URBAN SETTINGS AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING – A CROSSROADS OF THE PERFECT STORM FOR CRIME PERPETRATION AND IDEAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CRIME PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Although human trafficking is a global crime affecting all regions and people, empirical evidence suggests that urban areas are more conducive to the manifestation, persistence, and perpetuation of all types of human trafficking. Despite the perceived linkages between urban settings and the proliferation of human trafficking in such areas, little attention is paid to the existence and/or lack of prevention and protection programs in urban areas. This research fills that gap and aims to develop a clear understanding of the urban attributes that allow for the proliferation of human trafficking. The study's main objective is to *study the perception of informed urban residents' perception of the role of urban environmental factors in curbing human trafficking and protecting victims?* Data for the study are collected from 300 students enrolled in an urban university over two semesters. The students were provided with a survey questionnaire that had three sections. The first section solicited their understanding of the spatial patterns of human trafficking in urban settings – urban environment attributes that facilitate human trafficking, the existing legislation that provides protection for victims and apprehends traffickers, and the programs that provide services to victims. The second section solicited their suggestions on using urban settings to prevent human trafficking and protect victims. The third section gathered demographics such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, national origin, level of education, income level, employment status, profession, political affiliation, and current residence area (urban/suburban/rural). The data

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analysis revealed that since urban settings afford opportune venues for crimes like human trafficking to manifest and persist with immunity, they also offer unique opportunities for combatting human trafficking.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, Sex, Labor, Sex work, Urban environments

Urban Settings – A Problem or a Solution for Human Trafficking?

Introduction

Empirical evidence suggests that human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing crimes worldwide (Moris, 2019; United Nations on Drugs and Crime, 2016; Kakar, 2017; Walker-Rodriguez and Hill, 2011). A most recent statement from the United States Secretary for Homeland Security confirms the enormity of Human trafficking the need to understand its dynamics and control it from further expansion. He stated, ". . . human trafficking is a despicable crime that impacts an estimated 25 million people, here in the United States and abroad . . . We will bring the full weight of the Department of Homeland Security – our resources and our dedicated personnel – to identify and protect victims . . ." (Statement from the Secretary of Homeland Security, January 25, 2022).

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA, 2000), an anti-trafficking federal law established in 2000, defines "human trafficking" as exploitation of a person or persons for sex or labour using "force, fraud, or coercion." It defines trafficking in persons (TIP) as a crime that does not necessarily require the physical transport of a person. Notwithstanding that TIP is a crime of global import (UNODC, 2021), urban areas present unique environments that can incentivize the manifestation, persistence, and perpetuation of all types of human trafficking. The United States Census Bureau (2010) defined 'urban areas' as densely developed residential, commercial, and non-residential areas. The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas: "urbanized areas" of 50,000 or more people and "urban clusters" of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people. The TVPA (2000) defines sex trafficking as "the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act" (22 U.S.C. §7102). It further explains, "a commercial sex act means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given

to or received by any person. Anything of value could include food, shelter, protection, gifts, or clothing. Where a person younger than 18 is induced to perform a commercial sex act, it is a crime regardless of whether there is any force, fraud, or coercion". The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015 (JVTA) expanded the definition of sex trafficking to include the soliciting and patronizing of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act (22 U.S.C. § 7102). Thus, for the purposes of this paper, human trafficking (HT) encompasses labour trafficking (LT), sex trafficking (ST), sex work (SW), and commercial sex work (CSW). It is also assumed that recruitment and exploitation tactics employed by the traffickers are similar, if not identical for LT, HT, ST, SW, and CSW. The current paper uses these definitions for human trafficking and urban areas to study the perception of informed urban residents' perception of the role of urban environmental factors in curbing HT. Specifically, two main research sub questions lend themselves to this inquiry: 1) *Can urban settings - that are often linked with Human Trafficking – be strategically leveraged to combat human trafficking, and 2) Can urban settings be used to protect existing and prospective victims?* The paper begins with an overview of the corpus of literature that examines the nexus of urban areas and human trafficking. The methodology section follows this. Next, results are discussed, and finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications and limitations of the current research and suggestions for further research.

