



FAMILIAL TRAFFICKING IN FOCUS

RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND
TRAINING & TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE AGENDA

SEPTEMBER 2025

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SUGGESTED CITATION

McCallum Desselle, L., Barrick, K., Scalise, P; Bacy, S. (2025). Familial Trafficking: Research Priorities and Training & Technical Assistance Agenda. RTI International.

KEY TERMS

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

In this paper, *victim* will be used to describe people who are actively experiencing FT, and *survivor* will be used to describe people who have lived experience of FT but who are no longer being exploited. *Victim* is a legal term that has rights and benefits within the criminal legal system. However, many people with lived experience prefer more empowering terms such as *survivor* or *lived experience expert* to describe themselves. The authors have chosen to use these terms to encapsulate this complexity with brevity.

FAMILIAL TRAFFICKING (FT)

FT is a form of human trafficking in which the perpetrator is a family member. Family membership may be established through blood relations (e.g., biological mother), legal ties (e.g., stepparent), or functional relationships (e.g., an unrelated child who lives full-time in the household).

RESEARCH AGENDA

A research agenda is a strategic plan that outlines the goals, priorities, and areas of investigation for future research endeavors. It serves as a roadmap, guiding researchers toward meaningful and impactful work. This research agenda will integrate TTA goals and priorities to translate that research into practice.

THIRD-PARTY TRAFFICKING

For this study, the term third-party trafficking is used to describe a form of human trafficking that is facilitated by someone who is not a family member.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TTA)

TTA is the planning, development, and delivery of activities designed to achieve specific learning objectives, resolve problems, and foster the application of innovative approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Familial trafficking (FT), also known as family-facilitated trafficking or intrafamilial trafficking, is an under-identified and under-explored form of human trafficking.

Often, human trafficking is assumed to occur between a victim/survivor and a third-party trafficker, such as a boyfriend or employer, who is not directly related to the victim. As such, research on FT is limited within the human trafficking literature landscape. Anti-trafficking practitioners and survivors alike have identified that research on this form of trafficking is necessary, because FT victims/survivors may have different needs based on their unique experience of exploitation at the hands of a family member.

LEARN MORE

Familial Trafficking: Advancing Training and Technical Assistance Through Research

For additional information about this study's methodology, outputs, and more, visit the project landing page at

<https://www.rti.org/impact/familial-trafficking-research-training-technical-assistance>

Given the growing awareness and desire for more information on this topic, a research-based training and technical assistance (TTA) agenda is needed to systematically map future work in this space to support anti-human trafficking professionals. This agenda framework is inspired by Arnold Ventures' Extreme Risk Protection Order Research Agenda (Zeoli, 2020).

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of existing gaps in both research and training and technical assistance (TTA) related to FT that could be addressed through future funding opportunities. It's intended to be used by policymakers, funders, and decision-makers.

STUDY OVERVIEW

This project was initially inspired by feedback from the field. For the [Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking](#) program, a team of [RTI International](#) experts convened a variety of events on the topic of FT in response to grantee requests to increase capacity on this topic. During these events, grantees confirmed what the literature suggested, that service providers and first responders may be under-identifying victims due to misclassification or misidentification. Additionally, practitioners shared their concern about the efficacy of existing services and treatment models that serve human trafficking survivors, which may not be tailored to the unique needs of FT victims.

Following these events, a team at RTI began a scoping review to identify literature and evidence to support TTA efforts related to FT response. In the process, the team identified the limited research on the topic, as well as a lack of guidance to provide evidence-based responses to FT.

To fill this gap, RTI internally funded this project to conduct exploratory research with the expressed intent of advancing and improving TTA provision to anti-trafficking responders. The research team interviewed anti-trafficking responders and FT survivors in Louisiana to better understand the scope and nature of FT response in the state. Qualitative coding software was used to identify themes in the interviews, and the findings were then compared with the existing literature to identify research and TTA gaps in this topical space. The draft resource was then reviewed by select stakeholders, practitioners, and survivors in the field to ensure that the recommendations were aligned with interests and needs in the field. This agenda is a culmination of those efforts and provides a roadmap for future research and TTA efforts to respond to FT.

