

Behind Closed Doors: Substance Use Disorder and Human Trafficking in Vermont



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Introduction

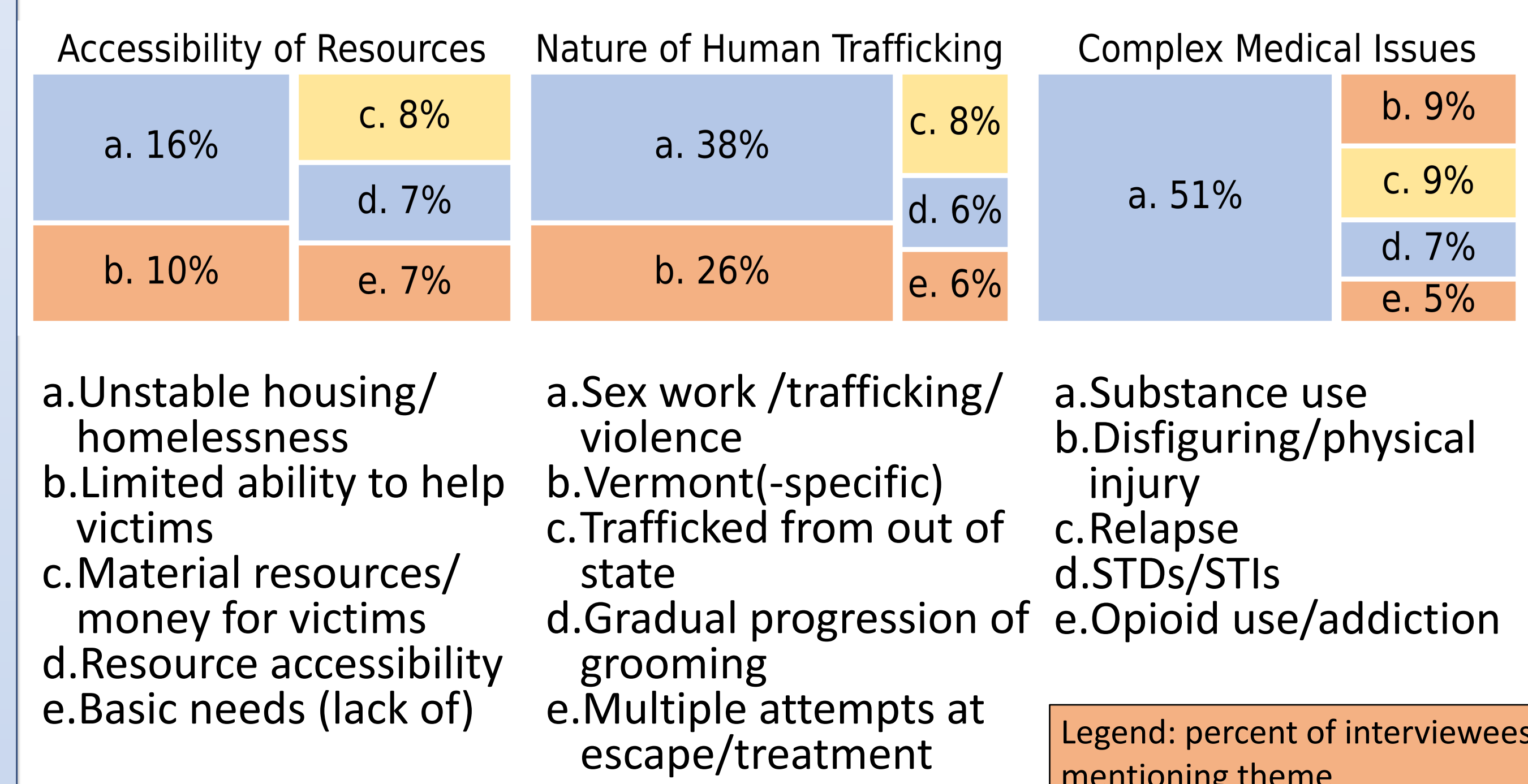
- Definition of Human trafficking:** The use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain labor or commercial sex acts^{1,5}
- Risk factors:**
 - Housing insecurity¹
 - Substance use disorders^{2,3,5}
 - Disrupted childhood households^{1,4}
- Study aim:** Investigate the relationship between human trafficking and substance use disorder in Vermont