Literature on urban areas and HT Nexus

What is known about the nexus of urban areas and HT?

The extant literature demonstrates a significant association between the prevalence of HT and urban environments. The unique features of urban environments make such areas more appropriate for HT perpetuation and sustenance. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report (2020), even though sex trafficking can occur in smaller towns, it is concentrated in urban areas.

The same report also underscores the presence of enhanced opportunities for traffickers to operate in urban areas 'under the guise of informal employment agents and recruit children for domestic work in private residences, where house managers and families exploit the minors in domestic servitude .'Additionally, traffickers are more likely to lure runaway and homeless children and orphans into sex trafficking and forced labour in urban areas because trafficked victims have higher demands than in smaller towns. Chrismas (2017) and Hughes (2005) also reported that higher demand for sexual services in large cities provides more opportunities for exploitation.

Similarly, Rotenberg (2016) revealed that most sex trade offenses in Canada are reported in large cities. Another study conducted by the Urban Institute (2015) revealed that street-based commercial sex was more prevalent in urban areas, and there were certain places known as "tracks" for commercial sex. Cole and Sprang (2015) also reported that since larger metropolitan communities have more commercial sex venues than smaller communities, it is likely that larger areas have a higher prevalence of sex trafficking. Kangaspunta (2006) reported that traffickers often recruit victims from rural areas to exploit them in more affluent urban areas. The current research explores whether urban settings that are often linked with human trafficking proliferation also have inherent unique features in their physical and social environments that can be strategically leveraged to combat human trafficking and protect victims.

Theoretical underpinnings – the nexus of urban environments and HT

Several criminological theories have hypothesized that physical and social environments in urban areas help engender and sustain criminal activity. For example, Shaw and Mckay (1942) argued that structural factors affect crime in urban areas. Specifically, they identified residential instability, poverty, and homelessness as significant urban characteristics affecting crime. Other researchers have also emphasized the role of the urban physical and social environment in

facilitating crime. Rengert et al. (2018) and Weaver et al. (2014) reported an increase in drug related crimes in urban areas. Aalbers & Sabat (2012) found that proximity to highways increased prevalence of prostitution. HT is one of the crimes known to thrive under such conditions. The existing literature on this subject demonstrates that urban environments provide sustainable natural venues for trafficking to thrive. A brief overview of the literature that establishes such a nexus between urban settings and HT is presented below.

Women and children are regularly taken from rural to urban areas and trafficked into various businesses, including sex work. A great deal of research has documented that the unique features of urban areas provide ideal settings for HT to proliferate. For example, proximity to interstate highways, a higher than usual number of cheaper hotels/motels, and sexually oriented businesses in urban areas contributed significantly to sex trafficking (McCutcheon et al., 2016; Mletzko, Summers, & Arnio, 2018). Newton et al. (2008) reported that commercial sex economies are concentrated in large urban areas. Similarly, Cotter (2020) described that sex trafficking and sex work are more prevalent in large urban areas in Canada. Kenyon & Schanz (2014) described those specific conditions in urban areas that allow sex trafficking to occur locally. Dalley (2010) revealed that high-end sex trade activities and the gang and drug-related crimes are more prevalent in urban centers (also see U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2016; Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2019).

Gainey and Hill (2021) reported that urban communities are 'hot spots for traffickers' because these areas offer opportunities for traffickers to lure and exploit victims with limited or no visibility. Additionally, convenient and inexpensive access to high-speed internet in metropolitan areas facilitates traffickers to reach customers, move victims, and conduct business expeditiously as well as anonymously (Latonero, 2011). This makes urban areas more viable,

attractive, and profitable sites for trafficking. Dank et al. (2014) reported that the results of their research indicated 'commercial sex economies are concentrated in large urban areas and span a variety of venues, including escort services, massage parlours, internet advertisements, and street-based prostitution.' Law enforcement also reported that street-level prostitution generally 'occurs along specific tracks within more densely populated urban areas. Other research by Curtis et al. (2008) and Raphael & Ashley (2010) also documented that commercial sex venues that can quickly and almost anonymously absorb trafficking victims exist in larger metropolitan communities than smaller communities. They reported that a higher number of available venues increases the probability of a higher prevalence of sex trafficking (see also Smith et al., 2009; Bletzer, 2005; Bortel et al., 2008; Brewster, 2003).

