



# Human Trafficking in the Contemporary Setting: from the Lens of Concerned Law Enforcers

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**Abstract:** Human trafficking is the most pernicious form of abuse and a multi-billion dollar criminal industry in modern times. This phenomenological study aims to document the lived experiences of law enforcers in Central Visayas who are at the frontline in the fight against modern day slavery. The researcher employed in-depth interview and focus group discussion to obtain the necessary data from 17 investigators from various law enforcement agencies, units and stations. In terms of experiences of law enforcers, the themes that emerged were encountering various forms of human trafficking, confronted with various modi operandi to lure victims, alliance with various government agencies, dealing with uncooperative victim and lack of material resources and support. They have also shared the challenges they encountered such as tedious and harried preparation for case filing, interventions, threat, harassment and pressures and lack of material resources and support. Nonetheless, law enforcement officers remained stable amidst pressure and strictly adhered with the rule of law. In terms of insights shared by the participants, the themes were awareness and advocacy is the key to mitigation, public should be astute and discerning in job recruitment, victims are vulnerable because of ignorance and poverty, and law enforcers need to be equipped to handle trafficking cases. The study implies that human trafficking is a multi-faceted problem that needs cooperation among various stakeholders in the society.

**Index Terms** - human trafficking, law enforcement officers, forms of human trafficking, modi operandi

## I. INTRODUCTION

Trafficking in person is one of the most pernicious forms of abuse that people inflict on others in the modern era (Bumgarner, 2015). It is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that denies freedom to 20.9 million people around the world (International Labor Organization, 2012). Based on the 2018 Global Slavery Index, there are 40.3 million people living in modern day slavery in every corner of the world, yet it is seemingly invisible to most people (Work Free Foundation, 2018).

In the study of Kranrattanasuit (2013), trafficking in person in the Association of Southeast Asia Nation (ASEAN) region is a serious crime that affects human rights, dignity, and integrity and has remained beyond control. This is brought about by incoherence of laws among member countries and dysfunctional counter-trafficking in person mechanisms among various local police agencies. In the 2018 Trafficking in Person Report, the Philippine Government failed to vigorously investigate and prosecute officials allegedly involved in trafficking in person (US Department of State, 2018).

The Philippines is considered as an origin of victims of trafficking, according to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Person. According to 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report, victims of human trafficking in the Philippines are sent to 37 countries across five continents (Orozco, 2014). Central Visayas is one of the most affected by this global problem of human trafficking. Region 7 or Central Visayas is third (3<sup>rd</sup>) in the number of cases filed for trafficking in persons. According to Regional State Prosecutor Fernando Gubalane, from 2003 to 2017, there were 357 cases filed in Central Visayas, majority from Cebu Province, which resulted to 42 convictions and 25 dismissal of cases (Antojado, 2018). The National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM) confirmed that there are a notable number of victims of human trafficking from Cebu City and it is also used as exit point (Leones & Caparas, 2003).

Most of the research about trafficking in person focus on the victims who get assistance in shelters. However, this may provide inaccurate data on human trafficking, because not all victims receive assistance from the state of origin and victims of trafficking do not want to be identified and they are reluctant to cooperate in the study and to tell their tale (Tyldum, 2010). Criminological knowledge on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in person remains scarce (Herz, 2018). There is less research about trafficking in person from the eyes of law enforcers. Research data about the modus operandi of the traffickers, the investigative technique employed by investigators and challenges encountered by law enforcers in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in person cases lacked evidence basis because so little high-quality research has been done on the topic (Weitzer, 2014).

May (2017), in her qualitative study on the lack of training on human trafficking among law enforcement officers in Tampa Bay Region revealed the following themes: inconsistent knowledge on human trafficking among law enforcers on human trafficking; law enforcers lack understanding on human trafficking; dearth on formalized training on trafficking in person; insufficient training for patrol officers who are usually first responders in human trafficking cases; no participation of the human trafficking task force; and the lack of cooperation among various law enforcement agencies in the fight against human trafficking.