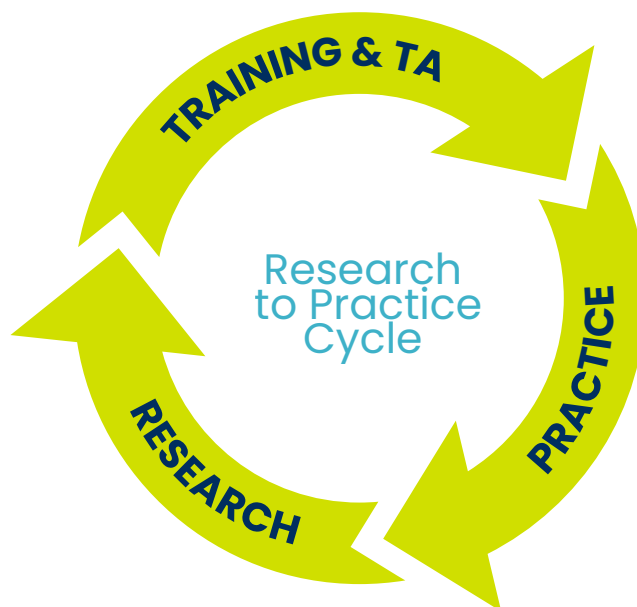


Sample email heading from research outreach activities

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE APPROACH

Research generates evidence to design effective interventions and responses. TTA is a vehicle that can transform research into informed training and practical guidance for on-the-ground responders. By combining knowledge generation and knowledge transfer, we seek to increase the impact of the research by communicating and disseminating the findings in a way that is directly applicable for practitioners.

The goal of this project was to conduct research with the intent of advancing and improving TTA for anti-trafficking responders. This unique combination of research and TTA was intentionally designed to ensure that professionals can implement the project findings into their anti-trafficking work.



AGENDA FORMAT

A research agenda is a strategic plan that outlines the goals, priorities, and areas of investigation for future research endeavors. It serves as a roadmap, guiding researchers toward meaningful and impactful work. This research agenda will integrate TTA goals and priorities to ensure that research is translated to practice.

This research agenda is organized into three sections:

- The first section is a **literature review** that explores existing research in the space of FT.
- The second section outlines **goals** for the conduct of future research and TTA, which emphasize general guidance and considerations for people conducting research and TTA.
- The third section outlines **research and TTA objectives**, organized by topical domain, that would benefit from future TTA and research exploration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

FT is a form of human trafficking in which the perpetrator is a family member. Family membership may be established through blood relations (e.g., biological mother), legal ties (e.g., stepparent), or functional relationships (e.g., an unrelated child who lives full-time in the household). Existing literature acknowledges that there is a general dearth of research on FT in the United States (Allert, 2022b; Brannock et al., 2024; Voller et al., 2024). Prevalence of FT in the United States is unknown. However, in 2021, of the 7,500 cases referred to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, nearly one-quarter of the cases involved a family member exploiter (Polaris, n.d.). One study of Kentucky child welfare cases found that nearly 60% of all human trafficking cases in the state had at least one perpetrator who was a family member (Edwards et al., 2022). Justice professionals believe the actual prevalence of FT to be higher than the reported numbers (Allert, 2022a).

Prior research has identified some common characteristics of FT victims. Identified cases of FT tend to occur in isolated or rural communities (Allert, 2022b; Sprang & Cole, 2018). Often, these cases happen in conditions of poverty in which the family unit needs money or lacks access to basic needs (Adeyinka et al., 2023; Edwards et al., 2022; Dalla et al., 2022; Horning et al., 2023; Karandikar et al., 2011; Lainez, 2020). FT victims tend to be younger than victims of third-party trafficking (Voller et al., 2024). For example, one study found that the average age of FT victims within the Kentucky child welfare system was 13.7 years (Edwards et al., 2022). Sexual abuse was identified as a common precursor to familial sex trafficking (Karandikar et al., 2011; Koepler et al., 2022; White et al., 2023). Venues where familial sex trafficking occurs include homes, hotel/motels, the internet, and strip clubs (Aramburo & Richie-Zavaleta, 2023; Sprang & Cole, 2018). Types of familial labor trafficking identified in the literature include forced criminality and domestic servitude (Horning et al., 2023; Koepler et al., 2022).

Studies have found that in FT cases, the perpetrator is most often a biological mother (66%), followed by a biological father (50%), stepparent (45%), or uncle (42%) (Allert, 2022b; Allert, 2022a; Sprang & Cole, 2018; Pacheco et al., 2023; Dalla et al., 2020). Perpetrators of FT may be motivated to engage in this type of exploitation to meet a variety of needs, including drugs (21%–82%),

cash (47%–51%), or other needs, like rent or clothing (30%) (Brannock et al., 2024). Another common factor noted in the literature is caregivers' chaotic substance use, defined as substance use that complicates and negatively impacts the user's life (Allert, 2022a; White et al., 2023). FT may be cross-generational, moving through matrilineal cycles of abuse within the family. Some studies found a relationship between prior or current maternal commercial sex work and familial exploitation of children (Allert, 2022a, Dalla et al., 2020). In other cases, victims are part of a cross-generational family system of grooming for sexual, physical, and psychological abuse (Horning et al., 2023). Issues of cross-generational trauma and multi-generational trafficking were identified as further complicating case identification as these factors normalized the exploitation for the victim/survivor.