While research documents a higher incidence and prevalence of human trafficking in urban settings and provides explanations for such a heightened vulnerability, little is known about *public attitudes* towards human trafficking within urban communities. Similarly, there is only limited research documenting general *perceptions of urban area residents* about human trafficking in their environments. Additionally, despite the perceived linkages between urban settings and the proliferation of human trafficking in such areas, little attention is paid to the existence and/or non-existence of prevention and protection programs in urban areas. The current research fills that gap to develop an understanding of urban residents' perceptions on urban environmental attributes that allow a proliferation of human trafficking. This article also addresses whether inherent urban environmental latent attributes and community resources may be used to understand the dynamics of human trafficking and devise catered prevention strategies.

Methodology

Objective of the study, Data, and Methods

The study's main objective is to explore the perceptions of informed urban residents insofar as 1) the attributes of urban environments that may positively influence the perpetuation of HT, and conversely, 2) the corollary attributes of such environments that may be leveraged to curb criminal HT activity. The secondary broader research questions that are hence explored are: *1) Can urban settings - that are often linked with Human Trafficking – be strategically leveraged to combat human trafficking? 2) Can urban settings be used to protect existing and potential victims?* To answer the primary and secondary research questions, it is imperative to understand the unique features of urban settings linked to HT's manifestation, perpetuation, and sustenance and explore whether urban settings provide suitable venues to develop programs to protect existing and potential victims.

Data for the study are collected from 300 participants (40% men and 60% women) aged between 18-45 years (See Table 1 for demographics of the sample). It is a non-random convenience sample. Over two semesters, all the participants were students enrolled in a criminal justice class at a large urban university. Convenience samples are often used in social science research (Peterson, 2001), especially when the research emphasizes basic psychological processes (Lucas, 2003). In this case, students are from an urban university and the objective of the study is to get their opinions on an urban issue. Thus, using students as study participants is justified despite the intrinsic limitations of a convenience sampling study design. All enrolled students were eligible to participate in the study. No extra credit or other compensation was offered in return for participation, and no penalty was imposed on those who opted not to participate.

The instrument to collect data was created based on a literature review on crime theories that suggest that urban areas' attributes provide enhanced opportunities for crime to exist and thrive. It is hypothesized that urban areas are appealing and viable sites for human trafficking as

they provide easy access to interstate highways, mobility, anonymity, higher demand for labour and sex services, and higher availability of clients/businesses eager to absorb trafficking victims. The instrument included a questionnaire consisting of open-ended short answer questions - which means the participants provided answers in their own words, and the data collected is qualitative. This method was selected for data collection because open-ended questionnaires offer better options for obtaining honest answers as they give participants more choices for responding (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; McNamara, 1999).

The questionnaire was divided into three sections: 1) respondents' comprehension of HT and their perceptions of urban settings that manifest and perpetuate human trafficking; 2) use of urban settings for human trafficking prevention and victims' protection; and 3) 'participants attributes'. Each section had short-answer questions. The first section of the questionnaire focused on participants' understanding of human trafficking, differences between urban and non-urban settings, attributes that facilitate human trafficking, and their knowledge of existing legislation on human trafficking and the availability of social services for victims in their areas. The second section solicited their suggestions on the best possible strategies for addressing human trafficking in urban settings, preventing human trafficking, and protecting victims. The third section gathered demographics such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, national origin, level of education, income level, employment status, profession, political affiliation, and current residence (urban/suburban/rural). The participants were given the questionnaires during the fourth week of each semester. They were allowed four weeks to complete. All the participants returned completed questionnaires by the end of four week allotted period. Data was anonymized and were correspondingly transferred from the completed questionnaires into a databank. All responses to the questions to each section were recorded, reviewed, coded, and divided into different categories. The first section of questions on

the participants' understanding of human trafficking and urban settings were recorded under 'Comprehension of human trafficking while the second section responses were recorded under the section 'Using urban settings for human trafficking prevention and victims' protection .'The third section identified demographic attributes, and the answers were recorded under the section 'participants attributes'.

