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Perceptions of the Benefits and Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration: An Exploratory Factor Analysis Study

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Abstract: To effectively address human trafficking, it is increasingly recognized that anti-human trafficking efforts need to include a collaborative approach between agencies most likely to come into contact with human trafficking victims and offenders. While literature is available that discusses the benefits and barriers to such collaboration, there is limited empirical research on the topic. Surveying professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration in a Midwest state in the United States, this exploratory factor analysis study explores their perceptions of the benefits and barriers to such collaboration. Based on the results, professionals' perceived benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration, with capacity perceived as the underlying benefit and collaborative uncertainty, agency incongruence, an unfavorable collaborative environment, and inadequate problem framing perceived as the underlying barriers. These findings can inform anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative practice, leading to more successful collaborative outcomes. Future research should include a confirmatory factor analysis to validate the factor structure found in this study.

Keywords: perceptions; human trafficking; interagency collaboration



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1. Introduction

Human trafficking is considered modern day slavery [1]. The United States (U.S.) Department of State defines human trafficking as “the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion” [1] (p.5). Using global law enforcement data, the U.S. Department of State estimates that, in 2021, there were 90,354 human trafficking victims identified, 10,572 human trafficking prosecutions, and 5260 human trafficking convictions [1]. In 2000, the U.S. Congress enacted the “Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act” (TVPA), the first federal human trafficking legislation designed to prevent human trafficking, prosecute offenders, and protect victims [1]. Today, all U.S. states have human trafficking legislation [2].

To effectively address human trafficking, it is increasingly recognized that anti-human trafficking efforts need to include a collaborative approach between agencies most likely to come into contact with human trafficking victims and offenders [3–9]. While literature is available that discusses the benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration [3–6,10–13], there is limited empirical research on the topic. This exploratory factor analysis study seeks to fill this research gap. Surveying professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration in a Midwest state in the U.S., this study explores their perceptions of the benefits and barriers to such collaboration. Building understanding on this topic can help inform anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative practice, thus leading to more successful collaborative outcomes.

2. Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration

Interagency collaboration, defined as “mutually beneficial and well-defined relationships entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals” [14] (p.4), is stated to be essential to effectively prevent and control human trafficking [15]. There is growing consensus among researchers and stakeholders [16,17] that human trafficking identification, investigation, prosecution, and victim service provision necessitate collaboration between the criminal justice system, human/social services, victim service providers, and allied professionals¹ to achieve meaningful short- and long-term solutions to the crime [3–5,18–35]. It is suggested that there are many benefits to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration [13]. However, it is also acknowledged that barriers exist that challenge such collaboration, or prevent it altogether [12].

2.1. Benefits to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration

Anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration is stated to have many benefits. For example, anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration increases learning and understanding about the issue among professionals working to address the crime as they share their knowledge about human trafficking, their perspectives concerning its causes and best solutions, and their experiences responding to human trafficking situations. This increased learning and understanding produces a deeper awareness and appreciation of the complexity of human trafficking. It can also lead to the development and implementation of more comprehensive and integrated approaches to victim service provision. Furthermore, it can even result in cultural change in organizations traditionally considered uninformed about, or unresponsive to, the issue of human trafficking, such as law enforcement agencies [3–6,9,19,23,29,36–41].

Anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration also allows agencies engaged in anti-human trafficking efforts to pool their financial and human resources to share the often substantial monetary and labor costs associated with responding to such a complex social issue. Sharing such costs provides agencies with limited budgets and personnel access to greater resources to support their anti-human trafficking activities. It also increases agency scale of coverage so their anti-human trafficking actions can impact a larger population or geographic area. Furthermore, it improves the sustainability of their anti-human trafficking efforts over the long-term. Sharing such costs can also improve the morale of individuals working to combat human trafficking because they have the financial and human resource backing necessary to carry out their work [9,40,42].

