

2024 Conference to Combat Human Trafficking

AGENDA

July 23, 2024

8:00 am Registration

BTI Institute

8:30 am *Welcome*

Leslie Etheridge

Director
Center for Safe and Secure Schools
Harris County Department of Education

8:50 am *Introductions and Conference Overview*

Kevin Clement

Executive Director, Strategic Partnerships
Borders, Trade, and Immigration Institute

9:00 am *Situation Update: Human Trafficking at the U.S. Southern Border*

Synopsis: *The speaker provides an update of the current situation at the U.S. southern border, to include an overview of the work of the Texas Department of Public Safety, statistics on illicit crossings and activity. The public safety implications, and what Texas law enforcement officers encounter in relation to human trafficking networks (including sex trafficking), labor trafficking, and trafficking of minors.*

Presenter:

Lieutenant Christopher Olivarez

Texas Department of Public Safety
Christopher.Olivarez@dps.texas.gov

9:30 am Break

10:00 am ***Breaking Chains: Unveiling the Reality of Forced Child Marriage***

Synopsis: *Child marriage, or marriage before age 18, was legal in all 50 U.S. states, as of 2017. Delaware and New Jersey in 2018 became the first two states to end this human rights abuse, followed by American Samoa (2018), the U.S. Virgin Islands, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota (2020), Rhode Island and New York (2021), Massachusetts (2022) Vermont, Connecticut, and Michigan (2023), and Washington (2024).*

Yet, child marriage remains legal in 39 states and is happening in the U.S. at an alarming rate. Nearly 300,000 children as young as 10 were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018 – mostly girls wed to adult men. This presentation will examine the prevalence and the current state of forced child marriage; explain its root causes; introduce indicators of forced child marriage; explain the development of anti-forced-marriage work and a multidisciplinary solution for women and girls to protect them from various forms of violence; discuss tangible actions to take to prevent child marriage and respond to it; and discuss what organizations working with adolescent girls need to dismantle root causes.

Presenter:

Eileen Dong

UN Ambassador, Global Goals

Executive Director, Hope Pyx Global

HopePyxGlobal@gmail.com | www.HopePyxGlobal.org | www.EileenDong.com

11:00 am ***SMU Human Trafficking Data Research (HTDR) Project: Make Human Trafficking Data Work***

Synopsis: *The mission of the SMU Human Trafficking Data Research (HTDR) Project is to Make Human Trafficking Data Work. HTDR facilitates collaborative efforts to enhance human trafficking data efficacy to broaden collective knowledge and utilization. HTDR's data warehouse provides collaborators a place to securely store, clean, enhance, analyze, and disseminate their human trafficking data through custom web dashboards and reports. Each dashboard or report provides secure, credentialed access to overlapping human trafficking datasets for vetted key stakeholders, such as law enforcement, prosecutors, researchers, service providers, and policymakers.*

Presenter:

Mateo Langston Smith

Research Technology Developer

Southern Methodist University

MLangstonSmith@mail.smu.edu

11:30 am **Lunch**

1:00 pm: *T Visas for Victims of Trafficking: Trends and Policy Developments*

Synopsis: *A presentation providing the latest statistical data on T visas showing a steady increase in applications and lengthening processing times, and the reasons for these trends. The presentation will also include an update on policy developments at the federal and state level and explain the implications for the victims seeking this form of relief and for law enforcement agencies and others involved in the process of certifying victim applications.*

Presenter:

Jessica M. Vaughan

Director of Policy Studies
Center for Immigration Studies
@JessicaV_CIS | 774.291.9005

2:00 pm *Disinformation & Misinformation Affects Professionals Combating Human Trafficking*

Synopsis: *The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer revealed a loss of trust in societal institutions, with individuals deciding whether to trust individuals like neighbors, teachers, or coworkers. Disinformation, defined as deliberately misleading or biased information, and misinformation as false information spread without intent, can alter public perceptions of topics like human trafficking. The media serves as a platform for the dissemination of news and events, influencing journalists, lawmakers, bloggers, and everyday citizens. False information about human trafficking is often disseminated, with some media, such as television series and movies, not providing a realistic portrayal of the issue. The agenda-setting theory, which includes false entertainment-related portrayals of human trafficking, also includes misinformation and disinformation. The media's ability to mold public perceptions of the world and provide a lens through which it is seen can lead to misinterpretations of human trafficking.*

Presenter:

Veronica L. Challenger

Doctoral Candidate, New Jersey City University
vchallenger@njcu.edu | (334) 614-6747

3:00 pm Break

3:30 pm *The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Anti-Trafficking Efforts*

Synopsis: *In recent years, there has been a surge of research interest in using big data, machine learning (ML), and artificial intelligence (AI) in anti-trafficking efforts. Data science techniques, with the power of data and computational analysis, can potentially assist anti-trafficking agencies in investigation, prosecution, and victim identification. Based on these theoretical advancements, hundreds of technological interventions have been designed and deployed to combat human trafficking.*

However, little consideration has been given to the societal and ethical challenges of those technology-based anti-trafficking tools despite their potential risks and harms, such as bias in datasets, privacy risks, surveillance of other at-risk groups, and issues concerning potential misuse. This research attempts to conduct an overview of the application of AI in anti-trafficking tools and analyze ethical challenges arising from the design, development, and deployment of this technology based on ethical AI and rights-based frameworks.