Once all the surveys were received, they were reviewed for completion. All the responses to questions in the surveys were coded in phases. First, all answers from the respondents were coded and recorded in their respective sections. Then, responses were reviewed to extract the most frequent or significant phrases and terms used by the respondents. These phrases and terms were summarized and paraphrased. The raw data were converted into comprehensible prose. These results are presented in the next section.

Results and Discussion

Table one presents the demographics of the respondents. The sample consists of forty percent men and sixty percent women. Their ages range from 18-45 years. Seventy percent of respondents were between 18 to 25, and thirty percent were between 26 and 45. Sixty percent of the participants resided in urban areas, thirty-five percent in the suburbs, and five percent in rural areas. Twenty percent of the participants identified themselves as 'Black,' twenty-five percent as 'White,' fifty percent as 'Hispanic,' and five percent as 'other .'Eighty percent were employed while twenty percent were not employed.

Table 1.   Questionnaire Section 3 – Demographics

Demographic attribute	N (300)	%
Gender		
Male	120	40
Female	180	60
Race/ethnicity		
Black	60	20

White	75	25
Hispanic	150	50
Other race	15	5
Current residence		
Urban	180	60
Sub-urban	105	35
Rural	15	5
Employment status		
Employed	240	80
Not employed	60	20
Political affiliation		
Democrat	135	45
Republic	135	45
Other	30	10
Age		
18-25	210	70
26+	90	30

Most of the participants demonstrated their knowledge of human trafficking. Their appreciation of HT was primarily expressed in terms of human rights violation, and all respondents (100%) described human trafficking as a form of exploitation. 'Exploitation' was subsequently decorticated as cheap labour in 45% of respondents. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents attributed economic motives to victims as a driving force for HT perpetuation. Thirty-two percent of the respondents described it as a violation of the victim's body and self-respect, while 29% explained it stripping their dignity. Such results are expected given that the respondents are Criminal Justice students who are putatively more cognizant of human trafficking than the public. When asked if they thought that urban settings were more suited for HT to thrive, 72% of the respondents responded that certain unique aspects of urban environments such as the higher prevalence of business opportunities, accessibility to public transport and highways, higher demand for cheap labour, and low to no visibility of criminal behaviour accelerate human trafficking. They stated that businesses in urban areas have intrinsic features that allow businesses to maintain a façade of legitimacy and secretly engage in illicit acts such as exploiting children,

youth, and adults for labour and sex. They reported that many businesses such as escort services, massage parlours, modelling, internet advertisements, and street-based prostitution exist in urban areas. These features facilitate the perpetuation and sustenance of trafficking.

When asked about the areas where HT occurs most, 37% stated it occurs everywhere, while 45% reported it occurs in urban areas. Other 43% indicated it occurs in suburban areas, while 35% reported it in rural areas. Almost half of the respondents said it occurs in urban and suburban areas. These results demonstrate that most respondents (88%) believe HT occurs most in urban and/or suburban areas, while 35% believe it happens in rural areas. When respondents were asked if they knew of any areas where HT is more likely to occur, 77% said it is likely to occur in downtown areas where most concentrated businesses are located.