System responders such as service providers, law enforcement, and child welfare professionals struggle to identify cases of FT. Identifying FT is particularly challenging for responders because existing validated screening tools often do not include data collection about the relationship between victim and perpetrator. FT victims seem to have a high level of engagement with child welfare systems, with one study finding that 89% of cases had previous engagement with child welfare for other types of child abuse or co-occurring crimes (Edwards et al., 2022). However, FT is frequently misidentified or miscategorized as child sexual abuse or neglect, offenses that typically carry less severe criminal justice penalties than trafficking (Allert, 2022b; Sprang & Cole, 2018; Voller et al., 2024). Intrafamilial secrecy emerged as a significant challenge to identification, with 47% of survey respondents reporting that investigations were hindered by victims or other family members being unwilling to disclose information (Allert, 2022b).

Once cases are identified, responders face barriers to building successful investigations and prosecutions of FT. Perpetrators often solicit through localized word-of-mouth communication, making it particularly difficult for responders to identify or investigate through traditional investigative means (Allert, 2022B; Edwards et al., 2023). Prosecution takes a significant amount of time to develop evidence and build trust with victims (Allert, 2022a). This is especially true considering the unique relationship the child victim often has with their perpetrator and the fact that they may have been groomed from a young age to

distrust law enforcement or other system responders (Brannock et al., 2024). In some cases, the victims have been manipulated to believe what they are doing is normal or even a choice (Brannock et al., 2024; Lainez, 2020). Lack of evidence and credible witnesses were also identified as a major barrier to successful prosecutions (Allert, 2022b). A lack of temporary placement or shelter settings can also prevent the stabilization of victims after they exit their exploitation (Allert, 2022a; Brannock et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, research found several promising practices to respond to FT cases. Training for key personnel, such as child welfare professionals, mandated reporters, medical providers, and law enforcement, were identified as important steps to improve victim identification (Voller, 2024; White, 2023). Utilizing a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach that emphasizes trust-building with the victim was identified as a critical step to successfully build a case (Allert, 2022A, 2022B). Mental health treatments that address psychological coercion or psychological harm, such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), were also identified as a promising practice (Marquez, 2020). Multi-layered interventions needed to address psycho-social needs of victims and utilizing multi-disciplinary response frameworks, such as multi-disciplinary teams, were recognized to improve response to FT cases (Edwards, 2022).

After conducting this literature review, RTI conducted exploratory research on familial trafficking in Louisiana. Read the findings report at <https://www.rti.org/impact/familial-trafficking-research-training-technical-assistance> .



GOALS FOR CONDUCT OF FUTURE RESEARCH AND TTA

RESEARCH AND TTA SHOULD BE SURVIVOR-INFORMED.



People who have experienced human trafficking provide important perspectives that can lead to more effective, victim/survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate strategies (NHTTAC, 2018). Survivor inclusion in research and TTA can take many forms, including facilitating advisory boards, hiring full-time staff who have lived experience, collaborating with survivor-led organizations, and incorporating interviews or feedback from victims/survivors into the research design (Ash & Otiende, 2023).

RESEARCH AND TTA SHOULD BE GROUNDED IN PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE.



Given the dearth of research and formalized knowledge on FT, future activities should integrate expertise from practitioners with knowledge about this unique population. In addition to their topical expertise, practitioners' engagement can improve the outcomes of research activities. For example, participation can support more intentional responses to vulnerable populations or increase the likelihood of acceptance and dissemination of research findings (Hounmenou, 2020; Miller et al., 2022). Partnering with agencies who engage with FT survivors, utilizing community-based participatory research methods, and integrating community advisory boards or expert consultants into project design are just a few examples of ways research and TTA can ground the projects in practice.

GOALS FOR THE CONDUCT OF FUTURE RESEARCH & TTA (CONTINUED)

RESEARCH AND TTA SHOULD INFORM FUTURE POLICY AND PRACTICE.