This research therefore aims to fill the research gap because law enforcers fighting trafficking in person are not much given importance. There is a need to document the modus operandi of traffickers, the investigative techniques and problems encountered by law enforcers in the fight of human trafficking, to lessen this phenomenon, which has been the scourge of humanity since olden times, but has now adapted to the digital age. This phenomenological study aims to document the stories and verbalizations of the lived experiences of law enforcement investigators who have conducted police operations against trafficking in persons in Central Visayas. This study also envisions to document the different forms of trafficking in person and the mode of operation (modus operandi) of traffickers and to account the experiences of law enforcers in the detection and investigation of human trafficking.

Moreover, the study intends to present the challenges encountered by law enforcers in the detection, investigation and prosecution of human traffickers and how they cope with these. This is also to articulate the untold stories and experiences of law enforcers while conducting investigative work such as political pressure, budgetary constraints and uncooperative victims. With these experiences, law enforcers can also share their insights on the loopholes of the local statutes, operational lapses and the significant role of other government agencies and the community in general in the fight against this modern day tyranny. The study could be the basis for the formulation of a comprehensive manual in the detection and investigation of trafficking in persons and revising the laws to address its loopholes.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative approach through the phenomenological technique. This qualitative type of research is concerned with the study of human experiences of events or phenomena from the actual happenings in the real world. It involves a lengthy discussion on the experiences, thoughts and insights of the key informants (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007). The use of bracketing was applied to minimize assumptions and to prevent potential harmful effects of presumptions that may have affected the research process, thereby increasing the precision of the research study. The researcher's pre-existing beliefs on the study or prior knowledge and experiences were put aside to fully capture the experiences being told by the participants with an open mind (Creswell, 2009; Taylor & Francis, 2012; Tufford & Newman, 2010). To achieve this, I was very objective in my analysis of the data obtained from the informants by sticking to the verbatim transcripts of the informants' responses, taken down notes and memos scribed in field notes to get rid of any personal biases or judgment.

The participants in this study were 17 law enforcement officers from Central Visayas. These were police officers assigned in police stations, or operatives of Criminal Detection and Investigation Group (CIDG) Region 7 and members of National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) of Central Visayas. Only those law enforcers who have conducted police operations against trafficking in person were the key informants in the study. The data was collected through recorded in-depth-interviews (IDI), focus group discussions (FGD) and note-taking. Before the actual interview and focus group discussion, the questionnaire was validated and ethical consideration was reviewed by the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) and permission was asked from the concerned school officials.

After this, a letter was sent to the Regional Directors of Philippine National Police Regional Office 7 (PRO7), Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to look into the records of their respective offices to identify those law enforcement officers who have conducted police operations against trafficking in person and to ask permission for the conduct of the interview and focus group discussion. After identifying the possible key informants, a letter was sent to the concerned law enforcement officers. The letter contained the purpose of the study, their extent of participation and asked the consent of their participation of the study. During the focus group discussion (FGD), the researcher acted as moderator and employ the following steps: introduction, rapport building, in-depth discussion and closure.

The mass data collected were summarized and presented in a way that communicated its most important features (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2009). Data were analyzed using a method which included data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2007). With data reduction, I employed the expertise of a professional data analyst for data analysis. She helped me in managing and handling the data, particularly with the sorting and organizing large volumes of qualitative data, retrieving and locating words and phrases. The protocol of this study was submitted to University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee for ethical review and consideration. Certification of approval was issued allowing the researcher to conduct the study.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from this study were guided by the research objectives as the bases in developing specific questions asked in the in-depth interview and focused group discussion. The data is presented through a thematic analysis.

