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## (Un)charted Waters: Case File Analysis with Child Victims of Trafficking in South Africa

Ajwang' Warria  
University of Calgary, Canada  
[ajwang.warria@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ajwang.warria@ucalgary.ca)

### Abstract

Background: Trafficking of children remains a concern in South Africa. Despite South Africa's progressive legislative measures to protect trafficked children, challenges in identification, and service provision are evident. The child's voice is the expression of their will and participation in matters involving them is pertinent. However, research approaches including directly interviewing children have been debated and are often thought of as somewhat controversial. Being heard is important to everyone – including children, yet there are limited child-friendly methodologies, the sample sizes are typically small, and social work files are rarely investigated. To close this research and practise gap, this study analyzed child trafficking using children's case files in social work agencies. Methodology: Manual extraction of information was applied using a template. The data was cleaned up and analyzed thematically. Ethics clearance was granted by the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics (non-medical) Committee (HREC). Permission was also granted by the Department of Social Development. Ethical considerations of confidentiality, anonymity and deferred informed consent were adhered to. Social work files or notes in electronic format were accessed. Research findings will not be shared with children because of increased risks over benefits and due to assent and consent not being obtained directly. In cases where concerns of (ongoing or perceived) harm especially were noted, these were discussed with the senior social worker in charge of the team for further action. Findings: Case record reviews are crucial in understanding the healing and recovery process of trafficked children in care. They can be valuable when studying the hidden and vulnerable populations like trafficked children and understanding prevention measures. In addition, they are a treasured source of information – due to the range of documents available for review, because they allow one to bridge the gap into the practice of social work and the mediating influence between the practitioner and the client. Conclusion: SDG 16.2 aims to end the abuse, exploitation, and trafficking of children. Introducing case file review and analysis in the social work curriculum and using it to inform research on trafficking helps us to inch closer to evidence-based interventions that support child development.

**Keywords:** child trafficking, South Africa, human rights