Further, 86% thought it would occur in areas close to public transport entry points such as bus stops and train stations, where mobility from one place to the next is convenient and inexpensive. The areas that promise low visibility are also 'hubs for human trafficking. An overwhelming majority (83-89%) believed it would happen in areas close to hotels, motels, and businesses like massage parlours, bars, and clubs. When asked where these businesses were located, a vast majority (87%) stated they were in urban cities, while a little more than one-third (39%) of the respondents believed they were in rural locations, and 42% indicated they were located everywhere. When respondents were asked to describe the main characteristics that differentiate urban areas from rural areas, the majority (85%) said urban areas were much more convenient, provided anonymity, and easy movement (87%) from one place to another. An overwhelming majority said urban areas have more employment opportunities and more privacy, while rural areas presented fewer opportunities for economic growth, little to no privacy, no access to transport, and financial hardship. All respondents said they were aware that human trafficking

is illegal and there are laws against human trafficking in the jurisdictions they live. However, when asked if they thought the existing laws were effective, almost half of them (45%) said no, and they gave various reasons for their answers. The respondents were asked if they were aware of any services available in their areas for human trafficking victims. Most of the respondents said yes, but most said no when asked if these services were adequate. A summary of responses to the first section of the questionnaire is summarized and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Questionnaire Section 1 – Urban Areas and Trafficking

Questions In your words please describe	Summary of Answers		Response %[i]
What do you understand when you hear a term "human trafficking"?	Exploitation		100
	Violation of basic rights		78
	Cheap labor		45
	Poor people willing to do anything		78
	Violation of body and self-esteem		32
	Stripping of dignity		29
Where does human trafficking occur most?	Everywhere		37
	Urban areas		45
	Suburban areas		43
	Rural		35
	Both Urban and suburban		49
Any particular areas where human trafficking is more likely to take place?	Downtown areas – concentrated businesses		77
	Areas near public transportation stops		86
	Near inter-state highways and truck stops		59
	Near airports and Air b and b		53
	Near hotels and motels		83
	Near businesses like massage parlors, bars, and clubs etc.		89
	Near normal looking businesses such as home building stores, grocery stores, restaurants etc.		56
	Farms and construction sites		76
	Gambling and other establishments		79
Where are these businesses located?	Urban cities		87
	Rural locations		39
	Everywhere		42
	Urban Areas	Are Congested and disorganized	67

What are the differences between Urban, Suburban, and Rural?		People are from anywhere	89
		It is easy to get lost there	92
		More opportunities	90
		More places to hide	91
		Nobody cares about anybody	95
	Suburban Areas	Are organized, manicured and clean	88
		Perfect for high end illicit businesses like in home sex parties etc.	89
		People know what is going on but do not say anything	92
		Residents are as corrupt or even more corrupt than urban area business people	89
		Hidden crime sites – like meth lab, guns, and child trafficking	92
		Exploitative in hidden areas	91
		Expensive	92
	Rural Areas	Open	90
		Everyone knows everyone	93
		Crime is difficult to hide except in barns etc.	85
		More prone to family violence	92
		Families abuse and traffic their children and poor relatives	94
		Ignorance prevails there	90
What are the main characteristics of these areas?	Urban Areas	Convenient	85
		Easy to move from one place to another	87

		Public transport available and inexpensive	90
		More employment opportunities	91
		No prying eyes – more privacy	92
	Rural	Inconvenient	93
		No public transport	94
		No jobs	85
		No privacy	90
		Poverty	92
Why do you think human trafficking is more prevalent in urban areas?	Higher demand for cheap or free services		95
	Viability of staying anonymous		96
	Easy and inexpensive means of mobility		89
	Attractive for the people coming from rural or poor places		98
	Accessibility to high speed internet and social media		97
	Culture of 'I don't care"		98
Are there any laws against Human Trafficking in your areas?	Yes		100
Are these laws effective? -	Perhaps not, because it keeps happening		78
	Not really – Human trafficking is hidden		86
Do these laws help in stopping trafficking?	No, victims do not want to get involved with police. They feel they are better off where they are than going back to the places they came from with.		45
	No, it is difficult to locate victims		76
	No, because traffickers force the victims to not to talk to anyone		89
	No, victims stay hidden		77
	No, victims do not report		89
	No, victims are threatened with violence		83
	Yes, at least some traffickers are apprehended.		45
	No, victims have nowhere to go if they do not do as they are told by their trafficker		90
Are there any services available for the victims of Human Trafficking in your areas?	Yes		43
	No		45
	Not sure or do not know		12
What services are available for the victims of human trafficking?	Police can provide protection		45
	Some churches provide services such as food and other essentials		82

