

*Journal of Research Practice*  
Volume 14, Issue 1, Article D1, 2018



*Research Design:*

# **Gaining a Fuller Picture of Sex Trafficking in Manitoba: A Case Study of Narrative-Based Research Utilizing ‘Low Tech’ Thematic Analysis**

**Robert Christmas**  
Winnipeg, CANADA  
[robertwchristmas@hotmail.com](mailto:robertwchristmas@hotmail.com)

## **Abstract**

This article explores narrative-based, person-centered research, carried out by the author for his PhD dissertation, titled “Modern Day Slavery and the Sex Industry: Raising the Voices of Survivors and Collaborators While Confronting Sex Trafficking and Exploitation in Manitoba, Canada.” The article describes interview dynamics considered and accounted for, including positionality of the researcher and the narrative-based research methodology. The author provides detailed description of the grounded, inductive, “old school,” low technology data analysis process used, some of the challenges encountered, and recommendations for similar studies in future. The key challenges arose from the positionality of the researcher and the need to protect the participants from potential repercussions. The recommendations relate to the relevance of narrative-based research, limited transferability of the results of such research, and the value of a more open-ended interviewing style.

**Index Terms:** sex trafficking; person-centered research; positionality; intersectionality; grounded theory; inductive analysis; story telling

**Suggested Citation:** Christmas, R. (2018). Gaining a fuller picture of sex trafficking in Manitoba: A case study of narrative-based research utilizing ‘low tech’ thematic analysis. *Journal of Research Practice*, 14(1), Article D1. Retrieved from <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/595/490>

---

## **1. Introduction: Research on Sex Trafficking and Exploitation**

My PhD dissertation research at the University of Manitoba, Canada sought to ascertain people’s subjective observations and descriptions of the current state of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking in Manitoba, Canada in 2016-2017, and what interventions could be applied to improve the situation (Christmas, 2017). Using an interpretive, narrative-based approach, with semi-structured interviews, the intention was to gather insights and perspectives of those affected by the sex industry. Broadening the net from previous

research that had often left out important voices on the issue, I sought to include the experiences and viewpoints of prosecutors; policymakers and lawmakers; leaders in the provincial, federal, and Indigenous governments; police officers and social workers; and survivors of the sex industry. My intention was to gain a fuller picture of the social phenomenon of sex trafficking, as well as how all the stakeholders interact with each other when addressing the issue of sexual exploitation of vulnerable women in Manitoba.

In total, I interviewed 61 people who had considerable experience of the sex industry in Manitoba, either directly participating as victims or providing services directed towards survivors of the sex industry. This project presented some methodological challenges. For one, I had to consider and account for several forms of power dynamics. For example, as a serving police officer, I had to account for the potential of perceived power disparity while interviewing sex industry survivors. I also had to account for the integrity of my research—critically examining the system within which I am employed. Second, I chose a narrative-based approach for my research, because I wanted to focus on people’s subjective experiences and their descriptions of the phenomenon, so that the findings may be meaningful for the participants themselves. I chose to use a “low tech” process for thematically analyzing the data. In this article, I will describe how I conducted the interviews, accounting for power disparity and bias, and how I conducted the analysis of over 1,000 pages of interview transcripts, eventually molding it into my dissertation. Through the process of my research, and the resulting analysis and conclusions, I learned many lessons, which I share in this article. I also highlight the benefits and power of narrative-based research and how I accomplished this study using a low tech, old school method of thematic analysis. In the conclusion, I highlight some of the challenges I encountered, lessons learned, and recommendations for similar studies in future.

## 2. Research Design

### 2.1. Person-Centered Research Strategy

I sought to ascertain people’s subjective observations and descriptions of the current state of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking in Manitoba in 2016-2017, and what interventions could stop it. An interpretive, person-centered approach was selected, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather narratives reflecting the personal observations, insights, and perspectives of the study participants.

My study drew upon a *social integrationist* perspective of the environment, meaning the subjective interpretations of my research participants are considered as the basic building blocks of knowledge relevant in this context. Social integrationists view human experience as a reflective, subjective, and reactive journey in which interactions are interpreted and understood subjectively (Blumer, 1969).