Generating knowledge is crucial in under-researched areas like FT. However, this knowledge is most powerful when it reaches those who can influence policy, practice, and social action (Scott et al., 2019). Therefore, research and TTA should intentionally design and implement outreach and communication strategies, dedicating sufficient time and resources to ensure the information is shared with the communities and responders most impacted by FT.

RESEARCH AND TTA SHOULD CENTER THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE MOST IMPACTED COMMUNITIES.



Since its early days, the U.S. anti-human trafficking movement has been plagued with misconceptions, misinformation, and sensationalism surrounding who is perceived to be the victims and perpetrators of these crimes (Doezema, 1999; Lee, 2021; Murray, 2020). Contemporary research indicates that marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by human trafficking (e.g., Murphy, 2016). Given the complex influences of demographic factors, geography, and culture on family dynamics, it is essential that research and TTA incorporate a lens that is inclusive of the most impacted communities. This approach can mitigate or prevent unintentional harm to populations that may be most affected by FT.

RESEARCH & TTA OBJECTIVES, BY DOMAIN

1. Screening and identification of FT cases

1. Identify risk factors and indicators of FT.
2. Understand the typologies and patterns affiliated with familial labor trafficking.
3. Validate screening tools or supplemental screening questionnaires to test FT identification efficacy.
4. Examine the nexus of FT and other criminal activity to understand the prevalence of co-occurring crimes.

2. Barriers to engagement in systems response to FT

1. Identify structural and institutional barriers among the systems that respond to FT including law enforcement, child welfare, healthcare, and social services.
2. Explore individual and relational barriers of survivor experiences, such as psychological, emotional, and cultural factors, that prevent survivors from seeking help or participating in system responses to trafficking.
3. Map how FT victims interact with system responders to identify potential intervention points.

3. Effective care interventions to support FT victim/survivors

1. Identify FT survivor's care needs for recovery.
2. Evaluate existing care modalities to understand their efficacy with FT survivors.
3. Explore the role of non-offending caregivers and family members in the recovery process for FT survivors.

4. Data on the prevalence and impact of FT

1. Establish reliable prevalence estimates of FT in the United States.
2. Generate estimates that are disaggregated by sociodemographic characteristics.
3. Evaluate the social and economic impact of FT on survivors.

RESEARCH & TTA OBJECTIVES, BY DOMAIN

DOMAIN 1: SCREENING & IDENTIFICATION OF FT CASES

Anti-trafficking responders reported struggling to identify FT (Allert, 2022a; Cole, 2018). One study found that 89% of FT victims had previous engagement with child welfare for other types of child abuse or co-occurring crimes (Edwards et al., 2022). Research suggests that responders may misidentify FT as co-occurring crimes such as child abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse without identifying the experience of FT (Cole, 2018; Voller et al., 2024). In part, this may be due to key responders' lack of awareness of the indicators of FT. Additionally, few screening tools include questions about the perpetrator's relationship with the victim (White et al., 2023).

The limited research on FT may be part of the reason screening and identification of FT is such a challenge. As with the state of human trafficking research in general, research on FT has primarily focused on juvenile sex trafficking. Additionally, existing studies have conflicting findings about the gender and origin of nationality of victims, which can further complicate establishing risk factors for identification (Adinkrah, 2018; Allert 2022b). The limited body of existing literature disproportionately focuses on sex trafficking, with only a few resources focused exclusively on labor trafficking or inclusive of both sex and labor trafficking.

OBJECTIVES

- 1 **Identify risk factors and indicators of FT.**
- 2 **Understand the typologies and patterns affiliated with familial labor trafficking.**
- 3 **Validate screening tools or supplemental screening questionnaires to test FT identification efficacy.**
- 4 **Examine the nexus of FT and other criminal activity to understand the prevalence of co-occurring crimes.**

DOMAIN 1: SCREENING & IDENTIFICATION OF FT CASES

Objective 1.1: Identify risk factors and indicators of FT.

RESEARCH

Responders have anecdotally identified some common risk factors; however, these have not been evaluated in large, multi-jurisdictional studies. In addition to more in-depth research on risk factors and indicators of FT, comparative analysis of FT and third-party trafficking risk factors or indicators would help practitioners better identify victims of the crime.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Training on the topic of FT should be provided to key stakeholders, including criminal legal professionals, child welfare professionals, and medical providers. Delivering TTA to a multidisciplinary audience could be an effective method for enhancing field-based identification of FT. Developing resources that outline the risk factors and indicators of FT and highlighting case studies to help professionals contextualize what cases may look like in their line of work may assist them in identifying cases.