Methods

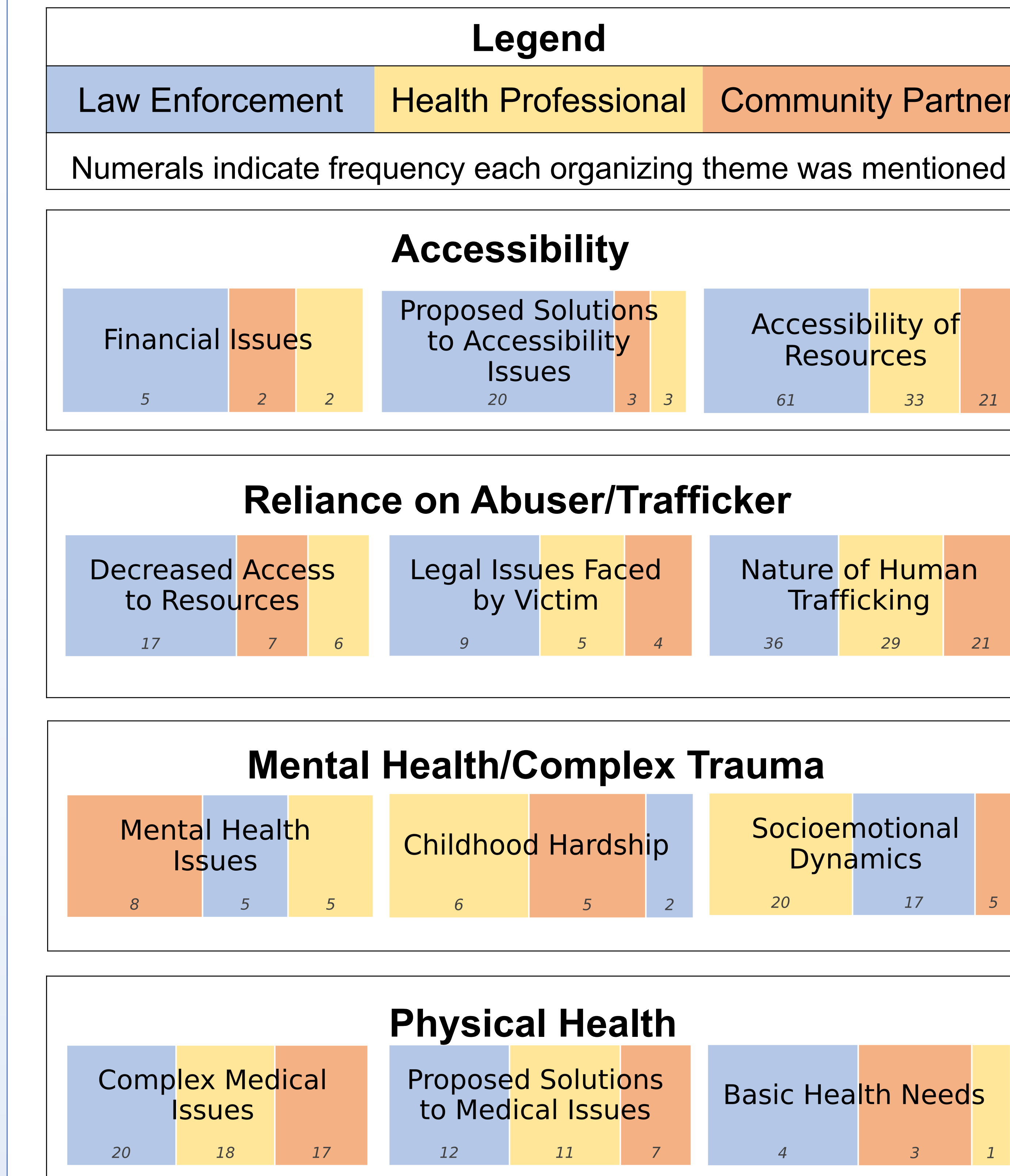
- Preparation:** We created a standardized set of interview questions
- Interview Aim:** To uncover risk factors, health and support needs, and victims' challenges
- Interview Population:**

3 Law Enforcement Professionals	3 Healthcare Professionals	3 Community Service Professionals
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- Data Analysis:** Two analysts (AA & KR) independently reviewed all interview notes. Analysts generated codes from recorded interview phrases, reaching thematic saturation in codes after three interviews. From the combined codes they identified higher level themes.

Results: Most Frequent Codes



Results: Top Themes



Expanded Themes

- Proposed Solutions to Accessibility Issues:**
 - Provide low-barrier services and easily accessible resources
- Decreased Access to Resources:**
 - Human trafficking begins with a gradual process of grooming. The abuser then limits victims' access to resources. The victims may be unaware they are being groomed and become reliant on their abuser.
- Legal Issues Faced by Victim:**
 - Victims who are trafficked may receive criminal charges against them. The victim then will need to manage these charges.
- Socioemotional Dynamics:**
 - The stigma and lack of awareness about human trafficking from society hinders victims from seeking and maintaining care.
- Complex Medical Issues:**
 - Substance use is common among victims of trafficking. This leads to numerous health issues directly stemming from that substance use.

Key Quotes & Common Words

"Some choose to stay there because they feel nothing will ever change, they are too far down the rabbit hole. But there are a good amount that actually are victims and do not want to be there."

"It has to be a collaborative effort, working with law enforcement and other organizations, not just working in silos."

"They don't feel safe to be seen by the doctor or in emergency departments. You know, they get treated harshly in the emergency rooms, many don't seek help because of that treatment."



Legend: Larger words = Mentioned more frequently in interviews

Conclusion

- Human trafficking and substance use disorder are closely entwined in Vermont.
- This co-occurrence has created a public health crisis that must be addressed utilizing best practices.
- National guidelines should be augmented to address Vermont's risk factors and concerns related to healthcare and social services accessibility.

Future Directions

- Augment national guidelines for confronting human trafficking to include regional risk factors and accessibility concerns.
- Conduct additional research to expand this Vermont specific data set.
- Compare risk factors and accessibility concerns in Vermont to other regions in the United States.

Citations

¹Branscum, C., & Fallik, S. W. (2021). A content analysis on state human trafficking statutes: how does the legal system acknowledge survivors in the United States (US)? Crime, Law and Social Change.
²Cesar, D. (2019). Intersections of Human Trafficking and the Opioid Epidemic, and Barriers to Data Collection in Human Trafficking. Dash.harvard.edu.
³Farrell, A., & Reichert, J. (2017). Using U.S. Law-Enforcement Data: Promise and Limits in Measuring Human Trafficking. Journal of Human Trafficking, 3(1), 39-60. Heroin and Other Opioids. (2016, July 18). Vermont Department of Health.
⁴Marburger, K., & Pickover, S. (2020). A Comprehensive Perspective on Treating Victims of Human Trafficking. The Professional Counselor, 10(1), 13-24.
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