My research approach was inspired, in part, by Wiseman’s approach, as described in her book, *Stations of the Lost: The Treatment of Skid Row Alcoholics*, in which she reported on a study of alcoholic men in the Skid Row area of Los Angeles, United States. She wrote, “to study human beings in any area of their social life it is necessary to view that area of life in terms of their experience and from their point of view” (Wiseman, 1970, p. xii).

Through narrative interviews, Wiseman created a rich picture of the social situation around Skid Row. My intent was to conduct a similar type of a multi-perspective study around sexual exploitation and human sex trafficking. My research was also an exploratory case study, proposing to create insights into the world of human sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in Manitoba.

In previous literature, interpretive, person-centered research approaches are highlighted as effective in examining local conceptions of peace building efforts, which was a goal of my study (Ripsman & Blanchard, 2003). Such research, as described by Palys and Atchison (2008), is “human centered,” and highlights people’s perceptions and human agency. Mac Ginty and Williams have suggested that person-centered approaches can better capture “local voices and Indigenous solutions” (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009, p. 8). Indigenous perspectives and solutions are particularly relevant to my research, as Canadian Indigenous women and children are drastically over-represented in the sex industry (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2014).

Women and children in the sex industry face numerous challenges arising out of their respective social positions and individual challenges, which conditions their perceptions and everyday experience. Terms such as *positionality* and *intersectionality* have been used in the literature to refer to this aspect of social life. Scholars have suggested that “person-centered” research is well-suited for the study of intersectionality because it allows us to explore the multidimensional and contextual nature of human experience (Hankivsky, 2011; Hunting, 2014; McCall, 2005). Person-centered research also informs initiatives aimed at improving social justice (Hankivsky, 2011; Rogers & Kelly, 2011). Hunting describes the nature and contribution of such research in these words:

Intersectionality-informed qualitative research has broadened the evidence base as to the complexities of experience across diverse populations. Such research allows for more nuanced understandings of health and social issues, providing a foundation for more effective and relevant public policies that advance social justice. Consequently, interest in and uptake of intersectionality-informed qualitative research has increased across academia, community settings, and governments. (Hunting, 2014, p. 16).

My research explores the many challenges that women and youth face in the sex industry in Manitoba. I sought to gain new insights through the stories of my participants.

## **2.2. Seeking Meaning From Narratives**

My intention was to ascertain and explain the patterns and interconnections in people’s subjective perceptions by gathering their stories. Rather than applying and testing existing theory, I chose a grounded approach, utilizing inductive analysis of the narratives, to build new theoretical insights. Such an approach aims to avoid the influence of prior expectations on the research to be conducted (Charmaz, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Patton (1980) wrote that grounded theory uses, “inductive analysis, analyzing themes, patterns, and categories arising from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to collection and analysis” (p. 306). I asked

participants some structured questions, in order to gain specific details on relevant issues that I wanted to explore, however, the questions were open ended, allowing interviewees the opportunity to provide a story, offering subjective insights (Senehi, 2009).

My conception of a grounded approach is that the researcher is a blank slate, gathering the perceptions, stories, experiences, and comments of participants, and then analyzing them later with an open mind to the themes that arise. Further, it involves listening to, reading, and reflecting on the stories provided. I was careful to retain the original intent and meaning of the stories in my analysis. In presenting the results of my work, I preferred to use the interviewees' words with direct quotations, as much as possible, rather than interpreting and paraphrasing their narratives. This way, the reader can see for himself/herself the story that was told and apply his/her own interpretation of the meaning. That being said, the final results / outputs of my research are my interpretation of the data. For example, many of the participants mentioned similar themes. These would not be identified as repetitive on their own, without my analysis. I also highlight, in many cases, where participants described unique and groundbreaking ideas. For example, only one participant mentioned that sports programs are significantly lacking in support for sex trafficking survivors. My analysis of the data highlighted when saturation of certain ideas was reached. One example of saturation was the need for more safe housing for survivors. I provided context, in my final analysis, for safe housing as a need that was identified by most participants.

