2003; Hickle, 2017; Oselin, 2010). Findings also align with literature that indicates a need for programming that infuses social support, such as training and employing women with lived experience as peer support workers or counselors, encouraging mutual aid, and facilitating women's relationships with individuals that they perceive as positive and healthy (Gesser, 2022; Shdaimah & Leon, 2016); this stands in contrast to residential programs (e.g., inpatient treatment, transitional housing) that impose rules that restrict contact with family members and friends while in treatment.

Positive religious coping (PRC) appeared to be beneficial to the exiting process, or perhaps those with greater religious coping skills were more motivated to exit. This finding adds to the literature that suggests that faith, spirituality, and faith communities serve as supportive influences in exiting from sex trading (Dalla, 2006; Hall, 2022; Hickle, 2014; Oselin, 2010; Prince, 2008). Of note, the survey and interview participants mean PRC score fell within the range of average scores (between 17-21) found in studies reviewed (Pargament et al., 2011). Participants were also disproportionately African American, and African Americans in general tend to have higher positive religious coping scores (Chapman & Steger, 2010). These results should not be construed to mean that religious beliefs or coping practices should be imposed on women who trade sex and seek help, but rather that women should be supported if they wish to apply them to their lives.

Fluidity between Sex Trading and Exiting

This study also contributes to nascent literature that has found that exiting is not only a process (that may include a return to trading sex before a final exit), but that there may be more

fluidity between sex trading and exiting than originally thought (Gesser & Shdaimah, 2021). Results from this study demonstrate that many women may use sex trading on an as needed basis and are conscious that they may make this choice depending on their economic and social circumstances. Even among trafficked participants, successfully getting out of trafficking did not necessarily mean an exit from sex trade activity. Ongoing forms of support may be needed to assist women in developing life skills and social support networks and attaining economic self-sufficiency necessary to leave sex trading over the long term.

Participants' Recommendations to Facilitate Exiting

Study participants' recommendations included needing resources and assistance to obtain financial and housing security for themselves and their children, achieve optimal behavioral health, and mitigate criminal justice-related barriers to exiting. They wanted safe, judgment-free services to escape from harm (e.g., traffickers), address trauma, and process their sex trade history, particularly with providers with similar lived experience. Access to therapy, substance use treatment, residential programs, and supports for their children were deemed important. They stressed that internal motivation to change was a necessary ingredient for exiting. Thus, services and resources should include harm reduction and drop-in services to engage women who are actively trading sex, as well as providers who utilize motivational interviewing to effectively and compassionately work with women's conflicting thoughts and feelings about sex trading while promoting self-efficacy and autonomy (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). In addition, programs should be mindful of women's needs for time and distance from their old lives and people with whom they used drugs or traded sex, while working to build leadership and advocacy skills among participants and increase access to important existing social ties (e.g., family members) and new social support networks.

Participants' Hopes and Dreams

Lastly, participants' hopes and dreams demonstrated what motivates them to keep going and strive for a better life, as well as their resilience, resourcefulness, and hopefulness. Women

who have traded sex should be supported to fulfill their aspirations, which often involved hopes for their children's future, improved health and wellness, economic security, and helping others. One study exploring the hopes and aspirations of women who have traded sex on the streets found similar goals, as well as hurdles to achieve them (Shdaimah & Wiechelt, 2017). Social service providers should offer opportunities for women who have traded sex to assist others in similar circumstances, as the qualitative findings suggest these experiences are meaningful and may facilitate other positive changes in their lives. Given that qualitative findings demonstrated that positive thoughts and feelings about oneself might facilitate exiting, it is important to ensure that women not only have mental health resources, but also have these kinds of opportunities to volunteer or help others and apply themselves toward their personal goals. Quantitative results also point to the resilience and resourcefulness of survey participants, whose mean score of 18 for general self-efficacy (minimum score 6, maximum score 24) was the same as the international average for the general population (Scholz et al., 2002). This further underscores the need for a strengths-based approach when working with women who have traded sex on the streets, by understanding and tapping into their positive beliefs in their abilities and helping to remove barriers to achieving their goals.

