



Risk to Resilience: Innovations in Human Trafficking Research and Response

Friday, April 25, 2025

USF St. Petersburg Campus

AGENDA

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Welcome Remarks

Christian Hardigree, JD, Regional Chancellor, USF St. Petersburg

Special Guest Presentations

Bringing “The Bulls” into the Fight Against Human Trafficking: Five-Year Review of the USF Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Research Lab

Joan Reid, PhD, LMHC, Professor, Department of Criminology, Director, USF Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Research Lab, University of South Florida

Launched in 2020, faculty and student researchers of the USF TIP Lab proposed to leverage innovative research endeavors to transform the Tampa Bay area from a region known to be at high risk for human trafficking to a region resilient to human trafficking. Responsive to community need, the TIP Lab has successfully developed two statewide projects that provide support to Florida’s efforts to combat human trafficking and support survivors. This presentation will provide an update of the accomplishments of the USF TIP Lab over its first five years. They will discuss the role of the university, government, community leaders, faculty, and students in the successful growth and accomplishments of the TIP Lab.

Identifying Victims of Sex Trafficking using Surveys of the General Population

Teresa Kulig, PhD, Associate Professor, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Co-Director, Victimology and Victim Studies Research Lab, University of Nebraska at Omaha

A challenge of research on sex trafficking has been to identify individuals who have been victimized by these crimes. Scholars have historically sought to identify victims in high-risk populations—or individuals who are known to have vulnerability indicators associated with trafficking (e.g., child welfare involvement). However, the field of victimology more generally has administered self-report surveys with behaviorally specific language to the broader population to identify and understand difficult-to-measure crimes. The idea being that not everyone self-identifies as a “victim” even if their experiences can legally be classified as such, which allows self-report surveys to tap into these experiences without relying on formal reporting systems. This presentation expands this line of work by discussing the feasibility of measuring experiences of sex trafficking victimization in the general population without labeling these experiences as “trafficking.” Findings from several recent national-level surveys that applied victimological methods of self-report surveys with behaviorally specific language that aligned with the federal legal definition to measure sex trafficking victimization will be discussed. The findings will be reviewed in the context of lessons learned when administering these surveys for future scholars and practitioners to consider.

Paneled Discussion – Collaborative Approaches to Combat Human Trafficking: Insights from Policy Makers, Organizations, and Practitioners

Moderator: Shelly Wagers, PhD, Associate Professor of Criminology and Director of Bridging Resource and Information Gaps in Human Trafficking (BRIGHT) Project, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Panelists:

- **Dotti Groover-Skipper, BASc**, Founder, President, and CEO, HEARTDANCE Foundation Inc.
- **Brent Woody, JD**, Lead Attorney and Executive Director, Justice Restoration Center
- **Pastor Kathy Norfleet, MA**, Founder and CEO, Images of Glory Orlando
- **Marianne Thomas, PhD**, Founder and President, My Name My Voice

Breaking Invisible Bonds: Navigating the Challenges of Trauma Bonding in Human Trafficking

Joan Reid, PhD, LMHC, Professor, Department of Criminology, Director, USF Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Research Lab, University of South Florida

Klejdis Bilali, MA, PhD Student, RMHCI, USF Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Research Lab, Department of Criminology, University of South Florida

This workshop will provide an overview of trauma bonding experienced by survivors of interpersonal violence including human trafficking survivors. The workshop will delve into the complexities of trauma-bonding, addressing its impacts on victim identification, treatment effectiveness, and building rapport and trust with clients.

Towards a Trauma-Informed System

Ken Epstein, PhD, LCSW, University of California, San Francisco, Clinical Professor in UCSF Department of Psychiatry and Consultant

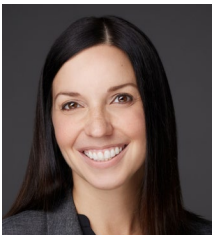
Trauma Informed Systems (TIS) is a model that promotes organizational culture change by cultivating a workplace that fosters curiosity, connection and collaboration and a rigor around quality care and staff experience. With increasing transactional pressures to produce metrics based on quantity leaders are often faced with a dialectic; tremendously increase productivity or promote wellness for staff and the organization. The result has been increased burnout and moral injury for leaders and staff. TIS implementation is transformative and necessary to sustain and promote a healing organization. This workshop will be a combination of didactic learning and peer-to-peer experiential learning including specific check-ins and prompts that help participants share their experiences, connect with colleagues, and feel supported. The LLS is centered on the six Trauma Informed Systems (TIS) Leadership competencies: Mirror and Landscape, Relational Leadership, Inclusive Leadership, Complexity Thinking, Mindfulness and Reflection, and Trauma Informed Communication.

Presenter Bios



Joan A. Reid, PhD, is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Florida, a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, and Professor of Criminology at the University of South Florida. Dr. Reid is also the Director of the USF Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Research Lab located in St. Petersburg

Florida. Dr. Reid is a leading expert on human trafficking having authored over 65 publications, primarily focused on child sex trafficking in Florida. Dr. Reid's research has been cited in various State Supreme Courts, as well as state and federal government agency policy reports on child trafficking. Her most recent book, *Trauma Bonding and Interpersonal Crimes*, addresses the phenomenon of trauma bonding across various interpersonal contexts.