Objective 1.2: Understand the types and patterns affiliated with familial labor trafficking.

RESEARCH

Familial labor trafficking research should explore the interplay of human trafficking with other labor crimes such as child labor law violations. Research into provider perceptions of familial labor trafficking could uncover whether there are biases around the harm (or perceived absence of harm) of labor abuse at the hands of caregivers. Case analysis of successful familial labor trafficking cases could also illuminate promising practices or successes in apprehending abusers.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

To enhance practitioners' knowledge around the types and patterns of familial labor trafficking, a comprehensive suite of training materials focused on familial labor trafficking types, risk factors, and indicators should be developed. These materials should include fact sheets that explain the consequences of familial labor trafficking on survivors and case studies (e.g., [U.S. v. Darnell Fulton](#)) of successful prosecutions of familial labor trafficking to demonstrate how to build these cases.

DOMAIN 1: SCREENING & IDENTIFICATION OF FT CASES

Objective 1.3: Validate screening tools or supplemental screening questionnaires to test FT identification efficacy.

RESEARCH

Studies focused on designing and validating screening supplements focused on FT are needed to understand their efficacy with FT identification. Implementation studies of screening tools within anti-trafficking settings could also aid in identifying if the tools need adjustment or are being applied properly by practitioners.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Once effective screening tools are developed, practitioners will need responsive TTA materials for improving screening and identification of FT at all system touchpoints. Using case studies to practice screening tools is one example of a mechanism to support implementation. Providing technical assistance to support responders in developing a screening protocol for their organization/agency may also improve implementation of screening tools.

Objective 1.4: Examine the nexus of FT and other criminal activity to understand the prevalence of co-occurring crimes.

RESEARCH

While anecdotal evidence suggests that FT intersects with other crimes (e.g., substance misuse and FT), analysis of victim/survivor experiences and/or examination of fact patterns of prosecuted cases could illustrate whether this is true across different communities. Conducting life histories or journey mapping directly with victims/survivors may advance knowledge of co-occurring victimization that was not identified by system responders. These research activities could help to determine which crimes most often intersect with FT and how these cases are being investigated, charged, and/or prosecuted by law enforcement, child welfare, and prosecutors.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

TTA should target populations that may be aware of adjacent trauma and adverse experiences (e.g., child welfare, substance use disorder treatment) but may not have the human trafficking expertise. Sector-specific resources that are tailored to specific responders who may encounter certain types of co-occurring crimes could also support identification.

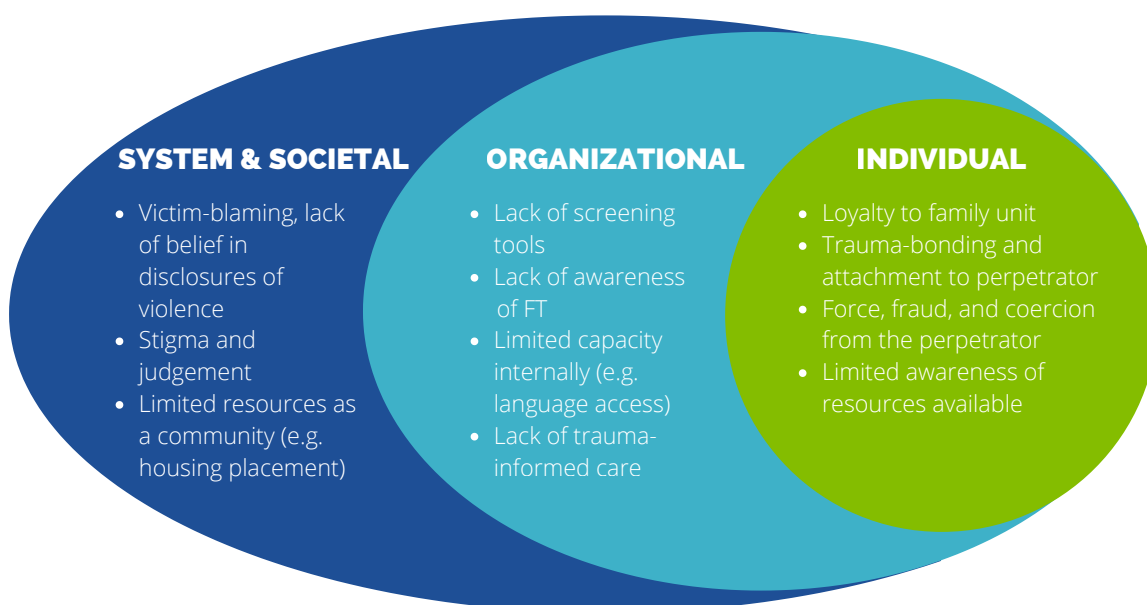
RESEARCH & TTA OBJECTIVES, BY DOMAIN

DOMAIN 2: BARRIERS TO VICTIM/SURVIVOR ENGAGEMENT IN SYSTEMS RESPONSE

Survivors of FT face a variety of barriers that prevent engagement in systems responses. These barriers can occur at system and societal, organizational, and individual levels.