In addition, anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration allows agencies engaged in anti-human trafficking efforts to establish a common mission for responding to human trafficking, set long-term goals to achieve the mission, and identify measurable objectives to actualize the goals [33,40]. This common mission and set of goals and objectives can aid in the establishment of a formalized infrastructure and strategic framework that can help mitigate the challenges of integrating the anti-human trafficking activities of multiple and varied agency types [33,40]. A formalized infrastructure and strategic framework can not only help build agency consensus concerning how to respond to human trafficking and facilitate positive and effective communication during the implementation of anti-human trafficking activities, but can also improve the coordination of agencies’ anti-human trafficking activities making such efforts more efficient and productive [3–6,18,43]. This can improve the overall outcomes of anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative efforts with results that are more likely to achieve the TVPA’s three-pronged goal of preventing human trafficking, prosecuting offenders, and protecting victims [9].

Finally, successful anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative partnerships can lead to the establishment of positive and productive interagency relationships, increase levels of trust between agencies, and heighten agency perception that such interagency collaboration is worth the effort. This can ultimately encourage continued and future collaborative exchanges. Successful anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative case outcomes can also increase anti-human trafficking workers’ confidence in their ability

and capacity to respond effectively to the crime and improve public perceptions of the legitimacy of the agencies' collaborative actions [9,18,19,43,44].

2.2. Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration

While anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration has many benefits that can result in improved human trafficking case outcomes, trying to merge multiple diverse agencies and coordinate their activities around anti-human trafficking efforts also poses several challenges [9,11–13,19,40,45,46]. First, anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration presents basic logistical hurdles when agencies lack financial and human resources, as well as time, to devote to such collaboration and do not possess autonomy from their parent agency to make decisions about their collaborative involvement. Additional barriers occur when professionals do not have broader agency or community support for their collaborative efforts and lack meaningful incentives to engage in such collaborative exchanges [9,11–13,19,40,42,45–47].

Difficulty can also arise because agencies engaged in anti-human trafficking efforts (again, including but not limited to the criminal justice system, human/social services, victim service providers, and allied professionals) are often fundamentally different with varying ideological frameworks, missions, and objectives. They can also have different cultures and values, professional language, policies, protocols and procedures, and perspectives on procedural justice [3–6,9,18,19,40,43,45–48].

In addition, agencies can have dissimilar levels of knowledge about human trafficking and can view the problem of human trafficking from a somewhat different perspective. In addition, they might not share the same ideas concerning the most appropriate response to the crime, or the best way to engage in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration [5,6,9,18,19,40,43,45,46,48]. Furthermore, power issues, mistrust, and territorialism over mission, resources, or jurisdiction can inhibit successful collaboration. A lack of effective leadership and the absence of key stakeholders in the planning and implementation stage of anti-human trafficking efforts can produce the same result [3,4,9,16,45,49].

For those agencies that do collaborate, factors related to the collaborative process itself can further challenge the collaborative exchange. These factors include an agency's lack of clarity concerning their role and responsibilities during the collaboration, differing expectations for collaborative engagement, and the absence of clearly defined outcomes for the collaboration. These factors can also include a lack of team building and conflict resolution strategies to build and sustain positive interagency collaborative relationships, as well as a lack of monitoring and evaluation of the collaborative exchange to determine whether the collaborative is progressing as planned and producing the desired outcomes [9,10,19,40,45,46].

Finally, the temporary nature of many anti-human trafficking collaborative groups, characterized as "*time-bound and task-specific*" [43] (p. 91) can impede the establishment of a group norm and culture that is necessary to work together across agency boundaries as a part of a collaborative team [9,40,43].

Taken together, agencies' anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative experiences and outcomes can influence whether they view collaborative participation as worth the effort, impacting the likelihood of further or new collaborative exchanges. This makes it especially important to examine the perceptions of professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration of the benefits and barriers to such collaboration. Building understanding on this topic can help inform anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative practice leading to more successful collaborative outcomes.

3. Current Study

The current study fills the research gap about professionals' perceptions of the benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration by answering the following research questions:

1. Do professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration perceive that there are benefits to such collaboration?
2. What do professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration perceive as the underlying benefits to such collaboration?
3. Do professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration perceive that there are barriers to such collaboration?
4. What do professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration perceive as the underlying barriers to such collaboration?

4. Methods

4.1. Participants

Using purposive sampling, this study targeted professionals formally participating in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration through anti-human trafficking task forces, commissions, and coalitions in a Midwest state in the U.S.