### **2.3. Scoping the Research**

This research focused on the exploitation of women and girls in the sex industry. While clearly boys and men are also victimized, the incidence is much lower and different in some ways. Eighty percent or more of sex industry survivors, in Canada, are female (Badgley, 1984; Cullen-DuPont, 2009; McIntyre, 2012; Smith, 2014). Moreover, 70 percent or more of sexually exploited youth/women in Manitoba have Indigenous ancestry (Cook & Courchene, 2006). The Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2014) concluded that the number one risk factor to being exploited in the sex industry is being female. Some research has been done on sexual exploitation and trafficking of males and LGBTQ2S (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, queer, 2-spirited) people in the sex industry, however, it is a topic in its own right, and clearly an area for future research (McIntyre, 2012).

I chose, therefore, to only focus my study on women and girls. A significant and challenging methodological decision I had to make was whether to interview those who are actively engaged in selling sex in the industry, or only survivors who are no longer involved in it. My decision in the end, under the guidance of my thesis advisors, was to only interview those who are not currently (to my knowledge) involved in the sex industry, and only those who are over the age of consent (in Canada this is 18 years of age). My rationale for excluding those currently selling sex was multifaceted. For one, those who are active in the sex industry are generally entrenched in the culture of the sex industry, which makes them biased against speaking with anyone, especially authority figures, outside the industry. Secondly, interviewing those who are active in the sex industry could put them in danger, as their traffickers are always close; therefore, for ethical reasons, I chose not to

interview those who are active. Third, I chose, also for ethical reasons, not to interview children who are under the age of 18. It is possible that my research lacked important perspectives and observations from those who are still entrenched in the sex industry.

## **2.4. Participant Selection**

For this research, I explored relationships between individuals and groups including: (a) political and Indigenous leaders, (b) government and non-government service providers, and (c) survivors of the sex industry. I sought out practitioners through word of mouth, interviewing those who are known to work in the area. As the interviews progressed, most participants mentioned knowledgeable and experienced people whom I should interview. The terms of my ethics approval, through the University of Manitoba Ethics Review Board, allowed me to seek out and approach people who are known to be working as practitioners, but not people who are sex industry survivors or who are private citizens and not widely known public advocates. I did not approach any survivor directly to request for an interview. A referral letter was given to interview participants to pass on to survivors who they anticipated might wish to be interviewed. Several survivors contacted me requesting to participate in the study after receiving the referral letter from acquaintances.

As a policy, I offered to interview all survivors who contacted me wishing to participate in the research. I did this because participating in the research was important for many survivors who reached out, and I wanted to facilitate the potential therapeutic catharsis and sense of contribution and community engagement on the issue for them. The survivors who reached out expressed appreciation for the research, and for the opportunity to participate; some of them contacted me several times after their interview either to suggest other participants, to add new information, or to ask how the research was going.

Of the 61 participants I interviewed, 6 were political leaders, 23 were social workers, 24 were police officers, and 8 were survivors, although some of the practitioners are also survivors. I cannot divulge how many practitioners were survivors, as it may identify the survivors, however, I can say it was substantial, over a half of them. High numbers of survivors continuing on in helping fields after their exit from the sex industry, was a finding of my research. No material or financial benefits were provided to the participants.

## **2.5. Research Instruments**

The instrument utilized in this research is semi-structured interviews recorded with audio equipment. In researching issues to consider around interviewing, I found that there is literature defining the importance of considering how interviews are conducted (Morris, 2009). I carefully considered how my interviews would take place.

All interviews were conducted at a place and time arranged by the participants, with consideration of my own convenience never entering into it. I further ensured, as much as possible, that interviews were conducted in private and in such a way that the subjects' privacy was protected. In several cases, when interviewing Indigenous elders, a gift of tobacco was offered to respect their cultural tradition.

## 2.6. Ethics Approval

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board (REB) approved the research within the guidelines established in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Subjects*, established in 2001 by Canada's three main federal research agencies: (1) Canadian Institute of Health Research, (2) Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and (3) Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

This research raises a variety of ethical issues due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and its close connection with crime control and law enforcement. In addition, the person-centered research strategy adopted for this research also poses ethical issues of its own, especially as the researcher is a serving police officer. Some of these issues and how these were addressed are discussed later, in Section 4, "Reflections on the Research Process."