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Familial Trafficking Survivors' Barriers to Engagement



FT victims identified by system responders often do not want to engage in the criminal justice process. This may be due to the unique power and control dynamics between the victims and perpetrators who may have started grooming the victims at an early age, taking advantage of children's inherent loyalty to and reliance on the family structure (Aramburo & Richie-Zavaleta, 2023; Lainez, 2020). Victims may also feel strong attachment to perpetrators, which

DOMAIN 2: BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT IN SYSTEMS RESPONSE TO FT

protects perpetrators from justice response (Allert, 2022a). Perpetrators may use threats, intimidation, or abuse of their relationship to control the victim (Allert, 2022a; Allert, 2022b; Sprang & Cole, 2018). Additionally, intrafamilial secrecy emerged as a significant challenge, with 47% of survey respondents reporting that investigations were hindered by victims or other family members being unwilling to disclose information (Allert, 2022b).

At the community/organizational level, responders may not know how to screen effectively for trauma. Existing literature recommends increased training of frontline professionals and mandated reporters. Additionally, many findings call for modified tools to improve victim identification, because this may allow responders to develop a more attuned understanding of the unique relational dynamics between child victims and related perpetrators (Allert, 2022a). Some isolated communities may also normalize cross-generational or FT experiences.

At the societal level, victims may face skepticism or lack of belief in their experiences. Believing in survivors, particularly heeding minors' testimony, is as an important step to empower victims. Many practitioners also shared that they felt there was a level of cognitive dissonance with the public's understanding of FT because it is difficult for people to believe that a caregiver would exploit a child, which leads to survivors' experiences being dismissed. FT victims often rely on their families for basic needs because alternatives are limited, and existing systems rarely have the capacity to fully support survivors.

OBJECTIVES

- 1 Identify structural and institutional barriers among the systems that respond to FT, including law enforcement, child welfare, healthcare, and social services.**
- 2 Explore individual and relational barriers that prevent survivors from seeking help or participating in system responses to trafficking.**
- 3 Map how FT victims interact with system responders to identify potential intervention points.**

DOMAIN 2: BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT IN SYSTEMS RESPONSE TO FT

Objective 2.1: Identify structural and institutional barriers among the systems that respond to FT, including law enforcement, child welfare, healthcare, and social services.

RESEARCH

This research should consider community/organization factors (e.g., lack of screening tools, lack of FT awareness) and systemic factors (e.g., victim-blaming, stigma, limited resources) that create barriers to engagement. Case analysis that retroactively screens child welfare cases for indicators of FT may be one mechanism to explore factors that impact why a case was missed or misidentified as a co-occurring crime. Once these factors are identified, solutions for addressing them can be developed.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Develop training and technical assistance materials that address myths and misconceptions about what survivors “look like” or present as in real life. This should include elements of the neurobiology of complex trauma of FT, barriers to disclosure, trauma-informed care, cultural competence, and attachment theory.

Objective 2.2: Explore individual and relational barriers that prevent survivors from seeking help or participating in system responses to trafficking.

RESEARCH

This research should consider individual barriers to engagement (e.g., filial piety, trauma-bonding, attachment, fear, cultural factors). Research should also analyze how trauma, coercion, and attachment to perpetrators affect a survivors’ willingness and ability to engage in services. Research into cross-generational human trafficking structures, with an emphasis on the unique dynamics of force, fraud, and coercion, would also benefit the field.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Create resources that explore the individual and relational barriers that may prevent survivors from participating in systems. Include information about promising practices to overcome those barriers. Facilitate communities of practice or peer-to-peer engagement that emphasizes how organizations can implement promising practices to overcome individual barriers.

DOMAIN 2: BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT IN SYSTEMS RESPONSE TO FT

Objective 2.3: Map how FT victims interact with system responders to identify potential intervention points.