**Table 1**

*Major Themes and Core Ideas on Experiences of Law Enforcement Officers with Regard to Human Trafficking*

Major Themes	Core Ideas
<b>Encountering Various Trafficking Acts and Exploitative Purposes</b>	<p>Forced labor; recruited elsewhere; convened in a certain place</p> <p>Human trafficking through illegal job recruitment</p> <p>Voyeurism or acts of lasciviousness involving children</p> <p>Violation of anti-pornography law; cybersex</p> <p>Most rampant trafficking: Online Sexual Exploitation of Children</p> <p>Sexual exploitation and trafficking of young girls by foreigners</p> <p>In OSEC, victims pose naked; paying clients watch them online</p> <p>Youngest case - a 3 month old infant still bringing feeding bottle</p> <p>15 minors rescued in trafficking for prostitution; pimped by a foreign national</p> <p>Sex tourism, young Filipina hired as escort service to foreigners</p> <p>Children, infants brought into cyber pornography by own mother</p>
<b>Being Confronted with Various Means to Lure Victims</b>	<p>Promise of huge salaries and benefits; good paying decent jobs</p> <p>Recruited; given cellphone, given money ending in debt bondage</p> <p>Paid money in exchange for exposing child's private parts</p> <p>Young girls offered decent job in the city but ending up as sex slaves</p> <p>Given fake training certificates purportedly from another country</p> <p>Spa, massage parlors offer extra services (sex); take out sex</p> <p>Human traffickers go to slum or rural areas; entice parents with money</p> <p>Offered work; promised opportunity of employment and education</p> <p>Traffickers make victim pretend as tourist to be able to go out of the country</p> <p>Offered money in exchange for nude pictures or cybersex</p> <p>Victim provided fake IDs/certificates, made to blend with real tourists</p> <p>Modus is an evolving process; once detected, perpetrators modify it</p>
<b>Coordination with Various Government Agencies and Foreign Counterparts</b>	<p>Collaboration with agencies like Visayan Forum, DSWD, DOLE,</p> <p>Work as a team; coordinating with DSWD, DOLE, NGO</p> <p>Sharing of intelligence reports with foreign counterparts</p> <p>Boundaries to boundaries intelligence sharing is done</p> <p>Networking collaboration is not only local or national but global</p> <p>If cases involves children, it is turned over to WCPD and WCPC.</p> <p>Role is to apprehend; the rest is done by other agencies i.e. WCPC</p> <p>Coordinate with partner agencies DSWD, IACAT, etc.</p> <p>Coordinate with intelligence operatives in the barangay</p> <p>Turn over victims to shelter, c/o DSWD, Carretas,</p>
<b>Dealing with Uncooperative Victim and Unwilling Witness</b>	<p>Trafficked persons difficult to convince to file a case</p> <p>When victim withdraws from case; especially if recruiter is a relative</p> <p>Desistance or withdrawal from the case by the victims</p> <p>Sometimes victims have a change of heart; changes their statements</p> <p>Trafficked victims get traumatized and refuse to cooperate</p> <p>Most basic challenge is the unwilling victim</p> <p>Victims look at enforcers as villains; hindrance to dream to go abroad</p> <p>Enforcers are not heroes or saviors for them but bad guys</p> <p>For parents/guardians, enforcers are the bad guys</p> <p>Lack of support and cooperation from guardians</p>
<b>Proactive Responses of Law Enforcers</b>	<p>Being more proactive in the fight against human trafficking</p> <p>Not simply waiting for report; doing surveillance in possible places</p> <p>Act immediately on reports received from foreign counterparts</p> <p>Do surveillance and test-buys; where personnel act as customer</p> <p>Conduct surveillance and undercover operations</p> <p>Use police assets or informants</p> <p>Checking documents and permits of recruiters and establishments</p> <p>Alertness in detecting red flags in possible victims</p>

All the participants have narrated the forms of human trafficking that they have investigated. The most prevalent of which were forced labor, cyberpornography, online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), prostitution and sex tourism. Elsa, expresses her anger especially to foreigner who takes advantage of the vulnerability of the minors who lured into cyber pornography. In her own words she expressed this:

*Last March 2014, I encountered a human trafficking case wherein we were able to rescue 15 minors inside a hotel, one of them is CICL the pimp of the foreign national, and then we were able to arrest also the perpetrator who is an Australian national... The main purpose was cyber pornography were the foreigner will take nude photos of the children and trade it online. (IDI-I\_Q1.1)*

According to Paul, a Police Colonel, the most common form of trafficking is OSEC or Online Sexual Exploitation of Children wherein victims pose naked in camera while the clients who paid for them are watching (IDI-E\_Q1.1). This is confirmed by Ted (pseudonym) who said:

*Today, our office investigates only OSEC or Online Sexual Exploitation Children because it is rampant in Visayas especially in Cebu Island. In OSEC, the child is groomed or prepared for explicit sexual activities. Actually, we have rescued as young as 3 months old. This type of trafficking usually happens inside the house. (IDI-D\_Q1.1.)*

The trend in human trafficking is evolving. That is why law enforcers are being confronted with various modi operandi. Among the notable modi operandi were too good to be true promise, legitimate business front and blending as tourist. Paul has succinctly said:

*Ah well, based on our experience, some recruiters go to the province, offered them decent job, a good pay, when they come with the recruiters, they end up in bars as guest relation officers or GRO. (IDI-E\_Q1.2.)*

Jay described how poverty has taken advantaged by the human traffickers in order to lure the minor victims and their parents. He revealed:

*Based on my experience, it is usually the parents or acquaintances who will drag the minor victim to cybersex. According to the parents, the main reason why they allowed their minor child engaged in cybersex is because of poverty and someone offered them money so they immediately grabbed the opportunity. Anyway, there is no personal contact because the child will only pose in the computer. There is also another modus operandi whereas somebody will offer big amount of money in exchange for nude photos or cybersex. Offering a big amount of money is a common modus operandi of human trafficker. (IDI-J\_Q1.2.)*

Ronnie on the other hand detailed how human traffickers pose as a legitimate business enterprise. In his own words:

*The modus of this human trafficker as we monitored them is that some of those are engaging in a legitimate business such as spa and massage business but behind those legitimate businesses they are engaged in human trafficking in the form of prostitution. (IDI-G\_Q1.1.)*

Law enforcers are always confronted with uncooperative victims and unwilling witness. Some of the victims execute affidavit of desistance or change their statement. In some instance, law enforcers are regarded as villains or not a hero because they are hindrances in their dream of working abroad and earn for their family. Jade is very frustrated with uncooperative victims. She lamented:

*First and foremost victim and witness cooperation is a big problem. In trafficking in person cases, the victim and witness must submit their selves to us and cooperate in order to pursue the case. Most of the time victims do not cooperate. (IDI-F\_Q2.1.)*