Police Interactions and Exiting

The second emergent theory is that police act as a barrier to exiting from sex trading but can be a source of help or a catalyst for change. Women who trade sex on the street and police tend to have a great deal of interaction, thus they have ongoing relationships that are good, bad, and/or ambiguous. These relationships set the tone for each individual encounter and the cumulative perception of police. At a structural level, one could infer that these relationships may be circumscribed and influenced by police roles and policies (e.g., criminalization of prostitution and drug use, policing practices/guidelines and culture in a given jurisdiction). Individual police officers may either feel constrained or empowered by these policies and practices, and, presumably, they can choose how they act in carrying out their roles. That is,

police may act with respect, compassion, and empathy or with disrespect, derision, violence, and exploitation, as evidenced by the various types of interactions participants had with police.

Negative experiences with police were plentiful among women who had traded sex on the street (and in other venues), whether they had a trafficker or worked independently. Many participants shared horrific stories of police abuse of power and recounted a common thread of verbal abuse. Few, if any, academic studies reveal such a comprehensive picture of police experiences among women who trade sex in the U.S., and none have explored their influence on exiting or help-seeking. All of the different types of experiences and relationships with police are important to consider; this study's findings correspond to previous research on women's experiences with police, some of which have illuminated the effects of fear and distrust of the police (Dank et al.; 2017; Fernandez, 2016; Footer et al., 2019; Oselin & Cobbina, 2017; Saunders & Kirby, 2010; Sherman et al., 2015; Sloss & Harper, 2010; Thukral & Ditmore, 2003; Williamson et al., 2007). Participants in the study generally held unfavorable perceptions of police, marked by low trust and limited legitimacy (e.g., police as effective, lawful, fair, responsive, and respectful) which has adverse impacts on public safety and community-police relations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022).

Neglectful Police Violence

One of the most compelling findings, based on both quantitative and qualitative data, is the high level of neglectful police violence and its association with negative perceptions of the police, as well as its impact on the women's health, well-being, and subsequent behavior. Neglectful police responses are framed as violence, in accordance with the World Health Organization's four domains of violence (e.g., physical, sexual, psychological, and neglectful), and have been found to be associated with mental health consequences (e.g., suicidal ideation; Devylder et al., 2018). When participants were asked how their experiences with the police affected them and their motivation and ability to exit, many were able to explicitly name both tangible and emotional or psychological effects of neglectful police responses. They discussed

how it reinforced their trafficker's power and control, led to consequences that impeded their ability to obtain employment or housing (e.g., due to arrest and ensuing criminal record), left physical injuries unresolved, re-traumatized them after a traumatic incident, and conveyed the message that their lives were not important to the police. These effects impacted their desire to seek help in future crisis situations.

This loss of help seeking is a clear factor influencing one's motivation and ability to exit. As a result of negative experiences and a common understanding that police will not help a woman who trades sex when in crisis, a large majority of women reported choosing not to report their own victimization to police. This has harmful immediate consequences, preventing women from accessing urgently needed services, as well as long-term consequences related to risk and safety. Building from previous research that found that police violence is associated with greater risk of client-perpetrated violence (Deering et al., 2014; Footer et al., 2019), this supports the idea that neglectful police violence creates a climate where perpetrators of violence against women who trade sex feel they can commit acts of violence against sex trading women without consequence. Ultimately, this impacts the safety of all women and girls, as well as entire communities.

Positive and Ambiguous Police Interactions

Nevertheless, participants also had positive or neutral experiences with police. Many of the positive interactions described in this study align with existing literature (Dank et al., 2017; Fernandez, 2016; Saunders & Kirby, 2010; Thukral & Ditmore, 2003; Williamson, et al., 2007). Ultimately, relationships with police were complex as they experienced the police in different ways and perceptions of the police varied. It is important to note that some of the experiences that fell into the "ambiguous" category, such as police paying for sex or using women who trade sex as informants, should be interpreted within a context of power imbalance, constrained choices, and potential risks to women who do not acquiesce to police requests. In addition, women who trade sex on the street may have a low standard of expectations for the police,

based on largely negative perceptions and experiences, thus affecting their assessment of police encounters.

Positive interactions and relationships with the police were impactful, especially given the power and authority of the police role, as well as the stigma and vulnerability of women who trade sex on the street (e.g., a higher likelihood of crises occurring in which a helpful response or words of encouragement would be appreciated). Thus, helpful police encounters can be a catalyst for change, particularly when there are direct connections to crucial supports. Crisis situations in which police are involved are critical points for intervention that we should not be missed.