RESEARCH

Assess systematic gaps in identification by mapping system touchpoints and understanding the barriers for identification at each touchpoint. Evaluate the preparedness and training of frontline professionals to recognize trafficking and respond appropriately. Collaboration is a promising practice identified through previous research; thus, future research into how system responders interact with each other may provide additional insight into the most impactful points for identification and appropriate referral to services. Survivor engagement into research design may also support identification of under-utilized points of entry into care. Life history mapping is one example of a methodology that could be useful in this regard.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Conduct a system mapping workshop where multidisciplinary stakeholders come together to collaboratively map out existing touch points with potential victims and discuss the current multidisciplinary response to FT and service pathways for victims in their jurisdiction. Create visual tools for jurisdictions to identify multiple points of entry for FT victims and determine how to support their identification. Create a tool for responders to identify how FT survivors may be engaging with their agency. Develop shared protocols for referral processes to streamline interactions between responders and ensure victims receive appropriate services efficiently.

RESEARCH & TTA OBJECTIVES, BY DOMAIN

DOMAIN 3: EFFECTIVE CARE INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT FT VICTIMS/SURVIVORS

FT victims are likely to experience negative physical and mental health outcomes due to their trauma. This could include suicidal ideation, hospitalization, and unwanted pregnancies (Sprang & Cole, 2018). While research has been successfully conducted about care models to support human trafficking survivors at large, little has been done to determine if FT survivors may have different care needs than people who experience third-party trafficking. For example, while research on juvenile sex trafficking victims has identified that non-offending caregiver involvement can be a resilience factor for recovery, that finding may not be applicable to this population because of the unique proximity of family to the perpetration.

Integration of family members into intervention strategies is a challenge for practitioners given the difficulty in understanding culpability and knowledge of exploitation among family members. FT may be cross-generational, moving through matrilineal cycles of abuse within the family (Allert, 2022a; Dalla et al., 2020). FT schemes often have complex relationships with family members who may have varying degrees of culpability for trafficking ranging from active engagement in the trafficking scheme to disengaged involvement in the trafficking scheme (e.g., the parent provides funding to allow the child to leave to be trafficked) to no knowledge of or involvement in the trafficking scheme (Adeyinka, 2018). Some service providers are unsure how to integrate non-offending family members into care in a safe way (Pacheco et al., 2023).

In some cases, the victims have been manipulated to believe what they are doing is normal or even a choice (Brannock et al., 2024; Lainez, 2020). Utilizing a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach that emphasizes trust-building with the victim was identified as a critical step to successfully overcome this belief (Allert, 2022A, 2022B). Mental health treatments that address psychological coercion or psychological harm, such as TF-CBT, were also identified as a promising practice (Marquez, 2020). Additionally, treatments that emphasize reprocessing cognitions and emotions that lead to normalizing abusive and coercive social interactions (which victims of FT have learned in their families of origin) and the belief that they are unworthy of healthy relationships should be evaluated as a potentially effective treatment for this population (Brannock et al., 2024).

DOMAIN 3: EFFECTIVE CARE INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT FT VICTIMS/SURVIVORS

OBJECTIVES

- 1 Identify FT survivors' care needs for recovery.
- 2 Evaluate existing care modalities to understand their efficacy with FT survivors.
- 3 Explore the role of non-offending caregivers and family members in the recovery process for FT survivors.

Objective 3.1: Identify FT survivors' care needs for recovery.

RESEARCH

We identified a few survivor needs through this study, but getting more survivor input from different settings and different experiences would be informative. Research should focus on how FT survivors' needs differ from those of survivors who experienced third-party trafficking. Assess how to effectively integrate trauma-informed care into service delivery for FT survivors.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Provide recommendations for integrating trauma-informed care into service provision for FT survivors (e.g., integrating survivor voice and choice in service delivery models). Create resources that outline common needs survivors may have.

DOMAIN 3: EFFECTIVE CARE INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT FT VICTIMS/SURVIVORS

Objective 3.2: Evaluate existing care modalities to understand their efficacy with FT survivors.

RESEARCH

Determine if there are existing modalities that are not applicable, or are more effective, for this population. Consider the potential for unintended consequences in applying commonly practiced existing care models to this population (e.g., the role of family members in care). Evaluate the efficacy of relational interventions (e.g., Trust-Based Relational Intervention) with this population.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Make recommendations for responsive care plans that address complex trauma, identity reconstruction, and social reintegration.

Objective 3.3: Explore the role of non-offending caregivers and family members in the recovery process for FT survivors.