4.2. Measures

This study measured two constructs that included: (a) professionals' perceptions that there are benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration; and (b) professionals' perceptions about the underlying benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. The development of this study's constructs was informed by human trafficking and organizational theory research [3,10–13,18,22,46,50–55].

The first construct was measured using a five-point Likert scale to rate participants' level of agreement with the statement that there are benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. The second construct was measured using the same five-point Likert scale to rate participants' level of agreement with a 15-item list of statements about the benefits of anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration (see Appendix A) and a 36-item list of statements about the barriers (see Appendix B).

4.3. Procedure

The participant list for this study was generated by reviewing web-based anti-human trafficking task force, commission, and coalition membership lists made available to the general public. The data for this study was collected using an online survey. In October 2013, a solicitation email that included informed consent and the survey URL was sent to the participants. Three email reminders were sent to those who had not completed the survey. The study was closed December 2013. Prior to survey dissemination, the study was reviewed and approved for human participation by the researcher's institutional review board.

4.4. Analyses

The survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide a general description of participants' demographic characteristics. Descriptive statistical techniques were also employed to provide a general description of respondents' perceptions that there are benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. To reduce the 15 and 36-item lists of statements and then determine their underlying factor structures, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted separately on the 15 benefit and 36 barrier items using principle axis factoring with oblique rotation [56–60]. The Kaiser's criterion of one rule (K1 rule), scree plot inspection, and parallel analysis were used to identify the appropriate numbers of factors to retain [56–59,61–64]. Items with factor loadings of 0.30 or higher were interpreted to fit well with the other items in the factor [57,58,65]. The reliability of the factors was examined using Cronbach's alpha with a value of 0.70 or higher interpreted to indicate good internal consistency [58,66]. All analyses were performed using IBM® SPSS® Statistics Version 22.

5. Results

Table 1 presents the participants' demographic characteristics and indicates that the largest percentage of participants were female (55.6 percent), identified as White (85.6 percent), and were between the ages of 55–64 (31.5 percent), followed by 35–44 and 45–54 (both 24.2 percent). The majority of participants worked in the criminal justice system (41.4 percent), were higher-level administrators (61.8 percent), and worked for a local agency (44.9 percent).

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Characteristics ($n = 178$).

Variable	Participants	
	<i>n</i>	(%)
Gender		
Male	78	(43.8)
Female	99	(55.6)
Transgender	1	(0.6)
Race		
White	149	(85.6)
Non-white	25	(14.4)
Age		
18–34	27	(15.2)
35–44	43	(24.2)
45–54	43	(24.2)
55–64	56	(31.5)
65 or more	9	(5.1)
Position Level		
Higher-level administrator	110	(61.8)
Manager	26	(14.6)
Supervisor	17	(9.6)
Line worker or equivalent	25	(14.0)
Length of Employment		
Less than 5 years	81	(45.3)
6–10 years	34	(19.0)
11–20 years	35	(19.6)
21–30 years	18	(10.1)
More than 30 years	11	(6.1)
Type of Agency		
Criminal justice system	74	(41.1)
Human/social services	57	(31.7)
Victim service provision	21	(11.7)
Allied	28	(15.6)
Agency Level		
State	25	(14)
Local	80	(44.9)
Non-governmental	43	(24.2)
Private	30	(16.9)
Number of Agency Employees		
1–10	49	(27.1)
11–50	74	(40.9)
51–250	36	(19.9)
250+	22	(12.2)

Note: Allied = Business, educational sector, and faith-based community.

In addition, the greatest percentage of participants reported working in their current job position for less than five years (45.3 percent), followed by 11–20 years (19.6 percent) and 6–10 years (19 percent), and were employed by an agency with between 11–50 employees (40.9 percent).

5.1. Perceptions That There Are Benefits and Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of participants' perceptions that there are benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. The highest percentage of participants strongly agreed that there are benefits to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration (60.8 percent). The largest percentage of participants agreed that there are barriers to such collaboration (57.1 percent).

Table 2. Participants' Perceptions that there are Benefits and Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration ($n = 168$).