Table 2

## Major Themes and Core Ideas on How Law Enforcers Deal with the Challenges of Human Trafficking

Major Themes	Core Ideas
<b>Tedious and Harried Preparation for Case Filing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process of gathering evidence and locating victims is tiresome</li> <li>Limited time for law enforcers to file the case</li> <li>Preparation of voluminous documents very time-consuming</li> <li>Have to extend work up to midnight or wee hours of the morning</li> <li>Need to catch up with the cut-off of the prosecutors at 12 noon</li> <li>Some docs take time to be obtained ie forensic exam results, ECG</li> <li>Reglementary period to file the case too short; 36 hours not enough</li> <li>Detecting/preserving digital evidence is a problem</li> <li>Sometimes digital evidences not admissible in court</li> </ul>
<b>Interventions, Threats, Harassment and Pressures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Politicians would get in the way; intervene in the process</li> <li>Some enforcers get threats or bribes to intercept the filing of case</li> <li>Harassment from defense lawyers is also a challenge</li> <li>Enforcers are threatened with lawsuits by defense lawyers</li> <li>Law enforcers prone to pressures from traffickers with connections</li> <li>Sometimes pressure is political; when they have connection inside</li> <li>Media presence is intimidating, with their big cameras and all</li> <li>Offers are sometimes there to compromise the case; a big hassle</li> <li>Pressure comes also from the media, demanding updates</li> <li>High ranking officials sometimes exert pressure to expedite the case</li> </ul>
<b>Limited Resources and Technical Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need spy/hidden cameras, body cams, vest for protection</li> <li>High tech cell phone, high speed internet; strong signal, laptop, drone</li> <li>No holding center for minors; have to be turned over to partner agencies</li> <li>Limited manpower resources for a wide area of responsibility</li> <li>Limitation in funds for transportation, accommodation, etc</li> <li>Lack surveillance equipment, computers, printers, photocopiers</li> <li>Budgetary requirement needs to be augmented especially for IACAT</li> <li>Need training on detecting online human trafficking</li> <li>Not adept in handling cybercrime cases and electronic evidences</li> </ul>
<b>Strict Adherence to the Rule of the Law on Human Trafficking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Just comply with all the requirements in filing the cases</li> <li>Being familiar with the laws and guidelines</li> <li>Awareness of the law is important</li> <li>SOP should be strictly followed or else face lawsuits</li> <li>Have thorough knowledge of the elements of the case</li> <li>Observe protocols handling human trafficking cases</li> </ul>
<b>Stability Under Pressure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do media black-out so as not to hamper investigation</li> <li>Refuse to give interview while investigation is going on</li> <li>Just focus on the work; set aside pressures</li> <li>Strictly exercise authority; not be swayed by pressures</li> <li>Set aside feelings of pity and enforce the law</li> <li>Put away sympathy; discharge the law as it should be</li> <li>Stay unfazed by politician's interventions or distractions</li> <li>"Passing the buck" when case has been filed</li> </ul>

Preparing a case folder to file with the prosecutor is a tedious process. As lamented by some law enforcers, they have limited time to file the case, considering that they need to prepare voluminous documents. Moreover, other law enforcers perceive that the 36 hours of reglementary period of filing a case is not enough. That is why they need to extend their work up to midnight and even in the wee hours of the morning. Nick reiterated the need to have a longer period to file a case. In his own words:

*We need a longer period to file a case. The 36 hours reglementary period is not enough, it would be better if it will be changed to 72 hours because human trafficking cases involves voluminous documents and investigative time. But luckily we have surpassed this challenge but we need to improvise, for instance, if the cut-off of the prosecutor is four o'clock, we will submit what we have done so far. In my experience, I just submitted the documents have it received by the prosecutor's office even if the actual inquest will happen the following day. (IDI-H\_Q.3.2.)*

On the other hand, Jay shared his problem in investigating cybercrimes and preserving digital evidence. He said: *Our main challenge is the technology because we are not capable to investigate in the internet and to preserve evidence. Cybercrime is new to us. So, if someone will report, that's the time when we investigate the matter. (IDI-J\_Q2.1.)*

Law enforcement officers, in an attempt to curb this multi-million transnational crimes also experienced intervention, threats, harassment and pressure. These pressure comes from politicians, defense lawyers, media and even from high ranking officers. Nick also experience being called up by a certain person and even threatened for a harassment suit.