Presenter:

Thao Do, Doctoral Student
University of Bath
Tnd32@bath.ac.uk

4:30 pm **Closing**

5:30 pm **Networking Reception** at the **J BAR M Texas BBQ**, 2201 Leeling Street, Houston, Texas

Day 2 – July 24, 2024

8:30 am ***Using Code Enforcement to Address Human Trafficking***

Synopsis: *Businesses such as massage parlors and bars have become a popular venue for human trafficking because it allows criminals to operate out in public by disguising their operation as a legitimate business. However, in their effort to disguise their criminal enterprise as a legitimate business, human traffickers have left themselves vulnerable to the problems that every legitimate business has to deal with: regulations. Attendees will learn how inspections of illicit business establishments and enforcement of the regulations can enhance traditional criminal investigations and aid victims of human trafficking.*

D.H. Domagas,
Senior Police Officer
Vice Division/Human Trafficking Unit/Differential Response Team
Houston Police Department
1200 Travis, Houston, TX 77002
Dennis.Domagas@HoustonPolice.org | 832-394-1341 (office)

9:30 am **Break**

10:00 am ***Overcoming Reluctance and Increasing Intelligence Gathering from Victims of Trafficking***

Synopsis: *Sex trafficking, especially of adolescents, is a pervasive yet highly under-reported problem in the United States. Some estimates place rates of occurrence in the hundreds of thousands at the same time the numbers of identified victims and prosecuted perpetrators are only in the hundreds. This form of exploitation often goes undetected,*

as victims rarely disclose on their own and instead may only be identified via suspicions from others or because they are suspects of criminal or delinquent activity. When questioned, trafficked adolescents may be particularly reluctant to provide details of their experiences. New collaborative efforts between researchers (e.g., legal and developmental psychologists) and practitioners (law enforcement investigators) offer an important opportunity to share knowledge and expertise regarding best practice questioning approaches that may enhance victims' complete and accurate reporting, thereby improving identification and evidence. In this session, we discuss our current collaborations, which have generated much-needed knowledge concerning approaches most effective for questioning suspected trafficking victims and for facilitating prosecution of traffickers.

Presenters:

Rachel Dianiska, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Psychological Science,
University of California Irvine, rdianisk@uci.edu

Jodi Quas, Ph.D., University of California Irvine

Allison Redlich, Ph.D., George Mason University

11:00 am ***Sex Trafficking in Latinx Immigrant Communities***

Synopsis: *An analysis of legal cases/criminal investigations into sex trafficking networks operating in Latino immigrant communities in rural and urban areas. The research analyzed the utilization of informal ethnic and community social networks in the running of a sex trafficking 'organizations' to recruit and victimize sex workers within their own immigrant communities, recruit 'drivers' for their loosely connected system of brothels, and provide services. The organizations studied operated predominately within a biological family (similar to traditional organized crime syndicates) or sets of romantic relationships. By also engaging with immigrant smuggling systems and recently arrived immigrants' vulnerabilities and desire to use informal ethnic social networks for connections and opportunity, they are able to profit from other immigrants' sex work. Through analysis of publicly available court documents, social network analysis can examine relationships between actors, the structure and density of the group, and membership changes.*

Presenter:

Lauren Copley Sabon, Ph.D., Teaching Associate Professor
Director of Online Education | Department of Sociology and Criminology
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701
copley@uark.edu | Office: 479-575-5560

12:00 pm **Lunch**

12:30 pm **Movie Screening: “City of Dreams”**

Synopsis: *Inspired by a true story, “City of Dreams” chronicles the journey of a Mexican boy whose dreams of becoming a soccer star are shattered when he's smuggled across the border and sold to a sweatshop in downtown Los Angeles. 2024 American-Mexican drama thriller film written and directed by Mohit Ramchandani, and stars Ari Lopez, Renata Vaca, Alfredo Castro, Paulina Gaitán, Jason Patric, and Diego Calva. “City of Dreams” is scheduled to be released in the United States by Roadside Attractions on August 30, 2024.*

2:30 pm **Break**

3:00 pm **Update: The Center of Research Excellence to Counter Human Trafficking**

Synopsis: *On December 12, 2023, the Borders, Trade, and Immigration Institute was named as a Center of Excellence to Counter Human Trafficking. The title was changed from “Center of Excellence” to a “Center of Research Excellence to Counter Human Trafficking” after much discussion within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Center has aligned its operations to DHS Office of University Programs guidance to Centers of Excellence. This update provides the new Center’s mission, vision, strategy and objectives to date in fostering research, analysis, educational resources and technology solutions in support of law enforcement and victim-oriented service organizations. Research and organizational efforts continue, absent funding.*

Presenter:

Kevin Clement

Executive Director, Strategic Partnerships
Borders, Trade, and Immigration Institute
KClement@uh.edu | 512.626.5413

4:00 pm **Combating Human Trafficking: Future Research Needs**

Synopsis: *The closing session is an open discussion between law enforcement operators, NGO representatives, and prospective researchers on technology and research needs that would assist operators in combating human trafficking.*

Facilitator:

Hady Salloum

Director of Research
Borders, Trade, and Immigration Institute
HSalloum@central.uh.edu | 201.859.5289

5:00 pm **Closing**