	Perceptions			
	There Are Benefits to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration		There Are Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Strongly agree	101	(60.8)	27	(16.1)
Agree	60	(20.3)	96	(57.1)
Neither agree nor disagree	5	(1.7)	35	(20.8)
Disagree	—	—	7	(4.2)
Strongly disagree	—	—	3	(1.8)

5.2. Perceptions of the Underlying Benefits and Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration

Table 3 presents the exploratory factor analysis results for the benefit items. The KMO measure verified sampling adequacy for the analysis (0.924) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2322.772$, $df = 105$, $p = 0.000$). The K1 rule indicated two factors with eigenvalues greater than one. The scree test identified a one-factor solution before the last drop in the eigenvalues could be observed. Since it is stated the K1 rule tends to overestimate factors and the scree test is subjective in application [56–60,62,63,67], a parallel analysis was performed [57,59,62]. The results of the parallel analysis supported a one-factor solution. One factor was retained because of the convergence of the scree test and the results of the parallel analysis. The one factor solution explained 66.25 percent of the variance (Factor 1 = 66.25 percent). The factor was labeled "Capacity." All 15 items on the factor had loadings higher than 0.30 and the factor had acceptable reliability (Factor 1 $\alpha = 0.96$).

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the Participants' Perceptions of the Benefits to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration Items Using Principle Axis Factoring and Promax Rotation ($n = 156$).

	Factor 1	h^2
Abbreviated Item Names ¹	Capacity	
Benefits Include:		
Increased levels of trust	0.85	0.71
Increased consensus building	0.84	0.71
Improved outcomes for end users	0.84	0.71
Increased sustainability	0.83	0.69
Increased morale	0.83	0.69
Increased scale of coverage	0.83	0.69
Increased communication	0.82	0.68
Increased learning and understanding	0.82	0.68
Improved coordination	0.82	0.67
Increased productivity	0.82	0.66
Increased efficiency	0.78	0.61
Cultural change	0.77	0.60
Increased legitimacy	0.75	0.57
Access to resources	0.74	0.54
Shared risk	0.62	0.38
Eigenvalues	9.94	
Variance explained (%)	66.25	
α	0.96	

Note. ¹ See Appendix A for non-abbreviated item names; h^2 = communality. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.924; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-square = 2322.772, $df = 105$, $p = 0.000$.

Table 4 presents the exploratory factor analysis results for the barrier items. The initial rotated solution revealed a five-factor solution. However, the fifth factor contained only two items (lack of resources; lack of time), indicating a weak and unstable factor [57]; therefore, the two items were removed. The remaining 34 items were submitted to a second exploratory factor analysis using the same procedure. The KMO measure verified sampling adequacy for the analysis (0.926) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 4863.542$, $df = 561$, $p = 0.000$). The K1 rule indicated four factors with eigenvalues greater than one. The scree test identified a four-factor solution before the last drop in the eigenvalues could be observed. The results of the parallel analysis supported a four-factor solution. Four factors were retained because of the convergence of the K1 rule, the scree test, and the results of the parallel analysis. The four-factor solution in combination explained 69.59 percent of the variance (Factor 1 = 56.57 percent, Factor 2 = 4.87 percent, Factor 3 = 4.50 percent, Factor 4 = 3.65 percent). Factor 1 contained eleven items and was labeled "Collaborative Uncertainty." Factor 2 contained nine items and was labeled "Agency Incongruence." Factor 3 contained ten items and was labeled "Unfavorable Collaborative Environment," and Factor 4 contained four items and was labeled "Inadequate Problem Framing." All 34 barrier items had factor loadings higher than 0.30. The four factors had acceptable reliability (Factor 1 $\alpha = 0.96$; Factor 2 $\alpha = 0.94$; Factor 3 $\alpha = 0.91$; Factor 4 $\alpha = 0.90$). Table 5 indicates the correlation between the factors ranged from moderate to high.

Table 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the Participants' Perceptions of the Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration Items Using Principle Axis Factoring and Promax Rotation ($n = 138$).