*Actually I have experienced a lot of pressure. This is so because we do not know whom traffickers are connected with, and at some point someone will just call you for a particular case and even threaten to file a harassment suit. That is one of the pressure we experience in handling human trafficking cases. This is very common in our system because we are just investigator and if we will follow the hierarchy of the organization someone is on top of us and they will contact us but we can still manage the situation. (IDI-H\_Q.2.3.)*

The fight against human trafficking in the Philippine is suffering a setback due to lack of material resources and support to law enforcement agencies in the frontline in this paramount battle. Among the law enforcement officers perceived hindrances are lack of logistical equipment such as spy camera, computer with high internet connection and even printer, limited manpower resources and not adept in handling cybercrime cases and electronic evidence. Anna and Rex, who both participated in the focus group discussion, have shared that:

*We need computer with fast internet connection, surveillance equipment such as night vision camera and body camera. (FGD-4 and FGD 6\_Q.2.1.1.)*

Jane shared how the court questioned the competency of the electronic evidence she submitted due to violation of protocol handling.

*As I have said, we have a problem in proper handling of electronic evidence, it was exposed (contaminated). Moreover, we just open the electronic evidence without adequate knowledge in the protocol. So, we have a case where we carelessly open the electronic evidence and it was questioned in the court. (IDI-A\_Q.3.1.1)*

While Nick's course of action in every pressure he experienced is what he called "passing the buck". In his own words: *I employ the "passing the buck" method. If there is a job to be done, I will quickly and thoroughly file it with the court when the investigation is done. If someone will call, I will just say that it is beyond my control already because the case was already filed. That is my style "passing the buck". I will just advise them to talk to the fiscal or to the judge. On my part, I have done my job and I have politely declined their consideration and requests. (IDI-H\_Q.2.3.2)*



Table 3

Major Themes and Core Ideas on Insights that Law Enforcers Can Share to Society in General

Major Themes	Core Ideas
<b>Awareness and Advocacy is the Key to Mitigation of Human Trafficking</b>	<p>Lack of awareness is the culprit why people get trafficked</p> <p>Spread awareness through campaigns to avoid being victimized</p> <p>Distribute leaflets and fliers about trafficking to the public</p> <p>Include it in school curriculum for greater awareness</p> <p>Hold symposium in schools on trafficking &amp; online sexual exploitation</p> <p>Disseminate provisions of RA 9208 and 10364 to the youth</p> <p>Give posters to internet cafes regarding prohibitions</p> <p>Educate public on RA9208 Anti Human Trafficking in Persons Act</p> <p>There should be more information drive about human trafficking</p> <p>Law in place; almost perfect; what is lacking is public awareness</p>
<b>Public Should be Astute and Discerning in Terms of Job Recruitment</b>	<p>If the promise of work and salary is too good to be true, be wary.</p> <p>Always check the legitimacy of the agency with DOLE, POEA,</p> <p>If there is an iota of doubt, investigate, verify, check</p> <p>Be mindful of job offerings in the internet; check legitimacy</p> <p>Report all cases of recruitment to the barangay, or police</p> <p>If recruiters promise high salaries, check w/ OWWA, POEA, DOLE</p> <p>Do not be too trusting of recruiters, do not talk to strangers</p> <p>People should get to know recruiter; do not be too trusting</p>
<b>Victims are Vulnerable Because of Ignorance and Poverty</b>	<p>Victims are from rural, remote areas, poor and unschooled</p> <p>Usually victims come from squatters' area; desperate for money</p> <p>Human trafficking victims are women, children; out of school youth</p> <p>Cyberpornography tolerated by parents for monetary consideration</p> <p>Root cause of trafficking is poverty and need for employment</p> <p>Most victims from provinces having difficulty with day-to-day living</p> <p>Mothers expose own kids to cybersex in exchange for money</p> <p>Common victims:female, bread winners, single moms desperate for work</p>
<b>Law Enforcers Need to be Well-equipped to Handle Trafficking Cases</b>	<p>Enforcers need training on protocol handling of electronic evidence</p> <p>The police should undergo training in handling cyber crimes</p> <p>Police force needs complete equipment/materials; logistic support</p> <p>Enforcers need to take Basic Trafficking in Persons Course (BTPC)</p> <p>Govt should allocate funds in the campaign against trafficking</p> <p>Limited personnel and budget hamper penetration in all areas</p> <p>Law enforcers need digital forensic investigation training</p> <p>Gender sensitivity training needed to handle women cases well</p>