	There are some places where the victims can stay for a while – like shelter services	35
	Some charities help trafficking victims	67
	Sometimes organizations like Red-Cross can help	45
	There are shelters for victims of domestic violence. If there is space available, victims of human trafficking can be accommodated there.	39
	Not sure – there are no services for boys or men.	87
How effective are these services?	Perhaps they help a few victims. More services are needed.	10
	Do not know	90

[1] The responses in some cells do not end into perfect 100% because respondents' answers overlapped.

The next section of the questionnaire asked respondents to suggest strategies and programs that can help curb HT and protect victims in urban areas. They were asked to describe their opinions and solutions to the high prevalence of human trafficking in urban areas. A vast majority (79%) indicated that the best way to reduce human trafficking, apprehend traffickers, and protect victims is through community engagement, and eighty-one percent recommended community cohesion. They suggested that such efforts should also be dedicated to programmatic development to control and prevent human trafficking. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents recommended using situational and environmental variables in urban settings to combat human trafficking and protect victims. They advocated that urban communities create physical environments and use structural place-based interventions. Seventy-one percent indicated that existing human trafficking task forces in urban areas often hold monthly meetings to discuss the state of human trafficking in their jurisdictions. They recommended that these task forces be 'charged for engaging communities to involve affected urban communities. They should 'share their resources and expertise with communities and engage them in developing programs to control and prevent HT, protect victims, and provide services to the victims'.

More than half of the respondents (59%) proposed to create and/or increase green space in urban areas. They suggested that the quality of neighbourhood buildings and businesses should be improved, and public spaces for urban communities should be created. They believed that a place-based approach will create a sense of community and cohesion. It will encourage community engagement, reduce the chances of engaging in clandestine illegal activities and develop a sense of pride and compassion among urban residents. Such an approach will also curb trafficking as urban areas will no longer be safe havens for traffickers to continue operating 'business as usual. Sixty-five percent of the respondents recommended outreach programs to assist trafficking victims. They believed these programs should be developed to reach both parties (offenders and victims) to develop supportive and confidential relationships with victims and offenders. Outreach programs can also be created to reach individuals at a high risk of becoming perpetrators or victims. These programs should be used to link them with social services, mental health counsellors, faith-based organizations, and other existing supportive organizations.

Seventy-seven percent of the respondents suggested developing a collaborative approach to combat HT and protect victims. They proposed developing programs that foster collaboration between communities, law enforcement, and citizens. They suggested that these joint forces should work with friends and families of victims to stop further victimization, educate communities, and create awareness about the vulnerability of all citizens. These programs should work towards changing urban social norms of indifference to empathy. More than two-thirds of the respondents (69%) suggested engaging and supporting youth. They believed youth are easy targets for grooming as victims and/or perpetrators. They described that youth could be quickly recruited by traffickers to work for them as perpetrators and to recruit other youth to be groomed for trafficking. Traffickers target youth because they are often seen as 'soft targets. They suggested that families,

communities, and other organizations should engage youth in communities, supporting them in their educational training and helping them find adequate employment. This will instill community pride and self-confidence among youth and prevent traffickers from quickly reaching and defrauding them.

Sixty-seven percent recommended using community-based programs in collaboration with law enforcement to reach out to urban residents, families, and youth to develop community cohesion. They also recommended engaging urban residents in developing programs to protect their communities. They suggested that these programs should empower urban residents and encourage them to protect their human and social capital. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents suggested creating legitimate economic opportunities for urban area residents to reduce financial stress and prevent them from falling prey to traffickers' deceptive tactics, such as offering easy access to high-paying jobs. Suppose urban residents are financially stable and believe fair and reasonable employment and educational opportunities are available to them. In that case, they are less likely to be enticed by the promises of easy money by traffickers.