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	h^2
Abbreviated Item Names ¹	Collaborative Uncertainty	Agency Incongruence Environment	Unfavorable Collaborative Framing	Inadequate Problem	
Barriers Include:					
Differing expectations for collaborative	1.01	−0.05	−0.19	0.07	0.78
Lack of clarity roles/responsibilities	0.87	−0.06	−0.21	0.28	0.72
Lack of clearly defined outcome	0.76	−0.05	0.09	0.14	0.76
Lack of monitoring/evaluation collaborative	0.76	0.06	0.01	0.07	0.73
Lack of conflict resolution strategies	0.70	0.10	0.18	−0.05	0.80
Lack of team building strategies	0.70	−0.04	0.26	−0.03	0.75
Temporary nature collaborative effort	0.66	0.02	0.11	0.06	0.61
Perceived marginalization of members	0.65	0.20	0.13	−0.08	0.77
Lack of understanding other agency	0.57	0.07	0.11	0.09	0.58
Lack of cultural competence	0.49	−0.16	0.39	0.08	0.58
Lack of willingness to truly collaborate	0.49	0.05	0.33	−0.00	0.66
Organizational missions/goals/objectives that are DCCI	−0.12	0.97	−0.11	0.20	0.85
Organizational policies/procedures/protocols that are DCCI	0.03	0.97	−0.09	−0.05	0.81
Organizational cultures/values that are DCCI	−0.03	0.91	−0.01	0.06	0.83
Organizational ideologies that are DCCI	−0.07	0.78	0.07	0.12	0.72
Organizational data/computer systems that are DCCI	0.10	0.50	0.10	0.10	0.50
Turfism	0.29	0.38	0.25	−0.90	0.63
Differing professional languages	0.01	0.37	0.34	0.08	0.51
Perceived power differentials	0.34	0.36	0.29	−0.18	0.67
Lack of effective communication	0.27	0.32	0.30	−0.06	0.59
Lack of community support	−0.18	−0.13	0.94	0.23	0.72
Lack of organizational support	−0.11	0.07	0.61	0.33	0.62
Lack of effective leadership	0.15	0.18	0.59	−0.15	0.62
Lack of incentives	0.09	−0.05	0.53	0.23	0.49
Absence of key stakeholders	0.28	−0.08	0.51	0.11	0.56
Lack of autonomy	0.08	0.18	0.51	0.05	0.55
History	0.27	0.18	0.49	−0.23	0.59
Confidentiality concerns	0.02	0.09	0.49	0.26	0.53
Lack of network list	0.26	−0.15	0.40	0.19	0.39
Lack of trust	0.21	0.36	0.38	−0.05	0.71
Lack of common MGOS to address HT	0.09	0.16	0.05	0.77	0.89
Differing levels of knowledge about HT	0.21	−0.08	0.11	0.61	0.58
Lack of common problem definition HT	−0.07	0.12	0.30	0.59	0.64
Lack of agreed upon PPP to address HT	0.41	0.30	−0.19	0.44	0.70
Eigenvalues	19.24		1.66	1.53	1.24
Variance explained (%)	56.57		4.87	4.50	3.65
α	0.96	0.94	0.91	0.90	

Note. Values in bold indicate highest factor loading; ¹ see Appendix B for non-abbreviated item names; h^2 = communality; DCCI = different, conflicting, competing, incompatible MGOS = mission, goals, objectives, strategies; HT = human trafficking; PPP = policies, procedures, protocols. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.926; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-square = 4863.542, df = 561, $p = 0.000$.

Table 5. Factor Correlation Matrix of the Barrier Items.

Factor	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
	Collaborative Uncertainty	Agency Incongruence	Unfavorable Collaborative Environment	Inadequate Problem Framing
Collaborative Uncertainty	1.00			
Agency Incongruence	0.717	1.00		
Unfavorable Collaborative Environment	0.755	0.718	1.00	
Inadequate Problem Framing	0.513	0.477	0.457	1.00

6. Discussion

While it is increasingly recognized that anti-human trafficking efforts require an interagency collaborative approach to effectively address the crime, and while literature exists that cites the benefits and barriers to such collaboration, there is a lack of empirical research on the topic. Building understanding on this topic can help inform anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative practice leading to more successful collaborative outcomes. This study sought to fill this research gap by examining professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration concerning their perceptions of the benefits and barriers to such collaboration. Findings emerged that can inform anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative practices, as well as future research on the topic.