Jay pointed out the lack of awareness of the people on trafficking in person. He even suggested to include in the high school and college curriculum the topic on human trafficking. He vividly said:

*The law is in place; in fact, it is almost perfect, the problem lies in the awareness of the people. If feasible, the topic on human trafficking in person should be included in high school and college curriculum. We badly need it. (IDI-J\_Q.3.2.1)*

Ronnie does not want only to include the topic human trafficking in the curriculum but also to educate the parents. He narrated:

*I think there is a need to include in the curriculum the topic on trafficking in person in order to eliminate the student's vulnerability to become victim. At least they will know what will happen to them if they will become victim of trafficking in person. Moreover, there is a need to educate the parents through information drive to constantly remind the parents what are the effects to their children physically, mentally and emotionally if they will engage in cyber pornography. Usually, victims of trafficking are tolerated by their parents for monetary considerations.*

(IDI-G\_Q.3.2.1.)

Nick suggested to be vigilant on the red flags such as too good to be true promise or using of fake documents. If this will happen they need to verify the recruiter to government agencies. In his own words:

*People should be vigilant because human traffickers usually employ deceit and take advantage on the vulnerability of the person. They should be cautious with signs or red flags of trafficking in person such as a promise of too good to be true promise of work, using of fake documents or pretending to be a fiancée modus. Then if they are offered work, they should verify it with the proper government agency if they are licensed to recruit or to deploy OFWs abroad. (IDI-H\_Q.3.4.1.)*

Fe, lamented that the usual victims of human trafficking are minors who are being pimped by their own mother in online prostitution. She said

*Rampant in our area is online sexual exploitation of children and the victims are usually 6 years old and below. Then it was the mother who pimp them in exchange of money. They usually do their operation inside their house. They will install internet connection in their house. It was track down because the mother frequently claimed money in remittance center like in Palawan and Western Union, that was their modus operandi. (IDI-B\_Q.1.1.1.)*

Jane, asserted that law enforcement officers lack training in protocol handling of electronic evidence. In her own words

*As what I have said, we really need the training in protocol handling of electronic evidence. This is very important because we are already well-acquainted with the law because we have studied that but we lack the necessary knowledge on protocol of handling electronic evidence. There are times when our electronic evidence are being questioned in the court for mishandling of evidence. (IDI-A\_Q.3.1.1)*

Nick, with dismay in his voice narrated how lack of budget affected the operation of Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT). He said,

*We really need budgetary requirement. In an office or organization, it is very hard to operate if you lack budget. There are times that we encountered problem in the budget. For example, in IACAT, we have intelligence agents who are job order and contractual and their salary were delayed. I cannot blame them if they lack interest in the work because the operation of the task force is 24/7 and sometimes they don't have salary and so they have no means for their transportation and subsistence. (IDI-H\_Q.3.2.1.)*

## Discussion

Law enforcement officers are being confronted by various forms of human trafficking. Among these are forced labor, cybersex, online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), traditional, pornography and sex tourism. This is in consonance with the 2015 Trafficking in Person Report of the US Department of Justice which estimates that 10 million Filipino men, women and children who have migrated abroad were subsequently subjected to sex trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage and forced to work as factory workers in Middle East and in Europe. Among these, the most prevalent is online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). Sta. Ana and Revisa (2016) describe child sex trafficking as the sexual exploitation by an adult to a child which involves payment to the child or to third parties.

It is worthy to note that human traffickers employed *various means in order to lure the victims*. The most common are “too good to be true promise”, using legitimate business like massage spa as front, giving money ending to debt bondage, enticing child and parents of huge amount of money and using falsified documents. Former co-chairperson of Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) and DSWD Secretary Dinky Soliman lamented the worsening problem of human trafficking in the Philippines. She further revealed the common modus operandi of human traffickers which is enticing parents to allow their young daughters to leave the province and work in Manila as domestic helpers with promises of huge salaries but end up doing jobs other than what was promised. She further added the human traffickers also offer a high-paying jobs abroad and the use of fake visas, marriage certificates and other spurious travel documents to facilitate exit (Ronda, 2015).