Participants Recommendations for Police Policies and Practices

Study participants offered recommendations for police practices and criminal legal system policies that stand on their own. Many of the police practice recommendations should already be in effect, such as treating the women in a professional manner and responding appropriately to victimization. Other recommendations are in place in some jurisdictions in the U.S. to varying degrees, such as arrest diversion with connection to resources and services or police training to understand and identify trafficking dynamics and employ an appropriate victim response. There are federal and local law enforcement operations that pursue traffickers, but often trafficked women and women who sell sex independently also get arrested during these operations, and victims may be coerced to cooperate with trafficking investigations or testify with no guarantee of protection against trafficker retaliation (Farrell et al., 2019). Local police engage in “reverse stings” where they target customers, but the use of the word “reverse” demonstrates that these operations are not the norm or the main target of law enforcement. While prostitution laws and their enforcement vary across jurisdictions and time, decriminalization or legalization of sex trading are rare in the U.S. Other countries offer a spectrum of different laws related to sex trading from which we could learn.

Finally, lack of accountability for police who engage in excessive force or misconduct is a widespread concern in the U.S., evidenced by numerous cases of police brutality and misconduct gone unchecked (Armstrong & Cantoni, 2021; Sedensky & Merchant, 2015; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Police lethality disproportionately affects BIPOC, for whom police appear to use a lower threshold of dangerousness than Whites (DeAngelis, 2021; Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study, Police Violence, U.S. Subnational Collaborators, 2019.). Sexual misconduct among police officers, including repeat offenders, rarely leads to being fired or other disciplinary penalties, and officers who lose or leave their jobs are easily re-hired in new jurisdictions (Stinson et al., 2014). This study sheds light on a population of individuals, who are disproportionately BIWOC and poor, that are often subject to police violence and misconduct without recourse, further building the case for greater accountability. Widespread, extensive police reforms are indicated, beyond mandatory training on sex trafficking and police response to victimization of those who may also be engaged in illegal activity, to include external review of complaints against police and removing barriers to police disciplinary measures and sanctions (e.g., qualified immunity), including termination and proper criminal and civil investigations and charges.

There is a broader problem of police culture that maintains racist, sexist, and transphobic attitudes (Westmarland, 2012), normalizes violence and aggression (Sierra-Arevalo, 2021; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016), and engages in victim blaming and minimization of victimization experiences (Zvi, 2022). Based on the accounts of participants in this study and others cited here (e.g., Fernandez, 2016; Sherman et al., 2015), police culture may also include vilification and degradation of women who trade sex. Given this entrenched, problematic police culture, the women who trade sex may be best served by avoiding unnecessary contact with the police. As proposed by a few interview participants, the decriminalization of behaviors and circumstances of vulnerable individuals is warranted, such as offenses related to sex trading, homelessness, drug use, and mental health crises.

Decriminalization should be coupled with reallocating police resources toward community supports and services for marginalized populations, such as women trading sex.

Limitations and Strengths

This study has some limitations. The survey sample was small, thus underpowered to conduct multinomial logistic regression, and quantitative analysis was limited to descriptive and bivariate correlation analyses. Selection bias in sampling occurred due to recruitment efforts focused on community partners, thus nearly all women were connected to some sort of social service program. The sample was also skewed toward women with very low incomes, high food insecurity, and housing instability, limiting variation necessary for meaningful analysis. This skew was expected and perhaps inevitable, however, given what is known about women engaging in street level sex trading. Nonetheless, findings should not be generalized to individuals who do not trade sex on the street but engage in other types of sex trading. In relative terms, I was able to recruit a large and diverse sample of study participants from throughout the city, given the transience and marginalization of this population, the hidden and illegal nature of sex trade activity in this setting, and the resource limitations typically associated with dissertation studies.