6.1. Perceptions That There Are Benefits and Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration

In this study, professionals did perceive barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. However, the largest majority of professionals perceived benefits to such collaboration. These findings align with current literature citing such benefits and barriers [9,10,19,40,45,46], but also extend this literature with an empirical examination of professionals' actual perceptions of their own joint efforts. The specific finding that the majority of professionals perceived benefits to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration provides confirmation of the value of agencies working together to combat trafficking. This specific finding also affirms recommendations made by human trafficking scholars, as well as professionals engaged in anti-human trafficking work, for continued interagency collaborative approaches to address the crime [18,22,23,33,35]. Future research would benefit from an empirical examination of the relationship between professionals' perceptions of the benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration and their perceptions concerning whether such collaborative efforts were a success and worth the effort, as well as their plans for future collaborative engagement.

6.2. Perceptions of the Underlying Benefits and Barriers to Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration

Underlying benefits. In this study capacity was identified as the underlying benefit to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. Within organizational theory research, capacity is conceptualized as a set of attributes that enable organizations to attain stated goals [68–70]. While the concept of capacity has been examined within organizational theory research in relation to the public, private, and non-profit sectors, to date, the concept has not been considered with respect to, nor applied to the topic of anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. This study contributes to current research on the topic of human trafficking by identifying the underlying benefit to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration, finding that such collaboration provides capacity—the inputs, throughputs, and outputs that can help agencies working together on anti-human trafficking activities to achieve desired collective outcomes. Future research should investigate the impact of

capacity on specific anti-human trafficking activity outcomes such as human trafficking detection, case processing, and victim service provision. The results of such research could help determine whether interagency collaborative efforts do in fact produce the most effective responses to the crime, as is often asserted.

Underlying barriers. In this study, collaborative uncertainty, agency incongruence, an unfavorable collaborative environment, and inadequate problem framing were identified as the underlying barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. Within organizational theory research general barriers to interagency collaboration have been described [14,51,53,54,71–74]. While many of these general barriers have been discussed within literature on the topic of human trafficking [9,10,19,40,45], the underlying constructs of the barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration have to date, not been explored, nor identified. This study expands current research on the topic by identifying these underlying barriers, finding first that collaborative uncertainty is one such underlying barrier. This finding is consistent with organizational theory research that suggests that uncertainty about the purpose, process, and outcomes of the collaborative, the absence of deliberate efforts to build and maintain positive working relationships between collaborative members, and short-lived collaborative exchanges can impede collaborative endeavors [14,75–77].

Second, this study found that agency incongruence is another underlying barrier to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. This finding is also in accordance with organizational theory research that states that agencies engaged in collaborative activities often possess fundamental differences that can make collaboration a difficult or impossible task. For example, collaborating agencies may possess ideological differences causing members to tackle the same social issues in radically different ways [54,78]. In addition, agencies core missions, goals, and objectives may also vary dramatically from one another preventing necessary agreement needed to proceed with the collaborative process [3,44,54,76]. Agencies' differing cultures and values can also prevent collaborative relationships from ever forming or can make seemingly straightforward issues difficult to tackle, resulting in a lengthy collaborative process or even stagnation [3,44,54,78]. In addition, agencies' differing professional languages can make communication within existing collaborative partnerships very difficult. Furthermore, perceived power differences between collaborating agencies can create negative feelings, exacerbating misunderstandings, ultimately hindering the overall collaborative process [3,53,54]. Finally, variations between agencies' basic business practices and technological systems may inhibit the operation of collaborative partnerships [44].

Third, this study found that an unfavorable collaborative environment is also an underlying barrier to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. This finding aligns with organizational theory research that suggests that a negative collaborative climate can hinder the collaborative process. It is stated that a lack of broader agency and community support for interagency collaborative efforts can render such efforts unsuccessful [14,75,76,79]. Collaboration can be further challenged without the presence of effective leaders to promote, manage, and nurture the collaborative process. Collaboration can also be challenged without relevant stakeholders at the planning and implementation stages to inform and help make decisions about collaborative activities [3,54,73,76]. Collaboration can also be impeded by suspicion and mistrust among collaborative members based on agency reputation, past collaborative experiences, or a history of collaborative failures [54,72,78,80,81]. Furthermore, collaboration can be blocked when workers are not provided meaningful incentives by their parent agency to engage in collaborative exchanges or afforded the autonomy necessary to make decisions about their involvement in and contribution to the collaborative partnership [53].