Law enforcement officers in conducting human trafficking operations are unfortunately considered villains and not heroes. In trafficking in person cases, law enforcement officers are always *dealing with uncooperative victims and unwilling witnesses*. Trafficked victims are difficult to convince to file a case; they desisted or withdraw from a case, changes their statements, refuses to cooperate and look at the law enforcers as villains. In Germany, among the reasons of dismissal were difficulty in gathering evidence due to uncooperative victim-witness and the gaps and complexity of the human trafficking laws (Hertz, 2018). While others are reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement agencies for various reasons such as corrupt law enforcers, adverse experience with police authorities and manipulation by the trafficker to fear the police (Jordan, Patel, & Rap, 2013).

Among the challenges encountered by law enforcement officers is the *tedious and harried preparation of filing cases*. After conducting anti-trafficking in person operation, the job is not yet done. They need to prepare voluminous documents, affidavits and other evidence and submit it to the prosecutor within the 36 hours reglementary period. That is why law enforcers need to extend their work up to midnight and even in the wee hours of the morning in order the comply the cut-off period of prosecutors considering that there are pieces of evidence which are difficult to obtain such as forensic examination results and digital evidence. Law enforcement officers in the continued fight against the modern day slavery have also experienced *political interventions, threatened by the syndicate, harassed with counter lawsuits and pressure from higher ranking officers* and even from media.



Law enforcement officers lamented the on *limited resources and technical support*. Among the law enforcement concerns are lack of spy/hidden cameras, body vest/protection, computer with fast internet connection and printer, limited manpower resources, budgetary requirements in the operation and training in cybercrime cases and electronic evidence. It is worthy to note that based on the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report, there are more than 1,100 human trafficking cases still pending in court due to endemic inefficiencies. Some factors that contributed to this very low prosecution are the non-continuous trials, limited resources, heavy workload among law enforcers, prosecutions and judges and corruption (US Department of State, 2018).

Despite the challenges and pressures faced by law enforcement officers they remain steadfast to *strictly adhere to the rule of law*, to observe the protocol and standard operating procedure and to comply with all the requirements in filing cases. One of the coping mechanisms employed by the law enforcers in meeting challenges is *stability under pressure*. Law enforcement officers usually do media black-out, strictly exercise their authority, remain focused on their work, put away sympathy and feelings of pity and employ “passing the buck”.

Law enforcers’ vigorous efforts remains futile without the support of the public. According to one of the participants, the lack of awareness is the culprit why people get trafficked. *Awareness and advocacy is the key to mitigate human trafficking cases* in the Philippines. The law enforcement officers specifically suggested the following in order to raise awareness on the public: distribution of leaflets, poster and fliers about trafficking in person to the public; inclusion the topic of human trafficking in school curriculum; conduct symposium in schools on trafficking and online sexual exploitation.

The *public should be astute and discerning in job recruitment*. They must be vigilant on the red flags or signs of trafficking in person cases and recruiters in their locality. Among these red flags are “too good to be true” promise of work and job offerings in the internet that promise high salaries. Moreover, the public should be discerning in dealing with recruiter. The public is also advised not to immediately trust to recruiters and always verify the legitimacy of the recruiter with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). The *victims of trafficking in person are vulnerable due to ignorance and poverty*. Furthermore, victims are usually women and children who live in squatters’ area, unschooled and desperately in need of money. Because of these, even mothers exposed their own kids to cybersex in exchange for money. Perpetrators take advantage of the fact that victims of human trafficking were in desperate need of money in order to escape poverty and the lack of perspective in their home countries (Herz, 2018).

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