Some biases may have limited findings. This study was cross-sectional while trying to understand experiences that are longitudinal in nature, thus participants' responses were subject to biases that are common in regard to memory recall. Also, though survey and interview questions were extensive, I failed to ask questions that directly probed about racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc., thus I was unable to offer more detailed insights into how the women's various intersecting identities factored into their exiting experiences and outcomes or police interactions. In addition, because I administered the survey orally, face to face with participants, social desirability bias may have played into their responses. As a White woman who had never traded sex, some participants may have chosen to speak less freely with me as they might have with someone with a similar identity or life experiences. For instance,

participants may have wanted to appear to be more removed from sex trading than they actually were. In fact, as I proceeded through survey questions, some women initially indicated that they had exited from sex trading but then later revealed ongoing activity as they became more comfortable with me and the survey I was administering. While I observed that study participants seemed comfortable and spoke freely with me (and many indicated that it was a relief to talk about their experiences with someone who cared), it is possible that some women did not attain the comfort needed to speak openly about ongoing sex trading or other stigmatized topics.

Future Research

There is much more to be known about women engaged in street level sex trading and women who have been trafficked. To complement this study, it would be beneficial to have in depth interviews with police to examine their experiences, perceptions, and relationships with women who trade sex on the street. Further research into neglectful police violence and its impact is needed. Research on other groups who trade sex and their experiences with the police (transgender women, men who trade sex, people engaged exclusively in non-street level sex work) is also warranted.

There is a dearth of literature that evaluates the effectiveness of different kinds of approaches, interventions, and resources to assist women who wish to exit from sex trading; this void is in urgent need of being filled; it is one of the reasons I decided to pursue a career in research and evaluation after working directly with this population and advocating for local and statewide policy changes. Finally, an examination of the effects of prostitution-related policies, as well as a cost-benefit analysis, would provide an evidence base to more effectively advocate for policies that reduce harm and promote positive change for women trading sex.

Recapitulation of Implications

Implications based on findings in this study have been embedded throughout this chapter, but a summary is included here to highlight how this study may inform policy and

practice concerning women who have traded sex on the street. The implications and recommendations are categorized by 1) practices and resources to facilitate exiting, 2) police practices and policies, 3) other policy changes.

Women who trade sex on the street are often in need of a variety of resources and effective practices from social service and healthcare providers. To facilitate exiting, an integrated/coordinated system of care, staffed by professionals who are compassionate and non-stigmatizing, who employ cultural humility and trauma-informed approaches to care, and offer services geared specifically to the needs and experiences of women who have traded sex on the street and/or have been trafficked. A wide spectrum of services are needed as there is no one simple solution or one size fits all approach, thus harm reduction options (e.g., mobile outreach, drop-in services) to inpatient and outpatient SUD treatment to transitional housing programs for mothers and their children are all needed. Many women who trade sex on the street are in need of material assistance (e.g., for rent, utilities, food, diapers), as well as assistance with employment, educational goals, housing, childcare, legal advocacy. Safety planning and safe spaces, especially when fleeing from trafficking and IPV situations, are critical. Access to comprehensive mental health services, with an emphasis on effectively treatment modalities for healing from complex trauma, and inclusion of a broad toolbox of strategies to cope with and heal from adversity and achieve personal life goals, including spiritual/faith-based supports and coping practices, if desired.

Social service providers should facilitate healthy formal and informal support networks, train and hire staff with similar lived experiences and shared identities, and offer opportunities for program participants to advocate for and assist others in similar circumstances. Social service and healthcare providers should use open communication that involves listening to what women want and need and assistance with achieving their personal goals and dreams, and the possible use of motivational interviewing techniques to help “elicit and reinforce change talk” while promoting participant self-determination (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Finally, practices that

mitigate criminal legal system barriers to exiting, including assistance with transitioning out of incarceration, implementation of arrest diversion/deflection programs, vacating or expunging criminal records, etc. are useful to many women attempting to exit from sex trading.