## 3. Validation and Analysis of Data

Transcribing 30 hours of audio recordings represented a nightmare of work for me. In desperation, I sought advice from fellow graduate students and professors with relevant experience. I tried several different transcription software packages, however, it would have taken me a year to transcribe it if I was working alone. Ultimately, I persuaded several gracious supporters of my research to assist with the task of transcribing.

While textual analysis software was available at my university, an "old school" approach seemed much more practical for my data analysis. Adopting this approach meant looking inductively for themes, ideas, and recommendations, placing each transcribed interview text into one large, searchable document that was over 1,000 pages in the end (not counting my own words). I studied every word of the interview transcripts starting at the beginning, and separated all of it into 38 distinct themes. As I read through the transcript, I created a new document for each theme as it emerged from the data. I copied all the comments pertaining to each distinct theme into the corresponding thematic document. I then organized the documents into sections in what became five thematic chapters of the dissertation (see Christmas, 2017).

Scholars have pointed out that the validity of the conclusions drawn from data is a subjective matter in an interpretive study such as this, and the researcher must be aware of and sensitive to his/her own biases and positionality (Creswell, 2007). Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) point out that interpretive analysis can be contentious for these reasons. However, that does not mean the conclusions are weak or invalid. It can also be valid and powerful if the researcher captures the authentic expressions of the research participants. As I was reviewing the transcripts, in most cases, it was very clear to me how passionate the participants were about their observations, and how significant their reflections were for them. In editing the quotations in my dissertation, I took great care to retain the intended meaning of the interviewees, respecting that they were asked to spontaneously answer

questions about complex subjects—and that extraneous word whiskers such as “um” are a manner of speaking that would be removed if they were providing written responses. I removed some word whiskers in the final dissertation, remaining careful to respect the extensive experience and dignity of my subjects, knowing fully well that I was doing this from the standpoint of my cultural standards. I only did this in places where it was obvious and clear what the participant’s intent was when they were speaking.

Druckman (2005) points out that analyzing interview data involves validating the accuracy and authenticity of the interview participants’ comments, keeping in mind how they are represented by the researcher. Additionally, Creswell (2007) describes several strategies for validation that I was able to employ. First, I am very familiar with the landscape and context of this subject matter; if someone were to make outlandish or completely inaccurate observations, I would recognize those as such and flag those for further analysis and clarification. The participants suggested several groundbreaking ideas that I immediately recognized as such. For example, one participant described her vision of a “Dream Catcher Village,” a community concept that does not exist currently. I recognized this as unique and explored it further with other participants.

Remaining consistent with Creswell’s recommendations, the ideas the participants raised were triangulated among all the participants’ contributions. Often, participants talked about similar or identical issues. For example, all the participants talked about the need for more education and awareness in society. If one said the opposite, I would immediately recognize it as uncommon and examine it more carefully. My research participants were all highly credible, and many are recognized experts in the field.

## **4. Reflections on the Research Process**

### **4.1. Positionality of the Researcher**

Scholars have highlighted that the position and relative power of the interviewer/researcher and the participants is significant in any study (Hunting, 2014; Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009; Karneili-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). My research required that I remain cognizant of my own positionality, both as a serving police officer, and as a privileged white male. At the time of the interviews I was a sworn police officer and most, if not all, of the survivors I proposed to interview had previous experiences with the law enforcement and the justice system. Survivors often have either good or bad preconceptions about the police, as most report having been prosecuted, harassed, apprehended, or helped by police officers; therefore, I was careful to consider positionality and the way I influenced the interviews with questions, body language, demeanor, and context. For example, I carefully considered the place and time of the interviews, my dress and demeanor (e.g., not wearing a uniform or a suit), ensuring that subjects had a say in deciding the time and place, and that they did not feel intimidated or uncomfortable. They were offered the opportunity to have a support person sit in (only one did), and I went to great lengths to openly discuss informed consent and that they could stop the interview at any time.