Finally, this study found that inadequate problem framing is an additional underlying barrier to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration. This finding is consistent with human trafficking and organizational theory research that states that during problem framing a person's knowledge about a problem impacts how they define the problem, and

their problem definition then impacts how they approach the problem [82–89]. Inadequate problem framing can produce a barrier to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration because agencies engaged in anti-human trafficking efforts can possess varying levels of knowledge about human trafficking impacting the problem definition they adopt. Agencies problem definitions can contrast sharply concerning the scope, causes, and consequences of human trafficking, complicating the collaborative exchange. The problem definition adopted can then result in very different ideas held by agencies concerning the best way to address human trafficking further challenging the collaborative process. If consensus concerning an approach can be reached, agencies may still clash when trying to determine how to work together to achieve their anti-human trafficking goals. Just as future research should investigate the impact of capacity on specific anti-human trafficking outcomes such as human trafficking detection, case processing, and victim service provision, future research should also investigate the impact of the four underlying barriers on such outcomes. The results of such research could help determine what barrier type presents the most significant impediment to achieving these broader anti-human trafficking goals.

6.3. Implications

This study's findings have important implications. First, before any anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative activities take place, collaborative group members should spend sufficient time framing the problem of human trafficking. Research states that when there is shared framing around a social problem, more cohesive group actions and successful group outcomes result [84,85,87–89]. Anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative group members should make deliberate efforts at the start of the collaborative exchange to ascertain group members' levels of knowledge about human trafficking, perspectives concerning human trafficking's status as a social problem, and ideas about the most appropriate response to the crime. These efforts can help build group consensus from which to build upon and move the collaborative process forward.

Second, after the problem of human trafficking has been sufficiently framed, to minimize the barriers associated with anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration, collaborative groups should establish a formalized infrastructure with a strategic framework to help inform and direct their efforts. At minimum, anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative groups should establish mutually agreed-upon goals and outcomes for the collaborative exchange and delineate roles and responsibilities of collaborative group members while working together. Collaborative groups should also standardize protocols, policies, and procedures for communication, data gathering, information sharing, and referrals, and adopt uniform mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the collaborative process and its outcomes [13,45,46,90,91]. Establishing mutually agreed upon goals and outcomes can help orient and guide the group's collaborative efforts [13,18,19,39,40,43,46]. Delineating roles and responsibilities can assist in the development of mutually reinforcing work strategies [13,18,19,39,40,43,46]. Standardizing protocols, policies, and procedures can streamline the collaborative process [13,40,45,46]. Adopting uniform mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation can help provide information concerning how the collaborative group is proceeding and whether it is effective, enhancing the collaborative group's transparency and accountability [13,18,19,39,40,43,46]. Taken together, these efforts can reduce the level of uncertainty associated with anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative efforts, decrease the difficulties of trying to merge the anti-human trafficking activities of often very incongruent agencies, and, with demonstrated collaborative successes, increase support from parent agencies and the broader community for continued collaborative efforts.

Third, once a formalized infrastructure and strategic framework has been established, agencies should provide professionals' supports and incentives to encourage anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative engagement. Dependent upon resources available, supports can include release time to engage in anti-human trafficking activities, as well as resources, whether financial, material, or personnel-related, devoted to anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative efforts [13,18,19,39,40,43,46]. Incentives can include

funding for and mandating the human trafficking interagency collaborative exchange, as well as incorporating interagency collaborative activities into position descriptions and performance reviews [13,18,19,39,40,43,46]. Such supports and incentives can provide the means necessary to build and sustain interagency collaborative partnerships. Collectively, framing the problem of human trafficking, establishing a formalized infrastructure and strategic framework, and supporting and incentivizing anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration can help enhance and sustain anti-human trafficking collaborative efforts and ultimately provide a more comprehensive and effective, response to the crime.