RESEARCH

Studies should focus on the impact of integrating non-offending caregivers and family members into service provision and if doing so facilitates healing for survivors, how responders can effectively break the cycle of FT in families with cross-generational trafficking, and if there are multi-generational treatment approaches in adjacent fields (e.g., child abuse, domestic violence) that could be applied in families impacted by FT.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Facilitate peer-to-peer engagement to discuss the complexities of engaging caregivers in treatment for FT survivors. Disseminate sample outreach and awareness campaigns to stop the cycle of FT. Design guiding principles or policy templates for caregiver engagement in service provision.

RESEARCH & TTA OBJECTIVES, BY DOMAIN

DOMAIN 4: DATA ON THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF FT

Reliable estimates of the prevalence of human trafficking are not available in most communities, and there are no estimates of the extent of FT in the United States. Existing literature acknowledges the general dearth of research on this topic and calls for additional research to understand the scope and nature of FT in the United States (Allert, 2022b; Brannock et al., 2024; Voller et al., 2024). These studies recognize that additional research is required to better understand the unique dynamics within family relationships in FT scenarios. Lack of data on the scope of the issue hinders efforts to develop and scale appropriate prevention and response strategies to address it. However, understanding the magnitude of the problem is not enough. It is also critically important to better understand both the susceptibility of different populations to FT and the long-term impacts of experiencing FT on the lives of survivors in order to develop effective and impactful intervention strategies.

OBJECTIVES

- 1 **Establish reliable prevalence estimates of FT in the United States.**
- 2 **Generate estimates that are disaggregated by sociodemographic characteristics.**
- 3 **Evaluate the social and economic impact of FT on survivors.**

DOMAIN 4: DATA ON THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF FT

Objective 4.1: Establish reliable prevalence estimates of FT in the United States.

RESEARCH

Adapt existing human trafficking prevalence estimation methods to accurately measure the scope of FT across regions and populations. Consider mixed-method approaches (quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, administrative data) to capture hidden and underreported cases and gather additional information on the experiences of FT survivors.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Create outreach and awareness materials targeted to the populations most vulnerable to FT. Design practitioner-friendly reporting mechanisms or a toolkit to help practitioners navigate data sharing with researchers (i.e., sharing service data to support prevalence estimate studies). Host a Community of Practice to discuss promising practices for field-informed research.

Objective 4.2: Generate estimates that are disaggregated by sociodemographic characteristics.

RESEARCH

Develop population-specific estimates (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, immigration status, geographic location, urbanicity) to identify populations that are at a particularly high risk for FT. Explore correlations with broader social issues such as poverty, substance abuse, and domestic violence.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Create resources to educate practitioners on specific demographics or contexts with high prevalence of FT (e.g., in rural communities). Develop practical interventions and approaches based on this information.

DOMAIN 4: DATA ON THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF FT

Objective 4.3: Evaluate the social and economic impact of FT on survivors.

RESEARCH

Examine the impact of FT on survivors' long-term outcomes across a variety of domains such as education, employment, housing stability, and social relationships. Explore the long-term economic impacts of FT on survivors (e.g., credit, job readiness).

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Create resources that outline long-term service needs that FT survivors may have. Utilize information to develop responsive programming that addresses survivors' social and economic needs.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was inspired by numerous champions in the anti-human trafficking field, with special gratitude to Marissa Castellanos, whose passion significantly motivated the RTI team to pursue this project. We extend our appreciation to the Louisiana anti-human trafficking responders who participated in this study and to the survivors who shared their invaluable insights and expertise. Their contributions were essential to the development of this resource. We also thank Lauren Vollinger and Stacey Cutbush for their talents and expertise, which greatly enhanced this project.

CONTACT INFORMATION

To learn more about this project, visit the project impact page on RTI's website:

<https://www.rti.org/impact/familial-trafficking-research-training-technical-assistance>.

For additional information about the findings outlined in this resource, please contact the Project Director, Leanne McCallum Desselle, at lmccallum@rti.org.

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Learn more about RTI's extensive human trafficking portfolio at

<https://www.rti.org/focus-area/human-trafficking-research-evaluation-training-and-technical-assistance>

RTI INTERNATIONAL

RTI is an independent scientific research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. With over 60 years of demonstrated success tackling multifaceted social issues, RTI has a strong and established record of conducting anti-human trafficking research, evaluating victim service programs, building practitioner capacity through responsive training and technical assistance, and trauma-informed engagement of trafficking survivors. Staff members come from a variety of professional backgrounds including social work, direct victim service provision, multidisciplinary leadership, and academia to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing human trafficking.

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