This research involved two main categories of participants: (1) survivors of the sex industry, and (2) practitioners and community leaders. These lines became somewhat blurred in some cases as the interviews unfolded, as I learned that practitioners who work directly with survivors in treatment programs, are often sex trafficking survivors themselves. This did not cause any problems that I am aware of. In some cases, my participants and I negotiated and agreed upon issues that they would wish to be identified with and which aspects they wished to have anonymized in the resulting publications. For example, several practitioners advised that they would like to be attributed with their comments in subsequent publications, but not with the parts in which they were talking about their own previous involvement as a victim/survivor of the sex industry. In some cases, people had put that part of their life behind them and had no wish for others to know about this aspect of their past. I was careful to respect and comply with these wishes.

Some of the participants are highly respected and have status in their workplaces based upon their experience as having survived the sex industry. I was aware that some might feel disempowered or subtly shamed if they were interviewed in a government office or outside of their normal workplace. Most survivors-turned-practitioners I interviewed suggested that the interviews take place in their workplace.

The interviewer must be aware of his/her own biases as well as the social and historical contexts in which the interviews take place (Lal, 1999; Tickner, 2006). Researchers must also be aware of the preconceptions and expectations they may place on participants and their narratives. For example, Phillips (1996) suggests that feminist researchers must guard against the tendency to “essentialize” the perspective of women being interviewed. Interviewing Indigenous participants also requires sensitivity to Canada’s colonial past, and the possibility that some Indigenous people may see the interviewer as privileged and/or biased towards a Western cultural viewpoint (Wilson, 2008). At the same time, this Indigenous participant perspective must not be generalized as every individual is different.

One other significant issue was the fact that I am a sworn police officer. As such, I am duty-bound and legally bound by *the Criminal Code* of Canada to act on information about serious crimes that may be disclosed to me. I addressed this concern in my application to my university’s Research Ethics Board (REB), explaining that, if an interviewee were to disclose involvement in serious prosecutable crimes, I would stop them and advise them of their constitutional right to not self-incriminate. While I did not anticipate this happening, it was remotely possible. The REB office advised that it is not uncommon for criminal activity to be divulged during research and that adding a caution about my background and position to the consent form would account for this ethical issue. As it turned out, no participant had to be cautioned regarding their legal rights with respect to criminal admissions, nor arrested as a result of the interview. I believe that people were more forthcoming and open with me because of my position as a police officer, and perhaps more so because of my reputation in the community for seeking social justice and improving services to the vulnerable. I was cognizant of these dynamics and careful to steer the interviews towards producing genuine and authentic narratives.

My intention was to be sensitive to potential biases and dynamics and account for them in my interactions with the participants. I informed the study participants that my goals in the research are to raise awareness and make recommendations, and to include the voices of a



broad range of people. Most of the participants expressed appreciation for this approach. This was also evidenced by the 100 percent positive response by subjects when I asked them if they would like to be advised of the publications that result from the study.

#### **4.2. Informed Consent and Protection of the Participants**

An informed consent process was applied with every participant, including questions about anonymity and whether they consented to be identified and quoted in the publications that will arise from the research. Most service providers were eager to weigh in and be identified in the research publications, however, some did choose to remain anonymous. Pseudonyms were attached to all survivors to protect them from any potential impacts from their participation in this study. Survivors who are not practitioners in the field of helping sex industry survivors were all made anonymous, using pseudonyms; identifying information was deleted from their transcripts. Identifying the survivors, in some cases, could have given them a stronger sense of contribution and inclusion in the research. On the other hand, there is always a risk that identifying them (only in cases where they wish to be identified), could have adverse effects that were unanticipated. Some of those impacts could have been in the form of retribution from the traffickers. Another potential negative impact could arise from being labelled in their current work and home communities as a former sex industry survivor. In the end, I chose to act on the side of caution, not identifying survivors even if they were fine with it.

Some of the service providers are also survivors who now work to help people to exit the sex industry. In these cases, they were offered the choice of anonymity or of being named in the research if they are publicly known as advocates as well as survivors. All participants were over the age of 18 and no one who is currently engaged in the sex industry was interviewed. No deception was used in conducting the research. Information was not deliberately withheld from the participants and the participants were not deliberately misled in the research in any way.

There was a potential risk that practitioner participants would be ordered by their organizations to participate, or feel compelled to participate because of my position as a police officer. I took steps to ensure that every participant understood that participation was voluntary, even if their employers approved their participation. In some cases, I also sought permission from their supervisors or higher authorities before the interviews took place. For example, I interviewed officers from three different police services. I spoke to senior commanders, so that I could advise interview participants that their commanders were fine with their involvement in the study and there would be no repercussions from participating.