Interestingly, study respondents asserted that victims often might consciously accept the risks of partaking in HT owing to the promises of enticing financial rewards. Such enticement often further manifests itself in consent to the traffickers' offer to serve as their assistants in trafficking and engage in criminal activities to mitigate their financial duress. These responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Questionnaire Section 2 – Suggestions on Prevention Programs and Strategies

Questions In your words please describe	Summary of Answers	Response %[1]
	Community engagement	79

Strategies and programs that can help curb human trafficking and protect victims in urban areas. Programs that can provide solutions to the problem of high prevalence of human trafficking in urban areas.	Community Cohesion	81
	Use of existing situational and environmental variables	89
	Structural place-based interventions	89
	Reorganization of Human Trafficking Task forces	78
	Create and/or increase green space	65
	Outreach programs to reach trafficking victims.	37
	Collaborative approach	77
	Engagement of Youth	69
	Support Youth	69
	Community based programs in collaboration with law enforcement	67
	Create legitimate economic opportunities for urban area residents	78
	Reduce mental stress	78

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore urban residents' perceptions of urban environmental factors that incentivize or curb HT. Previous research has documented a higher prevalence of crime in urban areas (see Shaw and Mckay, 1942; Aalbers & Sabat, 2012; Rengert et al., 2018; McCutcheon et al., 2016; Weaver et al.; 2014). Similarly, more HT cases are reported in urban areas (see Kenyon & Schanz, 2014; Dalley, 2010; U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2016; Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2019). This research collected qualitative data to explore urban residents' perspectives on developing HT prevention programs and policies centered around the same urban attributes that help sustain human trafficking. The results indicated that a better understanding of community dynamics on their residents could position them as leaders and encourage partnerships with HT task forces and law enforcement in developing control and prevention programs. Such grass-roots efforts can prove to be instrumental in controlling HT. Such community engagement can foster empowerment and assist in creating cohesive communities and help develop a sense of security among urban residents. Study respondents proposed creating physical environments and

implementing structural place-based interventions. Their suggestions included programs that engender collaboration among law enforcement, communities, youth, and victims. Other suggestions included creating legitimate employment opportunities and reducing the financial stress of vulnerable community residents.

Since the results of this study provide fascinating insight into possible suggestions for community development to curb the progression of HT in urban environments, there are many limitations to the study. The recommendations about using a place-based approach, community engagement and community cohesion merit further exploration. This research does not examine whether these are viable and whether these programs will effectively reduce HT and provide needed victim services. Secondly, the sample used for this study is a non-random sample, and the respondents are students at a university – their perceptions and opinions may not be generalizable. It should also be noted that the sample is a convenience sample composed of university students attending criminal justice (CJ) classes. This may pose a selection bias problem as the study respondents may already be aware and sensitized to HT and its effects. Their views may have limited generalizability. Future studies should be conducted using more inclusive sampling strategies.

Additionally, it should also be noted that the study focused on obtaining the respondents' suggestions for HT control and prevention in urban areas. Some of the suggestions are broad, and the determination of their feasibility is beyond the scope of this study. Future studies should explore the applicability and feasibility of such propositions. Despite its limitations, the current research offers a unique perspective on the role of urban environmental factors in HT and sets the

stage for further examination of urban human and social capital to curb HT and provide services to the victims.

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[i] The responses in some cells do not end into perfect 100% because respondents' answers overlapped.

Table 3: Questionnaire Section 2 – Suggestions on Prevention Programs and Strategies

Questions In your words please describe	Summary of Answers	Response %[i]
Strategies and programs that can help curb human trafficking and protect victims in urban areas. Programs that can provide solutions to the problem of high	Community engagement	79
	Community Cohesion	81
	Use of existing situational and environmental variables	89
	Structural place-based interventions	89
	Reorganization of Human Trafficking Task forces	78
	Create and/or increase green space	65

prevalence of human trafficking in urban areas.	Outreach programs to reach trafficking victims.	37
	Collaborative approach	77
	Engagement of Youth	69
	Support Youth	69
	Community based programs in collaboration with law enforcement	67
	Create legitimate economic opportunities for urban area residents	78
	Reduce mental stress	78