6.4. Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study helps inform our understanding about professionals' perceptions of the benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration, it is not without limitations. First, the exploratory nature of the study in general, and the exploratory design of exploratory factor analysis in particular [57], limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the findings. Second, the state selected for the study site may not be representative of the human trafficking issue in other parts of the country. Third, the purposive sampling technique can introduce sampling bias with respondents potentially not reflecting individuals engaged in anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration throughout the state. Finally, anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative practices today may not reflect the practices present when the data was collected. Organizational theory research states that common benefits and barriers to interagency collaboration remain stable over time [92–94]. However, this research also suggests that extreme events can significantly alter traditional interagency collaborative approaches [95]. Recent human trafficking research supports this assertion, finding that the current COVID-19 global pandemic has greatly challenged anti-human trafficking interagency collaborative efforts [96–98]. Future research, through a confirmatory factor analysis, should confirm whether the underlying benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration identified in this study have in fact remained stable over time. In all, this study's limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings and highlight the need for additional research on the topic.

Despite these limitations, this study provides an empirical examination of a topic that, to date, has received limited attention in the broader human trafficking research. Understanding professionals' perceptions of the benefits and barriers to anti-human trafficking interagency collaboration is vital to informing such collaborative efforts and achieving successful collaborative outcomes. Future research can benefit from a confirmatory factor analysis to validate the factorial validity of the models derived from this study's exploratory factor analysis results [60] and determine whether the models have the same structure when applied to different populations [57]. In addition to the confirmatory factor analysis, future research can also benefit from conducting this study in other regions of the country and/or using a different sampling frame to see if this study's findings can be replicated.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request due to privacy restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Non-Abbreviated Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaborative Benefit Item Names

Non-Abbreviated Item Names

Benefits Include:

Increased level of trust (e.g., individuals, organizations, populations being served)
 Increased consensus building (e.g., ability to collectively identify and solve a problem)
 Improved outcome for end users (e.g., population being served)
 Increased sustainability (e.g., activities, services)
 Increased morale (e.g., individuals, organizations)
 Increased scale of coverage (e.g., activities, services)
 Increased communication (e.g., between individuals, organizations, populations being served)
 Increased learning and understanding (e.g., about an issue, organization, services)
 Improved coordination (e.g., activities, services)
 Increased productivity (e.g., activities, services)
 Increased efficiency (e.g., financial, operational)
 Cultural change (e.g., individuals, organizations)
 Increased legitimacy (e.g., individuals, organizations, issue)
 Access to resources (e.g., financial, equipment, facilities, expertise, research, training, technology, staff, social networks)
 Shared risk

Appendix B. Non-Abbreviated Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaborative Barrier Item Names

Non-Abbreviated Item Names

Barriers Include:

Differing expectations for collaborative engagement and output
 Lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities
 Lack of clearly defined outcome
 Lack of monitoring and evaluation of interagency collaborative activities and efforts
 Lack of conflict resolution strategies
 Lack of team building strategies
 Temporary nature of collaborative effort
 Perceived marginalization of members
 Lack of understanding of other agency/organizations member's professional roles and responsibilities
 Lack of cultural competence
 Lack of willingness to truly collaborate
 Organizational missions, goals and objectives that are different, conflicting, competing and/or incompatible
 Organizational policies, procedures, and protocols that are different, conflicting, competing and/or incompatible
 Organizational cultures and values that are different, conflicting, competing and/or incompatible
 Organizational ideologies that are different, conflicting, competing and/or incompatible
 Organizational data and computer systems that are different, conflicting, competing and/or incompatible
 Turfism (e.g., territorialism over mission, resources, jurisdiction)
 Differing professional languages
 Perceived power differentials
 Lack of effective communication
 Lack of community support
 Lack of organizational support
 Lack of effective leadership
 Lack of incentives (e.g., not mandated, not part of job description, not part of performance review)
 Absence of key stakeholders
 Lack of autonomy (i.e., discretion and independence to make decisions without immediate organizational oversight)
 History (e.g., past history of interagency collaborative failures)
 Confidentiality concerns

Non-Abbreviated Item Names

Lack of network list
 Lack of trust
 Lack of common mission, goals, objectives, and strategies to address human trafficking
 Differing levels of knowledge about human trafficking
 Lack of common problem definition concerning human trafficking
 Lack of agreed upon policies, procedures, and protocols to address human trafficking
 Lack of resources (e.g., financial, equipment, facilities, expertise, research, training, technology, staff, social networks)
 Lack of time

Notes

- ¹ An allied professional refers to an individual working in the business and educational sector or faith-based community.

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