Practitioners, as well as survivors, were cautioned regarding potential discomfort or even trauma resulting from the interview process. There is growing research and awareness of the increasing post-traumatic stress found among service providers (Bonokoski, 2012; Freeze & Baily, 2011; MacQueen, 2011). Legerski and Bunnell (2010) reviewed the contemporary literature on the potential of traumatization of research participants when they are interviewed about their stressful experiences, ways of reducing the impacts, and viewpoints on whether the benefits of such research outweigh the potential harms. The general conclusion was that a very small, statistically insignificant, number of research participants of trauma-focused research experience distress as a result, and those that do,

only experience the negative feelings for a short period of time after being interviewed. Most participants in such research have described their experience of participating in research on their traumatic experiences as “positive, rewarding, and beneficial to society” (Legerski & Bunnell, 2010, p. 429; also see Jorm, Kelly, & Morgan, 2007; Runeson & Beskow, 1991). The researcher should strive to do no harm, remaining aware that the person they are interviewing today might be the one in 100 who feels adverse effects from the process.

Legerski and Bunnell (2010) found that while negative effects of participation in trauma-focused research appear to dissipate, the positive rewards reportedly increase with time. They reported that some studies have found that most participants experience some level of distress as well as positive benefits from their involvement in such research (Legerski & Bunnell, 2010). Yuen et al. (Yuen, Wong, Holroyd, & Tang, 2014) interviewed 23 sex industry workers in Hong Kong and found positive thinking is used to maintain resilience among them. My research also revealed some resilience-building strategies among survivors that might inform policy.

During the interviews, some mild emotional reactions did arise for some of the respondents, but none appeared traumatic. Some participants did mention that talking about their experiences is sometimes emotionally triggering, but none mentioned an intention to seek assistance from any of the trauma counseling services provided with the consent forms. Several participants also mentioned that contributing to research like this, is part of their healing journey and that they were glad to participate. For myself, the experience was sometimes emotional and visceral, as I felt empathy for the terrible experiences that some of the women I interviewed had gone through. Following is a sample narrative, just to introduce in this article the raw subject matter that was exposed and analyzed through this research:

ASHLEY (name changed to protect their identity): From a survivor’s view, I was first victimized at the age of 15. I was groomed and coerced into entering the sex trade, and then to selling myself on Ellice and Home.

All the money I made went to drugs.

I was then introduced to an older man who pretended he was my boyfriend. He had me working out of an older girl’s apartment who was out of town. I was advertised on the Internet and I would see many men a day there. He said he was keeping all the money and that I would get a car, my own condo, clothes. He bought me jewelry, but I didn’t see any of the money.

Then I ended up moving from Winnipeg to Vancouver, and back to Winnipeg to an abusive dangerous predator, and then to Toronto where I was with a very controlling abusive predator who actually sold me. I was in jail and I had a surety, and I guess he had had enough of me so he essentially sold me to another predator who ended up being murdered. He was shot in the head after which I returned to Winnipeg.

Then when I came back to Winnipeg, I was trying to get help for my addictions and I had ended up getting a big settlement from a lawsuit I had in Vancouver. And I wasn't able to manage the money, and I felt so hopeless, so much guilt, and so much shame that I jumped off the Maryland Bridge.

I landed on the ice. I broke my back and my legs, and my feet were crushed. So I spent 6 months in the hospital rehabilitating from that.

And from then I still was entrenched in the sex trade. That's all I had known my whole teens and adult life. I had been brainwashed by these men into thinking that I needed them.

So, I had a son and I lost him to CFS [Child and Family Services]. The turning point really wasn't for me until I was pregnant with my daughter.

This is one of 61 stories gathered, which is fairly typical in the raw pain and suffering described by the participants.

## 5. Conclusions

My research goal was achieved—I broadened the net from previous research that had often left out important voices. My intention was to gain a fuller picture of the social phenomenon of sex trafficking, as well as how all the stakeholders interact with each other when addressing the issue of sexual exploitation. There were, however, lessons learned and I present those here as topics for further discussion and research.