There are several police practices and policies that may improve health and well-being, encourage greater help-seeking, and facilitate exiting among women who have traded sex on the street (including those forced or coerced by traffickers). Police communication and behavior should be professional, ethical, and respectful. This would mean refraining from degrading language, including racist, sexist or sexualized comments, misconduct such as coercing sex or excessive use of force, etc. Mandatory training would assist police officers to better understand the experiences of women who trade sex on the street and identify trafficking victims, as well as increase sensitivity in their interactions. In addition, trafficking investigations should ensure that trafficked individuals as well as those who sell sex independently are not arrested, as they are not the intended target of investigations, and investigations should not rely on coerced victim cooperation or fail to offer protection against trafficker retaliation. Reforming police response to victimization is critical, e.g., officers should prioritize the safety and health of victim, never victim-blame, follow protocols of reporting and investigation, and not arrest the victim for outstanding warrants or prostitution/drug offenses. Police and other first responders should consider these moments as critical points for intervention and connection to resources. To improve police relationships with women who trade sex on the street and facilitate exiting, police departments may consider implementing arrest diversion programs with connection to community resources and services.

Additional internal police reforms would include 1) accountability for misconduct, excessive use of force, and other illegal and unethical police behavior, including external review of complaints against police, removing barriers to police disciplinary measures and sanctions, and proper criminal and civil investigations and charges; and 2) an overhaul of police culture in

which departments actively work to purge prejudiced and discriminatory beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors among officers and new recruits/trainees.

Finally, the additional policy changes outlined below may assist with exiting sex trading for those who wish to exit, while supporting improved health and well-being among all women who have traded sex:

- laws that better protect against traffickers and other individuals who perpetrate violence against women who trade sex, including protection against retaliation;
- decriminalization of sex trading, drug use, and offenses associated with homelessness and mental illness;
- re-allocation of resources afforded to police departments to enforce laws related to prostitution, drug use, homelessness, and mental illness toward relevant community-based prevention and intervention programs and services;
- increased availability of and access to and living wage employment and affordable housing, including for those with criminal records for prostitution and drug-related offenses;
- increased federal, state, and municipal funding of services for women who have traded sex or have been trafficked.

The implications or recommendations presented here are not exhaustive but provide some important points to consider and largely come directly from participants. The transformative methodological paradigm calls for greater attention to the voices of marginalized groups (such as women with lived experiences of sex trading and trafficking), the identification of systemic inequities and oppression, and the advancement of potential solutions to societal problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Mertens, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2016).

Conclusion

The two theories emerging from the results of this study describe the complexities of both the exiting process and relationships with police, among women who have traded sex on the street. There are no simple or “one size fits all” solutions. As Selena stated: “Everybody has a reason for being out there. Everybody's trying to find a way, but everybody has a reason as to why they're trying to get out.”

The results and implications presented here are meant to inform practice and policy to better facilitate exiting and reduce harm to women that trade sex on the street. More comprehensive social services, healthcare, and resources to address the many levels and layers of factors are indicated. An improved police response and less punitive approach may have a more positive influence on exiting than the current police policies and practices, which appear to be ineffective in deterring prostitution and are often harmful to those involved.

Finally, it is important to recognize the agency of women who trade sex on the street and the many strengths they possess. Despite the hardship and adversity described by women in this study, they had tremendous hope, resilience, and desire and ability to affect change in their own lives and those of others. As Tasha stated:

I don't even know how I'm standing here talking. I should be turning over in the grave somewhere, but I'm not. I'm all right, so, I mean, just the thought of me helping somebody else come out of their storm makes me happy.

When women are offered the right tools and supports, as in Melanie's case, they can achieve their goals and live a better life:

Things are good. I'm doing great. I just want to keep climbing up the ladder. I want to get somewhere. I wish that I could help everybody in recovery to help them focus on their self to get clean. But when the time is right, they will.

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Appendix A: Survey

1

Participant ID#: _____
Today's Date: _____

Sex trading, exiting, and interactions with police: A mixed methods study of women engaged in street-level sex trade.

Thank you for your participation in this study. This survey asks questions about your health and well-being, as well as your experiences with selling sex, and interactions with the police. All answers you provide will be kept strictly confidential. You can choose not to answer any question or stop the survey at any time, without any consequence. You will receive a \$25 gift card for your time. The information you provide will be used to help understand your experiences in the sex trade. If something I ask triggers some upsetting feelings, let me know if we should stop or if you would like some help in dealing with how you're feeling. The survey asks a lot of yes or no questions, or questions that are on a scale, like most of the time, some of the time, a little of the time, etc. It is a little long, but I want to respect your time as best I can, so you don't have to give details. I'll let you know what kind of response options there are for each question.

The following are general questions about you, your family, and your financial situation.