Teresa C. Kulig, PhD, is Associate Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Co-Director of the Victimology and Victim Studies Research Lab at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She has published more than 60 articles, book chapters,

and other writings on victimological topics, including in peer-reviewed journal outlets such as *Justice Quarterly*, *American Journal of Public Health*, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, and *Victims & Offenders*. Many of her works are on the nature and control of sex and labor trafficking, the measurement and theories of victimization, public opinion on responses to victimization, and the social construction of crime. She has worked with multiple researchers and practitioner partners to design and implement rigorous research, including leading grant projects on a national review of multidisciplinary teams addressing child sexual exploitation, a labor trafficking assessment in Nebraska, a collaboration with law enforcement to inform sex trafficking interventions with vulnerable youth, and an evaluability assessment of five service areas within a large child advocacy center.



Shelly M. Wagers, PhD, is the Director of the BRIGHT Project, (Bridging Resources and Information Gaps in Human Trafficking) an interactive digital platform that brings Human Trafficking service providers together into an integrated and coordinated network

of care to connect victims and survivors to individualized need-based resources. The BRIGHT project was born through an enterprise needs assessment conducted for the

USF Trafficking In Persons Lab: Risk to Resilience Lab to improve survivor services. Dr. Wagers designed and directed the needs assessment which consisted of hundreds of field interviews with community partners engaged in antitrafficking work throughout Florida. Through the efforts of Dr. Wagers, her team and the BRIGHT community partners, the BRIGHT project has received aggregate multi-million-dollar funding from the State of Florida and United States Federal Government to expand BRIGHT statewide and develop a replicable evidence-based model.

Dr. Wagers also serves as the Associate Director of the USF TIP and is an Associate Professor of Criminology at the University of South Florida. She earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Public Health Education from the University of North Carolina Greensboro and holds a Master of Arts and Doctorate Degree in Criminology from the University of South Florida. Dr. Wagers has worked in the field of interpersonal violence for over 25 years: first as an advocate, then as a law enforcement officer and now as a research analyst and scholar. Her expertise includes developing researcher-practitioner partnerships with advocates, law enforcement and the courts to strengthen policies and programs. She has over 20 years of experience in violence prevention and effective responses to interpersonal violence. Specifically, Dr. Wagers has consulted with local and statewide Violence Task Forces, conducted multiple trainings for advocates, law enforcement, criminal law attorneys and judges, and prepared technical reports for state agencies on implementing evidence-based practices in the field.

Dotti Groover-Skipper is the founder of HeartDance Foundation, which serves men, women and children engaged in the sex industry and is currently working on anti-trafficking initiatives with The NO MORE Foundation. Groover-Skipper is credited as a catalyst to peak action against human trafficking in Tampa Bay and was recognized in 2013 by former Florida Governor Rick Scott and former Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi, as the "Human Trafficking Advocate of the Year" for the State of Florida. Additionally, in 2016, she received the Zonta International "Status of Women" award as the 2016 Human Trafficking Victims Advocate, and in 2019, received the "Heartbeat of the Community" award from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. Groover-Skipper graduated from the Department of Homeland Security Investigations Citizens Academy in February 2020 and has served on the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking and served from 2014-2020. She serves



on various local boards, including the Hillsborough County Commission on the Status of Women, the Hillsborough County Anti-Drug Alliance, and is the immediate past chair of the SAFE Tampa Bay (Strategic Alliance to Fight Exploitation). Groover-Skipper is also a partner with the Tampa Bay Regional Human Trafficking Task Force. In July 2021, she was honored with the “Richard Hosking Award for Distinguished Service” by the Florida Public Health Association. In January 2023, she was the recipient of the Pola Star Award by the Central Florida Human Trafficking Task Force and in March 2023 received the “Lifetime Achievement Award” by the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office.

Brent Woody received his JD from the



Florida State University College of Law. He is the lead attorney and executive director of the Justice Restoration Center, a nonprofit organization providing trauma-informed restorative pro bono legal services and advocacy for survivors of human trafficking, as well as advocating on trafficking-related legislation and policy matters. Since 2009, Brent has made it a personal mission to provide free legal services to victims and survivors of human trafficking. Understanding that individuals subjected to exploitation in the forms of forced labor, commercial sex, and domestic servitude have no means to obtain desperately needed legal services, Brent committed to never turning away a survivor with trafficking-related legal needs.