### *(i) Reducing Selection Bias Through Mixed Methods*

In future similar studies, one might consider using mixed methods. A challenge and potential research deficiency I encountered was in selection and inclusion of participants. For example, my dissertation findings stress that no-one enters the sex industry voluntarily and that the sex industry amounts to modern-day slavery. There are people who take the contrary view, that selling sex is a legitimate occupation and women should have the right to pursue it as a career if they wish. Throughout my research project I reached out to service providers who hold this view, however, none of them chose to be interviewed by me. There are survivors as well who are known to hold this view, however, I was unable to interview them. Failing to include this view is a potential shortcoming of my research. In similar future projects, I would recommend more attention on how the participants are selected and recruited for interviews. This challenge might be overcome, or mitigated, in future studies by adding surveys, which might offer more anonymity to participants. Surveys also might have identified the demography and characteristics of the survivor population more clearly. Likewise, statistical analysis might have added greater credibility and impact to my findings. For example, people often ask me for numbers of sex industry survivors, what percentage are in helping professions, and similar questions.

*(ii) Enhancing Authenticity of Narratives by Enabling Free Flow of Ideas*

In narrative-based research, interview questions ought to be open ended. While my questions were open ended, my assessment in the end was that I could have allowed more latitude to the participants to introduce and talk about different topics. In the end, I found the most impactful statements and comments were the ones that came in the form of short stories. In future, I would use more open ended questions and do more to encourage a free flow of ideas from the participants.

*(iii) Changes in Context May Undermine Research Findings*

One quandary I have struggled with is the generalizability of the results. Since I selected to constrain my focus to Manitoba, I must be careful about how I relate the results to the rest of Canada. While sex trafficking exists everywhere, it is different from region to region. It is also changing constantly. I found that in Manitoba there are pipelines through which people are trafficked from rural reserves into larger urban centers. I can only speculate if this is the case in other regions of Canada. I must also be careful to consider how things are constantly changing. For example, the move of the sex trafficking industry from the street into Internet based platforms is occurring more quickly in some places than others. We must be careful to consider, in all research of contemporary issues, that the context may be changing and our findings may be becoming outdated.

*(iv) Giving Voice to Marginalized People Through Narrative-Based Research*

I recommend narrative-based research where it may give voice to marginalized people. With the benefit of hindsight, now that I have completed the research and defended my dissertation, I have no hesitation recommending narrative-based studies. I have highlighted a few of my philosophical and methodological challenges and lessons learned, however, the positive outcomes far outweigh the few challenges I have identified. The stories are powerful, and I could not imagine capturing the impact of the survivors' own words in any other way but to showcase them, as much as possible, in the way they use them.

## References

- Badgley, C. (1984). *Committee on sexual offences against children and youth: Sexual offences against children*. Ottawa, Canada: Department of Supply and Services.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- Bonokoski, M. (2012, October 14). Police recognizing PTSD scourge. *Winnipeg Sun*.
- Canadian Women's Foundation. (2014). *Stories and strategies to end sex trafficking in Canada*. Retrieved July 20, 2018, from <https://www.canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/CWF-TraffickingReport-Donor-EN-web.pdf>

- Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing social justice studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 507-535). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Christmas, R. (2017). *Modern day slavery and the sex industry: Raising the voices of survivors and collaborators while confronting sex trafficking and exploitation in Manitoba, Canada*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. Retrieved from <https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/handle/1993/32586>
- Cook, R., & Courchene, D. (2006). *Preventing and eradicating abuse of our children and youth: Regional team development*. Winnipeg, Canada: Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres. Retrieved July 25, 2018, from [http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/traciustrust/pubs/eradicating\\_abuse.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/traciustrust/pubs/eradicating_abuse.pdf)
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Cullen-DuPont, K. (2009). *Global issues: Human trafficking*. New York, NY: Infobase.
- Druckman, D. (2005). *Doing research: Methods of inquiry for conflict analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Freeze, C., & Bailey, I. (2011, November 9). A female RCMP officer's damning indictment of her employer. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved July 20, 2018, from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/a-female-rcmp-officers-damning-indictment-of-her-employer/article4181592/>
- Glaser, B. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence vs. forcing*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Hankivsky, O. (2011). *Health inequities in Canada: Intersectional frameworks and practices*. Vancouver, Canada: University of British Columbia Press.
- Hunting, G. (2014, April). *Intersectionality-informed qualitative research: A primer*. Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.
- Jootun, D., McGhee, G., & Marland, G. R. (2009). Reflexivity: Promoting rigour in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard*, 23, 42-46.
- Jorm, A. F., Kelly, C. M., & Morgan, A. J. (2007). Participant distress in psychiatric research: A systematic review. *Psychological Medicine*, 37, 917-926.

- Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier, R., & Pessach, L. (2009). Power relations in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(2), 279-289.
- Lal, J. (1999). Situating locations: The politics of self, identity, and 'other' in living and writing the text. In S. Hesse-Biber, C. Gilmartin, & R. Lydenberg (Eds.), *Feminist approaches to theory and methodology: An interdisciplinary reader* (pp. 100-137). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Legerski, J. P., & Bunnell, S. L. (2010). The risks, benefits and ethics of trauma focused research participation. *Ethics & Behavior, 20*(6), 429-442.
- Mac Ginty, R., & Williams, A. (2009). *Conflict and development*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- MacQueen, K. (2011, November 18). The RCMP: A royal Canadian disgrace. *Maclean's*. Retrieved July 20, 2018, from <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/a-royal-canadian-disgrace/>
- McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs, 30*(3), 1771-1800.
- McIntyre, S. (2012, November). *Buyer beware: A study into the demand side of the sexual exploitation industry*. Alberta, Canada: The Hindsight Group. Retrieved July 20, 2018, from [http://www.hindsightgroup.com/Resources/Documents/Final%20Report%20Nov%2015%20-%20FINAL%20\(with%20TC\).pdf](http://www.hindsightgroup.com/Resources/Documents/Final%20Report%20Nov%2015%20-%20FINAL%20(with%20TC).pdf)
- Morris, J. S. (2009). The truth about interviewing elites. *Politics, 29*(3), 209-217.
- Palys, T. S., & Atchison, C. (2008). *Research decisions: Quantitative and qualitative perspectives*. Toronto, Canada: Thomson Nelson.
- Patton, M. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.
- Phillips, L. (1996). Difference, indifference and making a difference: Reflexivity in the time of cholera. In S. Cole & L. Phillips (Eds.), *Ethnographic feminisms: Essays in anthropology* (pp. 22-36). Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press.
- Ripsman, N. & J. Blanchard. (2003). Qualitative research on economic interdependence and conflict: Overcoming methodological hurdles. In E. D. Mansfield & B. Pollins (Eds.), *Economic interdependence and international conflict* (pp. 310-323). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Rogers, J., & Kelly, U. A. (2011). Feminist intersectionality: Bringing social justice to health disparities research. *Nursing Ethics, 18*(3), 397-407.
- Runeson B. & J. Beskow. (1991). Reactions of survivors of suicide victims to interviews. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 83*, 169-173.

- Senehi, J. (2009). Building peace: Storytelling to transform conflicts constructively. In D. J. D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste, & J. Senehi (Eds.), *Handbook of conflict analysis and resolution* (pp. 201-215). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Smith, J. (2014, February). *The tipping point: Tackling the demand for prostituted/trafficked women and youth*. Retrieved July 16, 2018, from <http://freethem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/The-Tipping-Point-MP-Joy-Smith-Full-Report-FEB-12-2014.pdf>
- Tickner, A. J. (2006). On the frontlines or sidelines of knowledge and power? Feminist practices of responsible scholarship. *International Studies Review*, 8(3), 383-395.
- Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 11(4), 522-537.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Halifax, Canada: Fernwood.
- Wiseman, J. (1970). *Stations of the lost: The treatment of Skid Row alcoholics*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Yuen, W., Wong, W., Holroyd, E., & Tang, C. (2014). Resilience in work-related stress among female sex workers in Hong Kong. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24(9), 1232-1241.

---

Received 11 July 2018 | Accepted 25 July 2018 | Published 30 July 2018

Copyright © 2018 *Journal of Research Practice* and the author