1. What is your age? _____
2. How do you identify your gender?
 - Female
 - Other _____
3. How would you describe your race? Please check all that apply.
 - American Indian/Native American
 - Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - Asian
 - White
 - Black or African American
 - Other _____
4. Are you Hispanic or Latino?
 - Yes
 - No
5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - Less than high school
 - Associate's (2 year) college degree
 - Some high school
 - Bachelor's (4 year) college degree or higher
 - High school diploma or GED
 - Graduate or post-graduate degree
 - Some college credit, no degree

[Click on the above inserted PDF to see the full survey (21 pages)]

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Thank you for your participation in this study. I'll be asking you some questions about selling/ trading sex acts and your interactions with the police. This interview will take about an hour. I will be audio recording, but everything you say will be kept strictly confidential, and I'll destroy the audio file once it has been transcribed (put into writing). You can choose not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. There are no negative consequences if you choose to stop. You will receive a \$25 gift card for your time. If something I ask triggers some upsetting feelings, let me know if we should stop or if you would like some help in dealing with how you're feeling.

- How would you describe yourself?
- Could you tell me a little about how you got involved in trading sex in the beginning?
- How long have you been involved in trading sex?
- How have things changed for you since you first got involved, if at all?
- What are some of the positive aspects (advantages) of selling sex, if any?
- What are some of the negative aspects (disadvantages) of selling sex, if any?
- Have you ever attempted to stop trading sex?
 - If so, how many times? What was your motivation to quit? What happened?
 - If not, have you considered getting out?
 - If not, what are some reasons why you want to continue to trade/sell sex?
- What do you think makes it hard to quit selling sex (even if you want to)?

- Could you tell me a little about your health and what supports you have in your life?
- What kinds of things are going well for you in your life?

- Have you had much contact with the police over the years?

- When was your first contact with police? What happened?
- When was your last contact with police? What happened?
- Could you describe a positive experience with the police, if any?
- Could you describe your worst experience with the police, if any?
- Could you tell me about any other significant experiences with the police?
- Have your experiences with the police made you feel like you wanted to get out of prostitution? If so, why? If not, how come?

[If any desire to exit prostitution at any point is expressed]

- Have your experiences with the police helped in some way to make getting out of prostitution easier? In what ways?
- Have your experiences with the police made it more difficult to get out of prostitution? In what ways?
- What are some other effects of your experiences with police?

- How do you think police should respond to prostitution?
- What advice or recommendations would you give to police or people who make policy about how women who trade sex are treated or how police handle prostitution? What should be changed, if anything?

- What are your hopes for the future?

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer and Scripts

Have you ever traded sex for money or something of value (like a place to stay or drugs)?

Would you be willing to talk to a researcher from UWM about your experiences with sex trading on the streets, quitting sex work (even if you have not quit or don't want to quit) and your experiences with the police?

- ⇒ Are you at least 18 years old?
- ⇒ Do you identify as a woman? (trans women included)
- ⇒ Have you traded sex on the streets?

Your input is valued!

45 minute survey= \$25 gift card

Study participation is completely voluntary.

A follow up interview may be requested after the survey (additional \$25 gift card).

**For more information or to set up a time for a survey:
Text or call Daria at (414) 600-4210**

This research has been approved by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Institutional Review Board, as of 12/07/2018

SURVEY Recruitment Script:

I would like to ask you if you are willing to participate in a research project called "Sex trading, exiting, and interactions with police: A mixed methods study of women engaged in street-level sex trade." This is a study that I am conducting to better understand women's experiences with sex trading on the streets, as well as getting out of it, and experiences with the police. If you agree to participate, I'll ask you questions about your health and well-being, what kind of supports you have, past traumatic experiences and trauma symptoms, criminal history and police contact questions, and about staying involved or quitting trading sex. I'll write in your answers in a survey as we go. This will take about 45 minutes. If you agree to participate, I may also see if you would be willing to do an interview or I may follow up with you to make sure I'm understanding everything you said correctly. For your time, I will give you a \$25 gift card. Of course, if you agree to participate now, you can always decide later not to participate. Do you have any questions about this? Does this sound ok to you?