Beginning in 2012, Brent’s work for trafficking survivors and victims rose to a new level as he began advocating before the Florida legislature for the rights of human trafficking survivors to petition a court for the expungement of criminal history records and vacating of criminal convictions for arrests while under the coercion of a trafficker or within a scheme of human trafficking. Unjust criminal history records and convictions close many doors for trafficking survivors, and this law was desperately needed by an untold number of victims. As a result, Florida’s human trafficking victim expungement law was unanimously passed and signed into law in 2013. Brent now represents over 200 trafficking survivors from in and out of the state and from within the Florida inmate population. Legislatively, Brent has initiated and successfully advocated for, among other things, the elimination of the statute of limitations for human trafficking offenses, enhanced penalties for traffickers, enhanced penalties for sex-buyers, the non-criminalization of commercially sexually exploited minors, and exemptions from the public records laws for the locations of safe houses.



Katherine D. Norfleet, MA, (Pastor Kathy) is a compassionate and visionary leader in the fight against human trafficking. As the Founder and CEO of Images Of Glory, Inc. (IOG), a CARF-accredited nonprofit organization established in 2001, Pastor Kathy has dedicated her life to restoring,

redeeming, and reuniting families affected by sexual trauma and abuse. Under Pastor Kathy’s leadership, IOG operates three impactful program divisions, including (1) Residential Services: two state-certified Tier 2 and Tier 1 Safe Houses that provide refuge and therapeutic services and support for sex-trafficked female youth ages 12-18; (2) Victory Academy: A private, state-licensed K-12 school and accelerated learning academy offering quality education to the community; and (3) Project Liberty: A community-based behavioral health empower center offering therapeutic counseling, case management, prevention and intervention education, and various other resources including referral services.

Pastor Kathy has written several pivotal resources, including: Project Liberty: Finding the Silent Treasure in Trauma; Journey Homeward: A handbook for Coming Home After Human Trafficking; Unwinding the Trauma Bond: Handbook of 20 Group Sessions for Human Trafficking Safe Houses; and Neuroscience 101: The Amygdala Hijack: De-escalation and Stabilization Handbook for Human Trafficking Safe Houses.

Pastor Kathy holds a MA in Human Services-Crisis Response in Trauma, a BS in Criminal Justice, is a Certified Behavioral Health Case Management Supervisor. She has also served in the U.S. Army. Her tireless advocacy has earned her numerous awards, including, most recently, “Champion” designation from the State of Florida DCF for her exceptional work in combating human trafficking. Pastor Kathy considers her greatest achievement as an overcomer herself to lead others toward healing, self-discovery, and empowerment.



Marianne Thomas, PhD, has an MA in Mental Health Counseling and a doctorate in Behavioral Psychology. As a survivor of human trafficking, Dr. Thomas has devoted her career to bringing awareness about the true problem of human trafficking in the United States,

educating communities on the human trafficking problem in their area, and helping organizations to create or grow their own anti-trafficking program. For over a decade, Dr. Thomas has worked tirelessly in direct care with survivors of human

trafficking and has worked as a counselor with children within the dependency system and with families who have experienced trafficking and homelessness. Dr. Thomas created, grew, and oversaw the largest mobile crisis and long-term anti-trafficking program in the state of Florida. For five years, she was the director of a safe home for minor girls that was called by the governing agency, the Department of Children and Families, the “gold standard” of safe homes for minors who had been trafficked in the state of Florida. Now, she takes her lived experience, book knowledge, and years of working directly with survivors to educate others. With her organization, My Name My Voice, Dr. Thomas provides education for those wanting to learn more about human trafficking in their area through one-hour trainings for organizations and multi-day conferences for communities. With the My Name My Voice collective of lived experience experts, Dr. Thomas and her team provide consultation for organizations who want to begin or grow an anti-trafficking program.



Klejdis Bilali is a third-year PhD student in the Department of Criminology at the University of South Florida (USF), and a graduate research assistant at the USF Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Risk to Resilience Lab. Presently, she is also a registered mental health counseling

intern at the USF Department of Pediatrics' Infectious Disease Program where she facilitates psychotherapy with youth living with HIV. She completed her MA in Clinical Psychology at the University of Central Florida where she facilitated research and trauma-focused psychotherapy with youth victims of sex trafficking involved in child welfare and the juvenile justice system. Klejdis' primary research interests center on interpersonal violence, including human trafficking, child abuse, and familial violence, with a focus on victimization prevention and intervention.



Ken Epstein, PhD, is the principal of P.R.E.P for Change Consulting (kenepstein.org), helping organizations promote and achieve culture change by improving organizational practices, workforce development, reflective practices, and promoting compassionate and relational leadership. Dr. Epstein has worked within family and youth service programs since 1981 in clinical and administrative positions at non-profit, university and government agencies. In 2018, he retired from the San Francisco Department of Public Health as the County Children, Youth and Families Behavioral Health director. In this capacity, he developed and led the vision and implementation of Trauma Informed Systems, which has become an organizational promising practice. He is a founding member of Trauma Transformed (traumatransformed.org). Beginning in 1990, Dr. Epstein specialized in developing, supervising, teaching, and practicing couples and family therapy. He is the founding director of the Intensive Family Model Clinic that he replicated at UCSF, where he serves on the clinical faculty in the department of psychiatry.