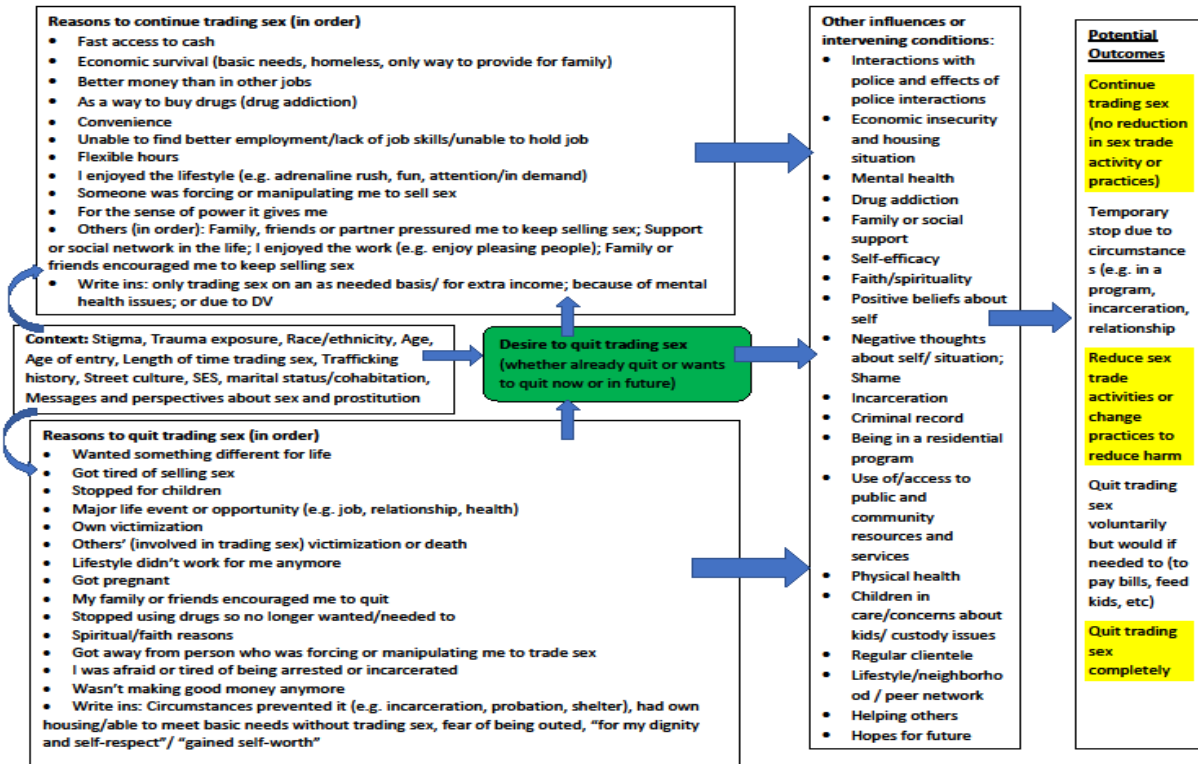
INTERVIEW Recruitment Script:

I would like to ask you if you are willing to participate in an interview for the research project called "Sex trading, exiting, and interactions with police: A mixed methods study of women engaged in street-level sex trade." This is completely voluntary, so it is up to you if you want to do this interview. I mentioned before when we did the survey, this is a study that I am conducting to better understand women's experiences with trading sex on the streets, as well as getting out of the sex trade, and experiences with the police. If you agree to participate in the interview, we'll talk about some different things, such as your health and well-being, your thoughts about and experiences with trading sex, your experiences with the police, and about staying involved or quitting trading sex. If you don't mind, I'll audio record the interview to make sure I get your exact words. This will take about 1 hour, give or take. If you agree to participate, I may follow up with you to make sure I'm understanding everything you said correctly. For your time, I will give you a \$25 gift card. Of course, if you agree to participate now, you can always decide later not to participate. Do you have any questions about this? Does this sound ok to you?

Contact via phone (voicemail), text, email to recruit for interview:

Hello, this is Daria from UWM following up with you about my study. A \$25 gift card would be offered for your time. Please contact me at this email/number if you are interested in participating and let me know when you have time to meet/talk. Thanks!

Appendix D: Coding Paradigms



How do women selling sex on street experience the police and how do those experiences influence the exiting process?

